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PART I – GENERAL INFORMATION

Project: **PGI00087 ESSPO; Efficient support services portfolios for SMEs**

Partner: Adam Mickiewicz University Foundation, Poznan Science and Technology Park

Territory concerned: Wielkopolska

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NUTS2 region: Wielkopolskie

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PART II – POLICY CONTEXT

The Action Plan aims to impact:

- Investment for Growth and Jobs programme
- European Territorial Cooperation programme
- Other regional development policy instrument

POLICY INSTRUMENT ADDRESSED:

Portfolio of measures for improving SMEs competitiveness comprising of following measures of ROP of Wielkopolskie Voivodship 2014-2020: Measure 1.3 (with selected sub-measures: 1.3.1 and 1.3.2) as well as measure 1.4 (with sub-measure 1.4.1)

The schemes aim at SME development through incubation and internationalization support services as well as development of new support services by intermediaries.

The ambition of these actions is to improve the conditions for entrepreneurship as well as raise competitiveness of SMEs on international markets. These are new schemes, that had not been implemented before in the region and the detailed design of the calls for proposals has been a challenge. The measure 1.3. assumes involvements of intermediaries (e.g. incubators) but the demand oriented approach is required.

THE POLICY CONTEXT

The Wielkopolska region belongs to the largest and most developed Polish regions. Despite relatively good macroeconomic indicators, the innovation indicators, especially those related to innovation in SMEs, are very poor and undermine the prospect to continue the growth in the future. For example Regional

Innovation Scoreboard 2017 - Relative performance to the EU in "2011" average and the distance in percentage (EU28 RII2011 = 100%) does not show much progress in 8 years, see table below:

TABLE 1 WIELKOPOLSKA INNOVATION PERFORMANCE IN REGIONAL INNOVATION SCOREBOARD 2017¹

	RII2009	RII2011	RII2013	RII2015	RII2017
Wielkopolskie	48,4	48,2	48,8	48,4	50,6

The problem of innovation in SMEs is even more visible if the different indicators are compared. In this examination Wielkopolska got 207th score for "SMEs innovating in-house" indicator and 208th score for "Innovative SMEs collaborating with others" among 220 regions in the scoreboard whereas synthetic score gives the region 199th place.

An additional, important element of the situation is little experience in the region to use ERDF programmes for "soft measures", and design and manage the instrument in such a way that it ensures quality "demand driven" support process and leads to expected results (e.g. survival and growth of companies and creation of jobs).

THE CHALLENGE TAKEN BY ESSPO

ESSPO addresses the issue of insufficient impact and efficiency of policies aiming to enhance SMEs competitiveness, especially their growth on national and international markets as well as their engagement in innovation processes.

IMPROVEMENT NEEDS

General needs for the instruments improvements were already at the start of ESSPO and consisted in rising the instrument efficiency by:

- targeting support services at specific SME segment groups,
- ensuring the instrument reflects the needs of SME target group,
- increasing the quality and added value of the services for SMEs,
- management the suppliers network and monitor the results.

PROCESS CONTRIBUTING TO THE IMPROVEMENT DESIGN

The improvements have been designed in the interaction of two mutually dependent processes :

(R) – intraregional process – which aimed at rooting the improvements within the region context i.e. the regional institutional settings, the economic fabrics, especially the SMEs. It involved many stakeholders in 3 levels:

1. **Working contacts between the LP and the Managing Authority** representatives – 5 meetings
2. **Regional Stakeholders' Groups workshops** – 6 meetings were organized, which gathered representatives of regional and local authorities and agencies, intermediaries, chamber of commerce and the final beneficiaries i.e. the SMEs.

¹ <http://ec.europa.eu/DocsRoom/documents/31644> (accessed 11 October 2018)

The Regional stakeholder group adapted **the living lab methodology** in step-by-step design of the policy improvements. The policy instrument has been seen as a product, so to answer needs of stakeholders, not only of SMEs but also the regional actors. The stakeholders therefore are the instrument users and were involved in its design all the time. The users' needs were taken as the starting point.

2.1. **Launch workshop** (12.01.2017): the regional stakeholders defined the roles, expectation needs of the instrument users and selected the most important issues to address:

2.1.1. Introduction of a sound monitoring of companies' needs as a basis for the instrument design and implementation;

2.1.2. Reaching the target SMEs through a well-coordinated network of intermediaries, who have the relevant competencies to provide the support according to SME expectations;

2.1.3. Ensuring flexibility of the support services delivered to SMEs, so that they are adapted to their current needs.

2.2. **Process workshop 1** (11.04.2017) defined characteristics of the instrument users, their needs and summarized the design challenge in a form of **HMW ("How might we...")**. Two **target groups** were selected:

2.2.1. **Start-ups**, new companies established by non-experienced entrepreneurs, mostly within the smart specialization areas and with innovative business models, also any start-ups in the areas with low entrepreneurship indicators.

They need access to equity financing, to be able to develop their business ideas. They also need to get awareness that the funding is means not the end on its own. They need skills of client and market acquisition, and complex consultancy and support in all aspects of company management, because they have limited knowledge and human resources.

The challenges (HMWs):

- How might we help start-up entrepreneurs to understand that the funding is not the only factor of success?
- How might we adjust support to individual needs of start-up companies?
- How might we get intermediaries to provide highest quality added value services that meet entrepreneurs expectations?

2.2.2. **Potentially innovative companies ("first time innovators")** mature companies, who have not engaged in innovation yet.

They are motivated with financial means, because they want to increase their scale of their activity. They need awareness and knowledge on how innovation can help their development. They also need high quality advice to get diagnosis of innovation potential and assistance in the innovation process.

The challenges (HMWs):

- *How might we help mature, potentially innovative companies to get understanding of need and importance of innovation, as well as the value of specialised advice? Because they do not think they need to use advice and external sources of innovation.*
- *How might we help these companies to effectively implement innovation?*
- *How might we get intermediaries to provide highest quality added value services that meet the mature companies expectations?*

2.3. **Process workshop 2** (2017.09.13) – defined the “product brief” summarizing the expectations the support instrument should meet and first ideas for the instruments concept.

2.3.1. Ideas: complex advisory program for SME, mix of support for start-ups (training, mentoring, financing), promotion for professional capacities of intermediaries.

2.3.2. Questions:

- How to organize effective intermediaries ecosystem that makes synergies with public policies?
- How to prepare and manage professionalization program of intermediaries’ staff? How to define the content of the program?
- How to provide the diagnosis of individual companies’ needs?
- How to organise and provide individualized company support?

2.4. **Process workshop 3** (01.20.2018)

2.4.1. defined critical success factors of the concepts from previous workshop and then elaborated improved instruments concepts, which were then translated into “story board” pre-alpha prototypes to be presented to users. The actions to be included in the action plan were identified: start-up incubation programme, mature SME 2-step advisory and financing programme, Intermediaries professionalization programme.

2.4.2. Further questions:

- 2.4.2.1. How to promote the support instruments among the SME target groups?
Outreach strategies and tools.
- 2.4.2.2. How to organise and provide individualized company support? How to provide the diagnosis of individual companies’ needs?
- 2.4.2.3. How to involve experts and mentors who assist companies development.

2.5. **Process workshop 4** (2018.06.06) – made tests of the prototypes with the users representatives and elaborated further improvements. Two alpha prototypes built to be included in the Action Plan:

I. Start-up incubation programme

II. “Assisting innovation in SME” programme for mature SME innovation activity instigation, advise and support the whole process, which includes professional and service offer development.

3. **Regional Stakeholder Dialogue Event** – open interactive event focused on the policy instrument target group i.e. SMEs.

(I) – interregional process was interwoven the regional processes providing inspiration and motivation.

The activities that contributed mostly to the Wielkopolska policy learning process:

4. **Peer reviews:**

4.1. of Wielkopolska policy instruments made by Estonian Partner: Tartu Science Park – PP8 (19.10.2016) provided impartial insight to the policy and recommendations based on the partner experiences and was a starting point for the regional process involving all the stakeholders who participated then in Regional Stakeholders Group. The main concern in the peer review report: **lack of communication in all levels of ecosystem**. The lack of communication and understanding leads to mistrust and misuse of existing funds which leads to more complex mechanism and rigid rules which leads to increased administrative burden and overall dissatisfaction

- Key recommendations:
 - Establish regular communication routines between active and willing stakeholders in ecosystem;
 - Policy owner and business support organizations (intermediaries) should define acceptable level of failure and then live by it. Never can all projects / calls / tools be 100% successful;
 - Define quality criteria for intermediaries and establish a safeguard mechanism (expert panel of company representatives and/or other persons with good business acumen) to evaluate the intermediaries' performance ;
 - Continuous capacity building of intermediaries' staff is crucial to retain quality of BDO in the eyes of SME's and also policy owner;
 - Start with mapping existing ecosystem with current bottlenecks and opportunities, there are many different players on the field who are acting uncoordinated.
- For incubation programme:
 - Introduce clear definition of a start-up, which should make sure that the supported startups have potential to develop e.g. business model is scalable or it is not just a repletion of popular business done in vicinity;
 - Take active approach in recruitment, which should be the task of intermediaries. Open call should be accompanied by a headhunting method - direct communication from an intermediary to startup team. This is not to say that there shouldn't be a public call, there should, but one should not only rely on passive recruitment strategy;
 - Incubation services support should include funding for increasing competences for business support services organisation as well. Some services need to be provided by

- partners (in a s key partnership model) e.g. legal (especially I/O and venture funding areas), financial (BAN's & VC's);
- Evaluation board accepting the incubatees should have business people who have experience in business, as they can better assess the potential of the business projects
- 4.2. of other regions: Bulgaria – PP6 (24-26.10.2016) and Centre Val de Loire in France – PP10 (25-26.04.2017) were a good occasion to get inspiration from the reviewed policies. Especially the network of intermediaries and an example of incubators in RCVL region.
5. **Task Force workshops**, which were an occasion to learn about relevant good practices and work-out answers to questions and challenges arising in the regional process:
- 5.1. **Workshop 1** in Tartu, Estonia (7-6.06.2017). Most important for Wielkopolska process:
- Discussion on the need of a good and simple need diagnosis tool and resolution for a questionnaire preparation,
 - Brainstorming of solutions to make intermediaries to provide high quality services – highly evaluated idea of introduction of competition,
 - Good practices:
 - Innovation network of Basque Country within a complex program of [Eskadi+ Innova](#), (PP8)
 - [JINNOVE](#) – intermediaries network and tools – of Haute de France (PP3)
 - [Communication among stakeholders in Centre-Val de Loire region](#) (PP10)
- 5.2. **Workshop 2** in Hameln, Germany (23-24.10.2017). Most important for Wielkopolska process:
- Discussing the final version of a questionnaire for diagnosing SME needs based on exchange of questionnaires used by PPs and development of Christian Saublens, expert of the Advisory Partner EURADA,
 - Brainstorming of solutions to establish competence requirement description for SME advisers following the EU ESCO model (classification of European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations: <http://ec.europa.eu/esco>). Such description could be used for requirements in call for proposal but also in any professionalization programs.
 - Good practices:
 - [Support for knowledge and technology transfer for SMEs in Weserbergland](#) region (PP9) areas via involvement of local authorities and provision of basic innovation diagnostics and consultancy as a first step to introduce existing SMEs to innovation and technology transfer. The scheme offers existing SMEs free counselling services in 2 steps: a “first stop-consultation” (max 1 day) and a subsequent intensive consultation (10 days max.). The subject may be an analysis of innovation performance, the development of project ideas or the initiation of cooperation with research institutions.
 - [Economic Developer University](#) in Centre-Val de Loire region (PP10) as tool for building a collaboration spirit an SME advisers professionalization.
 - Competences curricula for TT managers and certification in EU projects: [Certified TT manager](#) (FP6) and its follow-up: [EuKTS](#) (FP7); Accreditation and Certification for the Knowledge and Technology Transfer Profession;

- [Use of IMP³rove for Individual and group SME need identification and policy making](#) (self-sustaining international tool initiated by the European Commission, DG Enterprise and Industry in 2006);
- Industrial Dynamics network in Vastra Gottaland region (Sweden) on how to create good collaboration spirit in regional networks.

5.3. **Workshop 3** in Segovia, Spain (16-17.05.2018). Most important for Wielkopolska process:

- Discussing the “living lab” approach in designing a support service for SMEs
- Feedback for the test questionnaires (other than Wielkopolska) showing how to draw conclusions from the SMEs answers of Christian Saublens, expert of the Advisory Partner EURADA,
- Brainstorming of concrete competence requirements description for SME advisers (finalizing the previous workshop idea)
- Good practices:
 - [Synergies of several activities towards existing SMEs in Centr@tec: Program](#) of Training and Support for R&D and Business Innovation of Castilla y León in collaboration with the regional Technological Centres (PP4). The program includes: diagnostics and implementation plans personalized analysis of the company level of innovation, action with a roadmap to implement propose solutions, and search for financing.
 - [REDEI: Entrepreneurship and Innovation Network of Castilla y León](#) – vivid community of actors: 106 members, main agents of the ecosystem of entrepreneurship and innovation that come from public sector (national, regional and local administration), science and innovation (universities, clusters, technological centers), companies (SMEs, Big Companies, Self-Employment. Entrepreneurs), financial shuttle and other facilitators (Foundations, associations).
 - Synergies of different support instruments through public agency IDEA of Andalusia region (Spain) – the agency manages financial instruments, being an ROP intermediary body, providing regional funding in synergies with EU funds, provision of advanced services and innovation infrastructure. The synergy is related with combination of funds and instruments but is strongly rooted in strategic planning of relevant actions to complement each other in order to achieve goals which would be not possible without the synergies).
- **Study visit to the Centre Val de Loire Region** (19-20.03.2019) –helped to learn more details on the intermediaries network tools, results and the diagnostic methodologies that are planned to be established in Action 2 of this Plan.



FIGURE 1 OVERVIEW OF WIELKOPOLSKA POLICY LEARNING IN INTERREGIONAL EXCHANGE PROCESS



PART III – DETAILS OF THE ACTIONS ENVISAGED

ACTION 1: INCUBATION PROGRAMME ENSURING INDIVIDUAL APPROACH TO EACH START-UP NEEDS AND SUPPORT QUALITY STANDARDS

ESSPO LESSONS LEARNT APPLIED IN THE ACTION

Lesson learnt	Source of the lesson
Targeting the right SMEs, active recruitment, selection of promising candidates	
<p>a. Active search by intermediaries: <i>Quite often headhunting method (direct communication from BDO to startup team) works best. This is not to say that there shouldn't be a public call, there should, but one should not only rely on passive recruitment strategy.</i></p> <p>b. Definition of startup, should make sure that the supported startups have potential to develop e.g. business model is scalable or it is not just a repletion of popular business done in vicinity</p> <p>c. Evaluation board accepting the incubatees should have business people who have experience in business, as they can better assess the potential of the business projects.</p>	<p>Recommendations from the peer review in Wielkopolska done by the Estonian partner (19-20 October 2016) and the experiences of Tartu incubation programmes.</p>
<p>d. Specialization of each incubators on the target groups (e.g. technologies) makes it easier to set up recruitment and selection process as well as committee set up</p> <p>e. Each incubator should be able to involve intermediaries, companies, financial institutions in selection committee.</p>	<p>Peer review made in Region Centre Val de Loire (France) (25-26/04/2017 with representatives of LP and the Wielkopolska Regional Authority</p>
<p>f. A broad mentor network should be developed with defined criteria for both mentors and company engagement. Mentors should mainly be experienced entrepreneurs, technical experts or corporate industry veterans;</p> <p>g. Incubators should ask companies not growing or not meeting expected criteria to leave – it makes room for new more innovative and creative companies. Incubators should create demand/awareness by making it competitive to be accepted into programs, have clear criteria for acceptance and graduation.</p>	<p>Insights from the representatives 2 international incubation associations: EBN and INBIA visiting Poznań and participating in an at additional Regional Stakeholder Group meeting (20/04/2017)</p>
Quality of the service, competences of incubators	
<p>h. The definition of quality should be based on the perspective of companies – what is the value and quality important for them.</p>	<p>Recommendations from the peer review in Wielkopolska done by the Estonian partner (19-</p>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Incubation support should include funding for increasing competences for business support services organisation as well. So that the potential stays within the intermediary. j. Continuous capacity building of incubator staff is crucial to retain quality in the eyes of SME's and also policy owner 	<p>20 October 2016) and the experiences of Tartu incubation programmes</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> k. Collaboration of incubators in a network is a good way for improvement of services and development of new types of support. l. Involvement of experienced mentors in the incubation process and scheduling it with regular review of milestones. 	<p>Peer review made in Region Centre Val de Loire (France) (25-26/04/2017 with representatives of LP and the Wielkopolska Regional Authority</p>

NATURE OF THE ACTION

ESSPO contributed to the design of new instrument for start-ups incubation. The general assumptions of the measure were set in the detailed description of the priorities of the Wielkopolskie ROP (submeasure 1.3.1.) The concept was to provide support services to newly established companies through incubators, the direct beneficiaries. LP agreed with the Management Authority that ESSPO Regional Stockholder Group would work out the detailed model of the service provision, including the quality requirements. The objective was to ensure transparency and quality of the support to the start-ups and the contribution to the region's smart specialisation strategy.

One of the difficulties resolved has been preparation an open call for any entities, that ensures the adequate quality of the intermediary services and effective process of incubation. And at the same time the instrument must respect the impartiality of the call regulation as well transparent call process. That means especially that the project and the stakeholders did not discuss access criteria for potential beneficiaries.

The instrument has been based on an incubation programme model inspired with the lessons learned within the project as well as dialogue among the relevant stakeholders, including young entrepreneurs.

The model is presented in the graph below:

FIGURE 1 INCUBATION PROGRAMME MODEL DEVELOPED IN ESSPO



The model was used to specify the quality requirements for each step of the incubation process that are to be respected by the beneficiaries:

QUALITY PLAN FOR INCUBATION PROGRAMME

No.	Requirement	Evidence
Recruitment and selection of start-ups		
1.	<p>Information about recruitment is publicly available so that all interested parties can take part in it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deadlines give sufficient time for the preparation of the application - minimum 3 weeks from the announcement. 	Announcement on the incubator website and the program platform
2.	<p>The recruitment rules are transparent.</p> <p>The recruitment call includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition of the target group - characteristics of enterprises preferred in the incubation program, eg. industry, applied technologies, business readiness, product innovation, location of the company's activity. • Recruitment regulations (or the entire incubation process), describing the evaluation criteria and the manner of the assessment. • Annexed to the regulations is the template of the incubation agreement. 	Recruitment documentation attached to the call



3.	<p>Confidentiality of data provided by the applicants.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The competition regulations ensure the confidentiality of data. 	Recruitment documentation attached to the call
4.	<p>Reliable evaluation of candidates.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required information from candidates provides necessary information for the assessment • The evaluators declare their impartiality to the candidates. • Individual meetings of candidates with the evaluation committee are an obligatory element of the assessment process. • Business practitioners and external experts participate in the evaluation committee. • The assessment process is documented and includes individual assessments in individual criteria. In addition, a collective (average or consensus) assessment is prepared along with justification. • Upon request, the applicant's assessment results are made available not disclosing the names of the persons involved in the assessments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application forms • Assessment reports
5.	<p>Diagnosis of individual company's needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The preparation of an individual incubation program must be preceded by an assessment of the needs of each company. As a minimum, a common tool for testing innovation potential should be used. • The assessment can be part of the recruitment process and can take place at any stage. 	Written conclusions from the assessment
Implementation of incubation program		
6.	<p>Signature of the incubation agreement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The incubator and the entrepreneur(s) sign an incubation agreement as the template included in the recruitment call. • Annexes to the contract are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Company development plan, comprising an action plan and milestones to be achieved - prepared by the entrepreneur (s) and accepted by the incubators, ○ Individual incubation plan, adapted to the enterprise development plan, including the scope and value of planned support services from 5 areas (infrastructure, business support, business development advise, specialized services and advise, investment support) - prepared by BEI and accepted by the entrepreneur (s). • This contract describes the responsibilities of both parties. 	Agreements and the annexes

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The contract should reserve the transfer of the next tranche of support dependent on the achievement of specific milestones set in the business plan. • The contract contains appropriate clauses regarding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provision of information on the development of the enterprise, including financial and employment data, also for a period of at least 3 years from the end of the incubation program, ○ Terms of termination of the contract in the event of non-performance of activities planned in the incubation agreement, ○ Terms of change introduction to the enterprise development plan, ○ The incubatee obligations to cooperate with other incubatees and participate in networking. 	
7.	<p>Ensuring the quality of services provided.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The incubators provides services according to internal procedures ensuring the quality assurance. It is recommended to use certified systems (eg ISO). The procedure includes adequate measures for the confidentiality of incubatees financial and personal data. • Each incubate works with a designated tutor coordinating the entire incubation process and services provided. • The incubators keeps a register of services provided to each incubate and, meetings. Conclusions from meetings are recorded in writing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation describing the procedures for the provision of services in the incubator • Register of services provided • Conclusions from periodic reviews of the incubation program progress • Customer satisfaction survey tool. Conclusions from the assessments and notes on the implemented actions.
8.	<p>Competences and experience of people providing advisory and training services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As part of the internal procedures referred to in point 7 above, the incubators ensures that the persons providing advisory and training services have appropriate competences. The incubation program describes the knowledge and experience requirements and each person involved meets these requirements. • As part of the incubation program, the incubatee has access to mentors or coaches with relevant experience in the field (minimum of one monthly consultation or a specific pool of hours to be used as part of the entire program). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation describing the procedures for the provision of services in BEI, in the part concerning the requirements for personnel • CV of persons providing advisory and training services) • Register of services provided, in which individual consultations are recorded
9.	<p>Monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the individual incubation program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The incubator and entrepreneurs at least once every 6 months jointly review the progress of the incubation program: implementation of activities by entrepreneurs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conclusions from periodical reviews of the incubation program progress. • Customer satisfaction survey tool. Conclusions



	<p>and achievement of milestones as well as implementation and effects of incubation services. The written conclusions of the assessment are prepared.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incubator conducts customer satisfaction surveys in a manner ensuring impartiality of collected information, draws conclusions from research and implements them in practice. 	<p>from the conducted assessments and notes on the implemented actions.</p>
Conclusion of the incubation process and follow up		
10.	<p>Summary of the program and identification of subsequent company development steps and possible sources of support.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The incubator and the incubate have a meeting summing up the incubation program. They pass on their evaluation of cooperation. • The incubator provides recommendations for further development and the offer of other support services, which the entrepreneur can use after the incubation. • The incubator reminds the obligation to provide financial and employment data that has been set in the contract. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed offer of other development services • Notes from the meeting
11.	<p>Monitoring of enterprise development in the post-incubation period.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The incubator maintains contacts with the incubation graduates, e.g. by inviting to networking meetings and other events. • The incubator collects data on the development of the enterprise according to the data and transmission frequency ranges established in the contract. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data from monitoring the development of enterprises – incubation graduates

The quality requirements are part of the instrument concept, and are included in its regulations. Beneficiaries are obliged to prepare their applications respecting the requirements, which should be also followed in the implementation phase.

STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED

- Marshal Office of the Wielkopolska Region in Poland (UMWW)
 - Department of Regional Policy – responsible for the ROP planning and evaluation,
 - Department for Implementation of the Regional Programme – department for the preparation of the detailed documentation of the instrument and its implementation.
- Poznan Science and Technology Park of Adam Mickiewicz University Foundation (PPNT) – responsible for the coordination of the Regional Stakeholder Group work, communication and support for the stakeholders in the interregional policy learning process, preparation of reports,
- Members of Regional Stakeholders Group (RSG)– representatives of regional authority, municipalities, intermediaries and entrepreneurs – responsible for the design of the instrument concept sharing experiences and knowledge from their perspectives;
- Beneficiaries of the instrument – practical implementation of the incubation program, communication among each other and provision of feedback on the incubation program in practice.



TIMEFRAME

- Delivery of the dedicated ESSPO report describing the instrument concept, including incubation model and quality requirements – April 2017.
- Preparation of the instrument documentation by the UMWW **May-August 2017**
- Announcement of the call for application. The regulation includes the the quality assurance model above , with clear reference to ESSPO document, was included in the call for proposal regulations, announced on the at: <http://wrpo.wielkopolskie.pl/nabory/212> - **5th of September 2017**
- Intake of applications – 29th of September 2017 – **10th of November 2017**
- Assessments of applications – **November 2017-February 2018**
- Decision on selected projects - **7th of March 2018**
- Implementation of projects – **June 2018 – December 2021**
- Second call – tbc. – **January 2021**

COSTS

- First call:
 - allocation (ROP, ERDF): 15 mln PLN (ca. 3,5 mln EUR)
 - value of projects selected: 8,86 mln z PLN (ca. 2 mln EUR) including ERDF contribution: 6,58 mln PLN (ca. 1,58 mln EUR)
- Second call – tbc.

FUNDING SOURCES

Through the policy instrument indicated in part II

ACTION 2: ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR INTRODUCING INNOVATIONS IN POTENTIALLY INNOVATIVE SMES (FIRST TIME INNOVATORS)

THE POLICY LEARNING PROCESS THAT LED TO THE ACTION

The target group definition

Potentially innovative companies (“first time innovators”) i.e. mature companies, who have not engaged in innovation yet have been selected by the Regional Stakeholder Group analysing the specific innovation profile of Wielkopolska i.e. the gap between low SME innovation indicators and higher other innovation indicators and relatively good stance of traditional SMEs. This shows clearly the potential in engaging this group in the innovation process.

The approach for the design of the policy instrument improvement in ESSPO adapted Living Lab approach, as described the Living Lab Methodology Handbook (2012)². The fundamental assumption for the Wielkopolska process was that the users of the SME innovation instruments are defined widely and they comprise: the SMEs, the intended addressees, the public administration – the owner of the instrument, and innovation support organisations – the intermediaries. All of them have their interests, needs and expectations. Representatives of all the three groups were invited to participate in the design process and share their knowledge and experience.

The characteristics of first time innovators is the foundation for the instrument design. The most important features of the target group:

- Existing resources within a company that can be engaged in innovation and make the SME “potential” for innovation:
 - Educated, experienced employees, mainly in the technical domain of the company – they have knowledge on of the technology, the process and the product, and may also be aware on the client requirements and feedback. They are indispensable to recognise the need for innovation, to participate in the design and to implement the innovation,
 - Market share and relations with their clients, which makes a good ground in introduction of innovation,
 - Financial resources, which makes it possible to finance at least a part of expenses of innovation process.
- The ambition to grow and develop. The owners or managers of the company do not have to plan specific innovation, but without the willingness to get better share in the added value, enlarge market, internationalise or progress in any dimension of the business there would not be enough of motivation to start the process.
- Prone to be motivated by financial incentives, as the monetary language is easiest to understand to all the stakeholders. However this aspect cannot be overestimated as many companies in the region already have experienced high transaction costs and risk of subsidies and tax reliefs. They often prefer to use financial instruments on market conditions as quicker and more suitable aid to implement their plans.

² A. Ståhlbröst and M. Holst, The Living Lab Methodology Handbook, https://www.ltu.se/cms_fs/1.101555!/file/LivingLabsMethodologyBook_web.pdf, 2012, (accessed: 11 October 2018)

- Sceptic to the need and value of outside advice and knowledge. The owners and managers are self-confident and do not trust external advisors, especially intermediaries who seem to be more generalist and not well aligned in business behaviour. This makes the entrepreneurs not trust the quality of the support.
- Not having any relations and experience on using external innovation sources, partly because of lack of awareness of the opportunities, partly because of passive and bureaucratic approach of knowledge providers, including universities and research organisations.

This has been epitomised in the challenge statement: *How might we help mature, potentially innovative companies to get understanding of need and importance of innovation, as well as the value of specified advice? Because they do not think they need to use advice and external sources of innovation.*

Questions in the regional process shared within the partnership

The regional stakeholder groups met at 5 workshops, interwoven with 3 interregional workshops that discussed the questions post in the region and provided good practice example. The questions that appeared in the process were escalated on the interregional level and most cases were shared by other partners and discussed on the workshops:

- *How to identify the most promising SME target group (segment) in a most precise way?* There are 300 thousand of SMEs in the region. There is need for a good definition of the target group as for its profile and population so in order to make it feasible to impact it as whole not just individual companies. At the same time there is a necessity to identify individual companies, who belong to the group.
 - *A profile of the SMEs must be defined by the size, sector, type of activity. A good practice of ASTRIDE (tool of Jinnove and RCVL intranet is to share a database of regional companies with the data publicly available.*
- *How to approach the SMEs from the target group (segment) in order to mobilise their use of the instrument?* The potentially innovative companies (first time innovators) do not seek for support and are sceptical about the value of external advice. What communication channels can be effective? What incentive to participate can influence the SMEs owners/managers? What messages should be conveyed?
- *How to minimise bureaucracy for SME beneficiaries and at the same time prevent the “crowding out effect” of applicants who would collaborate with knowledge providers any way?* SMEs who are not aware and enthusiastic about innovation and external support will be not willing to spend their time for the paperwork needed in the application and reporting process. Even though most of voucher programmes have simpler and shorter procedures comparing to “ordinary” schemes the first time innovators may not be prepared to make any effort before they are not convinced about the benefits.³
 - *The most effective is a network, proactive approach – a number of experienced advisors are able to individually approach a multiplied number of SMEs, examples of good practices: JINNOVE, RCVL economic developer network.*

³ Challenges listed in the ESSPO project internal papers for preparation of interregional workshops (Task Forces) to answer regional issues.

- *A small grant to start is a good incentive for a company – as in the French regions mentioned above. ;*
- *A promotion campaign can be helpful.*
- *How to identify individual needs of companies and provide tailored support? What diagnostic instruments can be used? How to organise the providers of the diagnosis so that it is made on a large scale for the whole region and at the same time high quality and responsive to each individual company expectation?*
- *How to organise brokerage for SMEs who don't know who can help their problems? First time innovators by definition are not aware of opportunities innovation can bring to them. They have difficulties in identification what kind of innovation would help them and who has the needed expertise. Not having previous experience in collaboration with RTOs they may need support not only to find a suitable provider but also to deal with the issues that may occur along the innovation project.*
- *How to ensure highest quality and added value services that meet entrepreneurs expectations? SME owner/managers are much sceptical as for the quality of publicly subsidised services. They have more trust to market condition deals. At the same time the potential providers (intermediaries, research institutions) do not have experience in acquisition of client and customer oriented services. There is a danger of self-fulfilling effect sceptical expectation of the first time innovators. They are not willing to use external support for innovation process, thus not ready to search and buy such services. But publically subsidised service quality might be disappointing.*
 - *Network approach works best in the good practices of RVL and HAuts de France as well as in the Industrial Dynamics (SE).*

In addition, when the instrument has been in an alpha prototype stage the stakeholders took advantage of a study visit to Centre Val de Loire region (19-20.03.2019), where similar approach has been applied i.e.:

- Representatives of regional network visiting companies to make a first step individual diagnostics,
- A semi-voucher prescribed by the network helping the SMEs to start their innovation activity;
- Signposting the SMEs to the relevant, specialized intermediaries following the diagnostic results and recommendations.

The regional stakeholders also studied information available on a discontinued practice of *Futurised Business* campaign in Netherlands implemented by Syntens⁴ as well as original *Knowledge Vouchers* of Limburg⁵. The first programme included definition of precise list of SMEs to be proactively addressed, first contact and company visit by innovation adviser and diagnosis of the company innovation potential and recommendations. The Limburg voucher similarly was addressed to a specifically selected list of companies and offered support in definition of the issue to be covered by the voucher as well as identification of relevant expert to provide the support. The objective of the scheme was not to finance

⁴ E.g. some information in the paper *Syntens and the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme* available at "http://ec.europa.eu/cip/files/docs/consultation-syntens_en.pdf (accessed 17.10.2018)

⁵ Description of the scheme in a brochure: *Innovating Regions in Europe. IRE Award for Best European Innovation Scheme*, IRE Secretariat, Luxembourg 2007, p. 6-7.

the collaboration between an SME and the RTDI support providers but to initiate it and convince the SME by trying it in practice.

ESSPO LESSONS LEARNT APPLIED IN THE ACTION

Lesson learnt	Source of the lesson
Targeting the right SMEs	
a. To achieve the impact of policy instrument it is necessary to focus on the well-defined, promising, segments of SMEs. There is no such a group as SMEs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommendations from the peer review in Wielkopolska done by the Estonian partner (19-20 October 2016) and to Bulgaria • Conclusions from the Task force 1 interregional workshop (Tartu, 2017).
Adjusting the support to individual needs and reducing the red tape	
b. There is a need for a simple diagnostic tool shared by the policy makers and advisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conclusions from the Task force 1 interregional workshop (Tartu, 2017). • Questionnaires shared by the partners and the final questionnaire developed in the project. • Good practices of diagnostic tools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Improve – EU methodology and tool, ○ Diagnostic Innovation Croissance in RCVL
c. First time innovators need support in the first steps of their activity: recommendations, partner search, mini-grant (voucher)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good practices of active advisory support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Jinnove and RCVL network ○ Weserbergland counselling
d. These SMEs are not able to apply for sophisticated requiring subsidies. Bureaucracy barrier needs to be removed e.g. mini-grant (semi-voucher) in a simple and quick procedure based on the diagnostics	As above
The quality of services and competences of the advisors	
e. The advisors must constantly improve their skills, the instrument directed to SMEs must also involve the learning aspect.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommendations from peer review: <i>Continuous capacity building of intermediaries' staff is crucial to retain quality of BDO in the eyes of SME's and also policy owner</i> • Competence profile of SME advisor developed in Task force workshop 2 (Segovia) and 3 (Hameln) • Good practice of <i>Economic Developer University</i> in RCVL
f. The competition factor and opening the external advise suppliers should motivate the intermediaries to provide high quality support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conclusions from the Task force 1 interregional workshop (Tartu, 2017).
g. The transparency of the network activities and development of trust helps to keep good quality of support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good practice of Economic Developer Network in RCVL

GOOD PRACTICES

A number of good practices has been identified in the ESSPO partnership that can help the design of the scheme. These include:

- 1) **The support network and tools coordinated by Dev'Up Centre Val de Loire (FR)**. Especially the diagnostic tool –(*Diagnostic Innovation Croissance*)⁶ used within the Network of Economic Developers Center-Val de Loire and the extranet, the data is confidentially stored in addition a public portal for SMEs guiding them through all support opportunities.
- 2) **The Jinnove network** and tools used in Hauts de France (FR) – especially ASTRIDE as a tool to screen potential beneficiaries of support by the publicly available economic data.⁷
- 3) **Mini grants for SMEs to start innovation activities** granted by regional networks in France known under the name of *Prestation Technologique Réseau* (PTR) - used by the ESSPO both French Partners Dev'Up and NFID.⁸
- 4) **Network of innovation support organisations** - *Innovanet* Network (known as the Innovation and Competitiveness Agents Network) within a complex mix of instruments to implement Basque innovation strategies
- 5) **Individual, tailor made qualified counselling services** to help SMEs to start innovative projects in Wesebergland region. The scheme includes a “first stop-consultation” (max 1 day) and a subsequent intensive consultation (10 days max.). The advice can involve analysis of innovation performance, the development of project ideas or the initiation of cooperation with research institutions.

NATURE OF THE ACTION

The key element of the concept is **the use intermediaries and high quality advisers BEFORE any financial support is provided**. It aims to overcome the awareness, attitude and competence barriers first. Then to generate a viable plan for the company that can be a basis for project funding.

The **instrument concept** comprises **two stages of support**:

1. First stage consists in active approach of innovation` advisers, who contact potentially interested companies and make a need diagnosis and a company development plan with the involvement of the owner or manager. This service is to be provided by a network of intermediaries without charging the beneficiary.
2. Second phase comprises a low value voucher. Its objective is not to constitute an instrument of financing of a complex innovation project, but to test collaboration with external support provider within a simple, short-term assignment that can bring tangible result, perhaps a first milestone in the company development plan.

⁶ <http://www.reseaucentreinnovation.fr/documents/diccvl.pdf>

⁷ The good practice description will be available at www.interreg.eu, some information available: <http://www.know-hub.eu/knowledge-base/good-practices/j-innove-in-nord-pas-de-calais-network-of-regional-innovation-stakeholders.html>

⁸ Information (in French): <https://subventions.fr/guide-des-aides/prestation-technologique-reseau-ptr-bpifrance/> and in Polish: E.Książek, J.M. Pruvot, *Budowa sieci współpracy i partnerstwa dla komercjalizacji wiedzy i technologii*, PARP, Warsaw 2011, p. 47.

The instrument is expected to increase the number of SMEs involved in innovation activities who by rising their absorption capacity can later use the instruments dedicated for more sophisticated project or innovate with private funding.⁹



STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED

- Marshal Office of the Wielkopolska Region in Poland (UMWW)
 - Department of Regional Policy – responsible for the ROP planning and evaluation,
 - Department for Implementation of the Regional Programme – department for the preparation of the detailed documentation of the instrument and its implementation,
 - Department of Economy – responsible of RIS3 implementation, including professionalization programme of intermediaries
- Poznan Science and Technology Park of Adam Mickiewicz University Foundation (PPNT) – responsible for the coordination of the Regional Stakeholder Group work, pilot action and a stakeholder interested in establishment of durable, effective intermediaries network that will enable the PSTP mission (the task of contribution to establishment of such network has been included in the 3 year plan for the PSTP strategy), communication and support for the stakeholders in the interregional policy learning process, preparation of reports,

⁹ The first draft concepts of separated actions (diagnosis, voucher, network of support organisations) from the 3rd workshop (13.09.2017) was critically analysed and re-elaborated at workshop 4 (01.02.2018). The results of testing elicited merging of the actions into one instrument at workshop 5 (60.06.2018).

- Members of Regional Stakeholders Group (RSG)– representatives of regional authority, municipalities, intermediaries and entrepreneurs – responsible for the design of the instrument concept sharing experiences and knowledge from their perspectives;
- Intermediaries involved in the Pilot Action for testing the approach in the sample of 30 SMEs.

TIMEFRAME

- Pilot action of testing the “potentially innovative SMEs” individual diagnostics provided by networked intermediaries for the introduction of a permanent ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR INTRODUCING INNOVATIONS IN POTENTIALLY INNOVATIVE SMES in Wielkopolska – September 2019-September 2020
- Communication between the LP and Pilot partners and the regional authority - constantly
- Introduction of change in the ROP to make space for the new instrument: September – December 2019
- Development and consultation of the working documents to introduce the new instrument, including detailed description of ROP, choice of state aid scheme, call regulations – January – October 2020
- Call for application – November 2020 – January 2021
- Implementation of projects – **March 2021 – December 2022**

COSTS

- Pilot action within ESSPO – 80 thousand EUR:
- Implementation within ROP, ERDF: 2,5 mln EUR)

FUNDING SOURCES

- Pilot action within ESSPO
- Implementation through the policy instrument indicated in part II

COMMITMENT

This Action plan has been developed by Poznań Science and Technology Park in collaboration with the actors in Wielkopolska Regional Stakeholders Group, who commit themselves implement the actions envisioned within their respective capabilities.

Date: 6 September 2019

Poznan Science and Technology Park, Adam Mickiewicz University Foundation

Prof. Jacek Guliński



President of the Board

ENDORSEMENT

Marshal Office of Wielkopolska Region, had regularly collaborated with Poznan Science and Technology Park as well as other actors taking part in the Regional Stakeholder Group within the Interreg Europe project ESSPO “Efficient support services portfolios for SMEs” that led to elaboration of the “Action Plan for Wielkopolska”.

We acknowledge the plan, which adapts the experience exchange in ESSPO to the region’s conditions and will support the implementation whenever possible within rules and regulations associated to procedures and resources of the Office.

The endorsement however cannot and does not create any legally binding obligation for the institution of Marshal Office of Wielkopolska Region

Poznań, 26 September 2019

DYREKTOR DEPARTAMENTU
POLITYKI REGIONALNEJ

Grzegorz Potrzebowski