



# KISS ME

Interreg Europe



European Union  
European Regional  
Development Fund

## Final Event KISS ME



Värmland County  
Administrative Board



**Innlandet**  
fylkeskommune  
County Council

2021-04-15

# Looking backward – April 2017

First presentation of our Policy Instruments at the Partner Meeting in Karlstad, Värmland in April 2017





# Looking backward – April 2019

Exchange of experiences and approaches about SME participation in Cross-border Cooperation, in Hamar, Hedmark (now Innlandet) in April 2019



# The Interreg Sweden-Norway Programme

The INTERREG programme Sweden-Norway became operational in 1996 and has become one of the main policy instruments for cross-border cooperation between the two countries.

With the thematic objective “Increase the competitiveness of SMEs”, the programme focuses on stimulating entrepreneurship and innovation among SMEs in the border region.

INTERREG SE-NO has proven to be a good instrument for fostering entrepreneurship, innovation and competitiveness among SMEs, but has a challenge with and potential to improve in relation to:

- i) attract SMEs to engage in cross-border cooperation and
- ii) to a larger extent facilitate cross border clustering, technology transfer, product and process innovation in order to increase the competitiveness among the SMEs in the border region.



# Action Plan and Interreg Support Facility

As an action in the KISS ME project, Länsstyrelsen Värmland (VCAB) and Innlandet County Council (ICC) intend to have SMEs benefit even more from the added value of cross-border cooperation and promote bottom-up involvement of ideas for cross-border interventions.

To fulfil this action, we have set up an *Interreg Support Facility* as part of a Swedish-Norwegian cross-border Action Plan.

The Interreg Support Facility will:

- Be a hub where SMEs needs will be picked up
- Consist of members with background and knowledge in Interreg Sweden-Norway projects and programme
- Identify and involve SMEs with innovation potential in the region and find out their interests and needs
- Encourage SMEs to participate in cross border cooperation and help SMEs overcome border obstacles
- Address the added value of cross-border cooperation
- Have contacts and networks in Brussels and Europe
- Have collaboration with business and business clusters
- Collaboration with the Värmland Regional Export Centre
- Collaboration with Universities and University Colleges in Western Sweden and Eastern Norway as well as regional research centres

# The Kontigo report

The evaluation report *Företagen i Sverige-Norge programmet* (Kontigo 2018) has been commissioned to provide in-depth knowledge of how the business community participates and what results it leads to in the Interreg Sweden-Norway programme. In addition, the report has been commissioned to map the obstacles and driving forces that the business community experiences when it comes to participating in projects.

Kontigo summarizes the report by making seven recommendations presented in these bullet points:

- ✓ Limit the amount of resources within the focus area Small and medium-sized companies to stimulate competition and thus get better projects
- ✓ Be critical when addressing the project owners' ability to carry out an Interreg project
- ✓ Set higher requirements for the description of the project and its activities
- ✓ Active counteract that the project is divided into sub-projects on each side of the border
- ✓ Assess how the requirements for business participation can be formulated
- ✓ Set high demands on the cross-border added value - especially where the companies are the target group
- ✓ Make it easier for companies to be beneficiaries

# KISS ME survey



VCAB and ICC have mapped expectations and needs for relevant SME`s in the border region through an online survey with a wide range of questions within the areas of “Employees, industry and turnover”, “Cross-border cooperation” and “Assistance from the policy instruments”.

The method was chosen partly on the basis of the Covid 19 situation and partly on the basis that it is an effective way of mapping SME`s needs to participate in cross-border projects. The target group for this survey was broad, but the SME`s had to be registered in the programme geography.

In total, there were 63 respondents in the survey of which more than 70% have had customers from or assignments on the other side of the border in the last two years. Regarding participation in an Interreg Sweden-Norway project, 80% of the respondents` state that they have not participated in such a project before, but almost all of those answered yes when we asked if they see any purpose to collaborate with other actors from across the border.

For a total overview of the questions that were asked in the survey we refer to the report we have written. On the next slide we will show you some of the answers we got when we asked if the SMEs see any purpose to collaborate with other actors from across the border.

# Do you see any purpose with cbc?

## Those who answered no: What does it take for the company to consider participating in a cross-border collaboration?

- ✓ In our case, it is about cooperation that we have direct and concrete benefit from
- ✓ Simple decision paths. Project grants continuously from the start of the projects. Good level of financial matching depending on the size and age of the company
- ✓ Clarify partners
- ✓ No border obstacles with the regulations
- ✓ Simplified regulations, especially within VAT
- ✓ Interesting partners
- ✓ A good, simple and clear system for being able to deliver services and use personnel from Sweden
- ✓ Business benefit and not dialogue meetings and other things for the policy instruments
- ✓ There must be a benefit in participating that exceeds the cost of the effort
- ✓ Technology development
- ✓ Communication and suitable business opportunities
- ✓ It must be able to make a positive contribution
- ✓ If it can lead to future activities with Norwegian organizations or companies. Another motivator is to acquire knowledge of the company, and a third factor is to be involved in socially useful activities where we are able to add value
- ✓ Clear plans and collaboration agreements. Good knowledge of laws and regulations. Financial gain directly or indirectly
- ✓ Cooperation between public actors can make our business more cost-effective
- ✓ Common benefit
- ✓ Have something we need
- ✓ Increase sales and strengthen the competence of the company
- ✓ Good conditions for mutual benefits and competence sharing
- ✓ Get access to the labor market and candidates in Sweden, it can be from schools, companies or the public sector
- ✓ That it is possible to simplify customs rules so that the meaningless bureaucracy can be reduced
- ✓ Mutual benefit
- ✓ It must be value-creating

## Those who answered yes: What is the added value that the company sees from collaborating with other actors from across the border?

- ✓ We see great benefits from working together in Norway, we just do not quite know how to take the first step
- ✓ Good value for money
- ✓ Stronger offers for customers and industries. Skills. Research environments and academia
- ✓ There may be interesting industrial partners and develop our performance
- ✓ Creates a much greater diversity in relation to supply and demand
- ✓ An expanded customer register and opportunity for work in Norway. The opportunity to grow as a company towards a market in another country which, after all, is very close
- ✓ It is always useful to see how you do it elsewhere
- ✓ Increased activity, experiences and networks
- ✓ We can create jobs and fill positions on both sides of the border
- ✓ Competence and product development
- ✓ Simpler market management
- ✓ Expands the network
- ✓ Opportunities for increased activity and results
- ✓ It gives us more knowledge and more references. It is also stimulating to meet other "cultures"
- ✓ Expands competence level and opportunities. In larger networks, you can achieve more
- ✓ We experience a better production flow when purchasing services from a partner
- ✓ Nothing but that it is natural for us to see the way
- ✓ Larger market
- ✓ Widen the market and contacts
- ✓ Competence development, experience and increased turnover
- ✓ Access to a larger market and a different type of expertise in Sweden than in Norway
- ✓ More than double turnover
- ✓ Contact network
- ✓ Reputation and possible increased turnover

# In-depth interviews

In addition to the survey, interviews have been carried out with a random sample of respondents.

In the interview results it was confirmed that SMEs have limited time and economic resources and must see the clear value in the project idea to be interested to participate in the Interreg Sweden Norway programme.

At the same time, we can conclude that there is a great interest among SMEs to participate cross-border activities and projects.



# Reccomendations

Based on this Interreg Europe KISS ME project, the project partners VCAB and ICC have provided input to the development of the new Interreg Sweden-Norway program in the consultation round.

Furthermore, we hope that our report with the following recommendations also will be able to make a positive contribution to the implementation of the new interreg Sweden Norway program and be a useful document for the other project partners and stakeholders in this KISS ME project.

## The Kontigo report

- ✓ Be critical when addressing the project owners' ability to carry out an Interreg project
- ✓ Set higher requirements for the description of the project and its activities
- ✓ Assess how the requirements for business participation can be formulated
- ✓ Set high demands on the cross-border added value - especially where the companies are the target group

## The KISS ME survey and the interviews

- ✓ There is an interest among SMEs for working with cross-border activities and several can also see that Interreg could be a tool for them to get started. But more information about the programme and its objectives is needed.
- ✓ Give a description in the program on what SMEs can get out of the program. This is especially important to clarify because the consultation draft consider SMEs as an indirect target group and not a beneficiary.
- ✓ Companies that are actively involved in the project is in need for compensation.
- ✓ It is important that the projects are relevant for the SMEs. We would like to recognize that the consultation draft addresses this especially under thematic policy objective 1 but it is important that this also applies for other policy objectives where SMEs are a target group.
- ✓ Unfortunately, some SMEs argue that projects are carried out for the sake of the project. It is important that SMEs are connected early in the project planning phase.
- ✓ In special cases, when a project could be strengthened by direct SME participation, SMEs should have the possibility to participate in a project as a co-partner with own budget.



## The consultation draft

- ✓ In relation to make the Interreg Sweden-Norway program relevant for SME`s we strongly support that the thematic policy objective 1 (Smarter Europe) is included in the program. We also would like to argue that this policy objective is prioritized in the distribution of budget among the different policy objectives and that it also should include Objective 1.3 “Improve the growth and competitiveness of SMEs.”
- ✓ We would like to give a recognition to the working group that they ask for a description on how the potential project owners intent to involve the business community.
- ✓ In the previous Interreg programme there was a possibility on the Swedish side to participate in a project as co-partner with its own budget (in cooperation with a project owner). This possibility could be included also in the new programme.

# Summary and the way forward

## *Summary:*

Värmland and Innlandet have learned a lot from the Interreg Europe programme and the KISS ME project.

We have worked together to strengthen the innovation capacity of our SMEs by comparing the approaches of four different border regions, exchanging tools to reach the SMEs and improving the policy instrument *Interreg Sweden Norway programme*.

## *The way forward:*

*Programme level: The new Interreg Sweden Norway programme*

*Project level: New projects built on SMEs needs and their involvement in projects.*

# Thank you!

Thank you all for a very nice and fruitful cooperation in the KISS ME Project!



A special thanks to Sina,  
who has successfully  
guided us through the  
almost five-year long  
KISS ME journey

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