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CLAY

Regional Action

Plan for South

Ostrobothnia

CLAY — Cross Sector Support for Innovative
and Competitive Artistic Ceramic SMEs



ETELÄ-POHJANMAAN LIITTO

Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia



Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia

CLAY Regional Action Plan for South Ostrobothnia, 2021

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Contents

1 Project General Information	3
2 Project Partner General Information	4
3 Introduction	5
4 Policy Context	6
Policy instrument	6
Ceramics in South Ostrobothnia viewed in larger context.....	7
Innovative and competitive ceramic SMEs	7
5 CLAY Regional Action for South Ostrobothnia	8
Development Needs meet Service Paths – Two Steps to Improve Ceramic and Other CCI SMEs' Access to Advice and Funding.....	8
Policy Need Addressed: Improving Networking and Communication to Overcome Service Gaps	8
Improvement through a Policy Guideline	9
Background.....	11
Focus on Networking.....	12
Learning to Navigate in the Development Environment	13
Specific Activities and Timeframe	14
Stakeholders Involved	15
Costs and Funding Sources.....	16
Risk and Contingency Plans	17
Monitoring and Indicators.....	17

1 Project General Information

Project	CLAY — Cross Sector Support for Innovative and Competitive Artistic Ceramic SMEs
Project Lead Partner	Umbria Region, Italy
Advisory Partner	European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation Cities of Ceramics (AEuCC), Spain
Project Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia, Finland• Association for the Development and Promotion of the European Ceramic Centre (Cerameurop), France• Technological Centre for Ceramics and Glass (CTCV), Portugal• Regional Development Agency of South-West Oltenia, Romania
Project web page	www.interregeurope.eu/clay



Regione Umbria



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CTCV



2 Project Partner General Information

Project	CLAY — Cross Sector Support for Innovative and Competitive Artistic Ceramic SMEs
Partner Organisation	Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia
Country	Finland
NUTS 2 region	Länsi-Suomi
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3 Introduction

The CLAY project focuses on the competitiveness of the European ceramic businesses encouraging regions to actions that support adopting innovative approaches to new technologies and digitalisation. These steps are imperative to strengthen especially the artistic ceramic SMEs' brand development and their positions in the global streams of artisanal production.

Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia has acted as one of the project partners implementing the CLAY Application Form for its part. It has participated all international project meetings and respectively organised one in September 2019. The meetings served in making tangible the interregional exchange and offered exceptional opportunities for the professionals of the sector in South Ostrobothnia to explore different ceramic cultures.

In general, the project has worked as an eye-opening learning experience that has brought forward the need to increase awareness about innovativeness and co-operation not only within the ceramic sector but across sectors. While it is admitted that South Ostrobothnia differs from the other project partner regions in the number of ceramic SMEs and in its operational environment in general, the CLAY project has given the incentive to analyse this context and to focus on the sector's needs. To this end, since January 2019, face-to-face meetings with ceramic artists and makers were applied to grasp the state-of-art of ceramics in the region and to build a sound foundation for the project work.

Later, organising the Pop-up ceramics exhibition as part of the Application Form implementation in March 2020 turned out to be an unexpectedly successful event that worked as a pathfinder to joint action. Interregional exchange has also helped to understand similarities in the challenges the ceramic sector faces in different parts of Europe. The Good Practices found through the project have been studied carefully at the Local Stakeholder Meetings that have been held regularly also in the virtual form. To support the exchange process even virtually, LSG members were sent an online survey to detail, which GPs they saw most applicable. This tool was found an effective addition to the virtual meetings as it gave more opportunities to state one's opinions.

Based on this exchange and learning so far, the Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia looks forward to entering the next step of the CLAY project, implementing the Regional Action Plan at hand.

4 Policy Context

Policy instrument

The policy instrument that the Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia is developing in the CLAY project is the Regional Programme. Together with the Smart Specialisation Strategy, these documents create the core for regional development planning for the years 2022–25. The Regional Programme contains the development targets based on the region's possibilities and needs, lists the topical initiatives and related measures, and sums the available financial resources for the following years. Still, it is important to understand that this document is a guiding policy instrument that does not include a budget or allocate funding as such. As the document is in process at the time of CLAY Phase 2, the RCSO Regional Action Plan focuses on strengthening the document's leverage on the ceramic sector and the cultural and creative industries in general.

In the previous Regional Programme, that was actual when applying for the CLAY project, focus was laid on its Thematic Objective 1 (Regenerative Local Industry and Commerce). This Objective aimed at developing the production of services and experiences to support the creative sector as a source of new businesses and to generate new competitiveness and added value in the more traditional sectors. The target was to strengthen entrepreneurs' competence in digital business activities and to promote the utilisation of digital marketing and sales innovations. The Objective also emphasised internationalisation and design in developing the creative sector.

Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) hold a lot of potential growth for the South Ostrobothnia region but also require incentive to flourish. It is understood that in order to support the CCI enterprises in the region customised education and advisory services are needed. Digitalisation processes in marketing and sales channels are developing rapidly. For ceramists, among others, the use of digital tools has proved indispensable midst the corona crisis since February 2020, following the large cancellation of popular events that until then offered the quintessential sales channel. Different digitized events then soon started to emerge, but many entrepreneurs now need the support to develop their skills to get forward on this freshly gained ground.

Ceramics in South Ostrobothnia viewed in larger context

At the early stage of the CLAY project, an analysis of the ceramic sector in the region was undertaken. This analysis helped to view the sector as part of a larger context, not only regarding the regional circumstances but also with attention to the state of ceramics at the national level.

In the South Ostrobothnia region, enterprises in ceramics are typically run as self-employing businesses, as is the case also elsewhere in Finland, except for very few exceptions. In national surveys, the personal and unique style that the independent action allows, is considered also the biggest asset of these enterprises. A challenge is that entrepreneurs in ceramics often need to view areas larger than the immediate surrounding region as their market sphere. Also, working single-handedly can lead to experiences of feeling isolated, especially as the number of entrepreneurs in ceramics has recently been decreasing. Therefore, different networks are important for the artisans and artists.

While networking and sharing knowledge and skills are important, it is also important to realise that globally the whole sphere of artisanal production has gone through drastic changes in a relatively short time-span and that this has had a strong influence on the whole of contemporary craft and design culture. This has implicated among other things difficulties to articulate the major shifts in the working and innovation environments of ceramic artisans and artist. It is very important to support these actors to adjust to and to benefit from this change in global streams of artisanal production.

Innovative and competitive ceramic SMEs

Achieving dynamic change in the area of ceramics and other material-based CCIs is directly linked to the artisans and artists' abilities to participate in and exploit different development measures. This requires understanding innovation as a processual renewal that often bases on joint learning and co-operation. The concept of innovation ecosystem allows to realise that processual renewal and learning happen in a nexus of relations that include structural, organisational and different human relations.

The CLAY project has successfully supported in opening new pathways to innovativeness among the ceramic SMEs. The different good practices presented

during the project have inspired to find new possibilities to increase the regional SMEs competitiveness through digitalisation and other innovative solutions. The RCSO and our CLAY Local Stakeholder Group (LSG) have appreciated this possibility to policy learning across the project's partner regions' Good Practices that have guided outlining the Regional Action Plan for South Ostrobothnia. The selected Action is based on two excellent Good Practices, as will be detailed in the following part.

5 CLAY Regional Action for South Ostrobothnia

Development Needs meet Service Paths – Two Steps to Improve Ceramic and Other CCI SMEs' Access to Advice and Funding

Policy Need Addressed: Improving Networking and Communication to Overcome Service Gaps

As a result of the CLAY regional sector analysis, undertaken in the first months of the project, it was found out that increasing networking among ceramic actors is one of the most important needs requiring attention in South Ostrobothnia. Indeed, as enterprises in ceramics, among other material-based CCI micro-enterprises, are typically run as self-employing businesses, working single-handedly can lead to experiences of feeling isolated. This is underlined by the fact that the current number of actors in ceramics in the South Ostrobothnia region is rather limited and even generally the number of artisanal enterprises has been decreasing.

Therefore, an important starting point to our Action is to enhance mutual interaction not only within the ceramics sector but across the field of material-based CCIs. This would open way for ceramic actors to find common ground with other artisans to better and jointly communicate about their work to their customers, the public bodies and potential co-operative partners.

The need to improve networking and communication is linked to changes in artisanal production and how it is viewed as part of cultural and creative industries' development. That artisan activity is increasingly framed as a branch of CCI instead

of a sector in its own right can sometimes reflect as difficulties in articulating the different development needs in the ceramic artisans and artists' work.

As found out through the surveys undertaken and analysed in the CLAY project, such needs include, for example, the need to improve media and communication skills in approaching potential customer segments and in finding partners to develop new products and services. Another observation made also in the South Ostrobothnia, as in other CLAY regions, is that traditional sectors can be cautious of or hesitate to approach different innovation and business development services.

On the other hand, it appears that these services can sometimes omit the needs and conditions of the more traditional sectors of activity and especially the characteristics of artisanal entrepreneurship. This can lead to divergence between the service provision and the prospective service customers (traditional sector and artisanal SMEs). It is in the interest of this Action to narrow the gap between the ceramic artisans and the public authorities that are in the position to support the artisan entrepreneurs' innovativeness capacity and business development.

This Action aims to support artisans to better articulate their development needs in the innovation and development environment and the funding authorities to better recognise those needs and to inform more fluently about their development tools. To this end, the Action suggests creating a policy guideline and a specific Service Path Description.

In this way, the action also acknowledges the advice given by the CLAY RCSO Local Stakeholder Group to outline actions that answer the need for concrete measures among and with actors so that the aimed policy improvement is graspable for those whom the improvement is supposed to benefit.

Improvement through a Policy Guideline

Through our action, we intend to achieve a Type 2 policy improvement - change in the management of the policy instrument (improved governance), by giving a broader emphasis to CCI (with a special focus on ceramics) in the regional development programme of South Ostrobothnia. In the long term, this will also result in a Type 1 improvement – Implementation of new projects that would be developed thanks to the improved access of ceramists to financial support measures for business development.

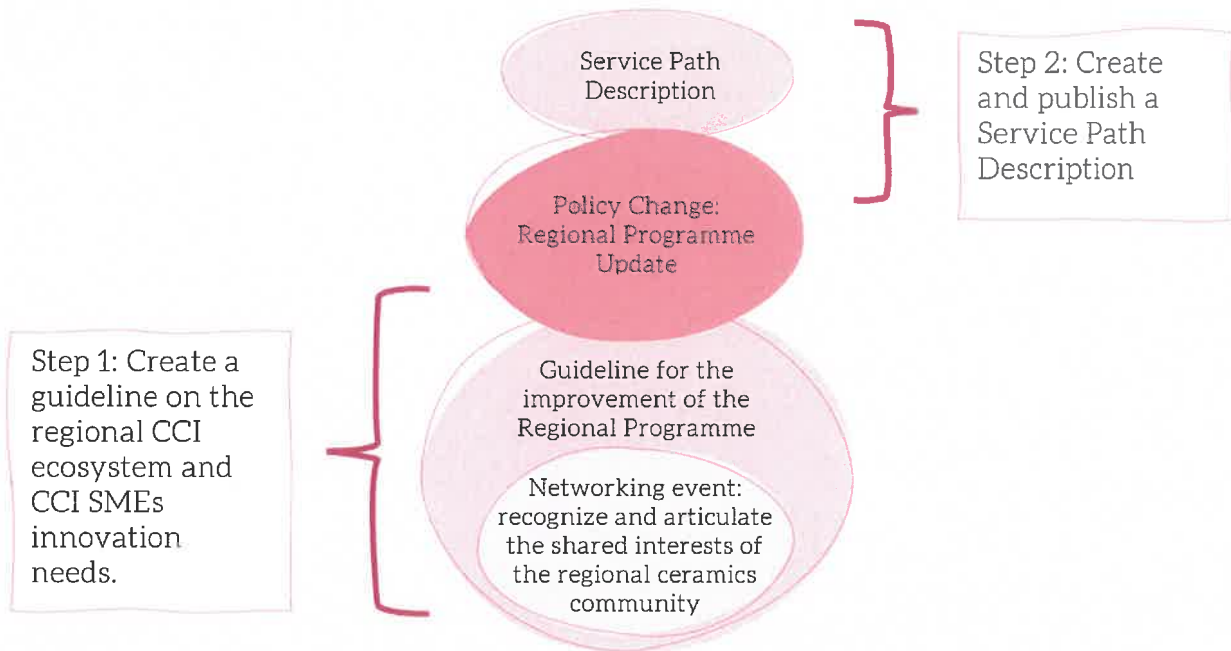
The policy improvement is built on a two-step action that improves the Regional Programme and yields a practical tool that illustrates access to CCI SMEs' support and development instruments.

The action begins with the Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia holding an assembly with actors from the ceramic sector and other artisanal fields of activity in the region. The first aim is to bring together peers to network, to share knowledge, ideas, and mutual learning experiences concerning artisanal entrepreneurship. As a step forward, the event helps to recognize and articulate the shared interests of the artisanal community, including ceramic actors, in the region. The event is additionally amplified with a specific section on storytelling on social media and marketing to inspire actors to more vivid networking and refined customer communication.

Based on the event's discussions, the Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia will create a guideline on the regional CCI ecosystem and the artisanal SMEs' needs within that ecosystem. This guideline will be made known to the Regional Board and will be handed to officers preparing the Regional Programme. The guideline aims to influence the process of designing and writing the Regional Programme so that CCI ecosystem and its actors' innovation and business development needs are recognized better and in more detail.

The guideline will include a notion about the need for a Service Path Description. Subsequently, the renewed Regional Programme will be improved with a reference to it. This practical measure will be created in the second step of the Action.

The Service Path Description demonstrates in a clear and visual way the possibilities for ceramic artists and other artisanal actors to access advice and financial support for developing their business activities. The intention is to create a tool that supports actors in the ceramics to better navigate in the operative environments of business and innovation development and help them find appropriate and useful instruments to support their activities. The description will be largely based on existing support instruments that are offered by public authorities, e.g. the Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment.



Together, the two steps of our action help achieving two key goals:

1. to outline and express the regional ceramic and other CCI SMEs shared objectives in the operative environments of business and innovation development, so that these are better recognised in the region's development activities;
2. to provide ceramic and other CCI SMEs with a new tool, illustrating the opportunities available with regards to innovation and business development instruments to improve their competitiveness.

Background

Throughout the first phase of the CLAY project, the Local Stakeholder Group (LSG) was informed about the different Good Practices (GP) presented during the project meetings and published on the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform. The Good Practices were jointly discussed and reviewed regarding which of them and to which extent would be applicable in the South Ostrobothnia region.

The LSG assembled eight times during semesters 1-5. Towards the end of semester 5, an additional survey was sent out to the stakeholders to detail, which Good Practices they considered most useful. The results of the survey were discussed in the LSG meeting on 4 Nov 2020 where it was concluded, which actions would be taken further to the first version of the Regional Action Plan.

Following later feedback from the project, regional actions were further developed into one action.

This long and thorough background work builds on two regional Good Practices presented as part of the CLAY project. These are, the 'Ceramica made in Umbria', presented by the CLAY Lead Partner (Umbria Region) and the PTI Innovation Springboard Service presented by the Region of Nouvelle-Aquitaine (PP6).

Focus on Networking

The GP 'Ceramica Made in Umbria', which was first shared by the CLAY LP in the occasion of the CLAY GP transfer webinar in March 2020, focused on increasing cooperation between SMEs through coordinated methods and on taking advantage of the rich heritage of ceramics in the region. In this GP, the objective to support the adoption of innovations among traditional ceramic SMEs was combined in a meaningful and innovative way with cherishing the value of the long traditions in ceramics in the region.

We are looking at this GP especially for two elements: networking and boosting innovation building on tradition. Indeed, one clear element of GP that lends itself to transfer is the cooperation between different ceramic companies, which creates a trusting network where to share innovations, knowledge and skills. This requires a mediator, who runs and supports the network. Based on the notion of how this GP amalgamates innovative and new approaches to communicating about traditional ceramics, the RCSO action is intended to support ceramic sector actors' to 'grow stronger together'. We transfer the concept of strengthening the regional ceramics community that is at the heart of 'Ceramica Made in Umbria'. This GP supports the ceramics community to articulate its development needs. Step 1 of our action transfers this, with the networking event and the Guidelines, leading to the policy change. These will be managed by RCSO as the mediator figure.

The GP also supports the sector in strengthening public visibility in ways that cherish the ceramic tradition, but even embrace possibilities to new modes of action and development. This is the overall objective of the Umbrian GP and it was put into place through a process of cooperation and expert support. The new tool in Step 2 reflects this and provides a practical service path description that will support actors in the ceramics to better navigate business and innovation development and help them find instruments to support their activities. See also the section below for further input to Step 2 and the service path.

In South Ostrobothnia, increasing networking among ceramic actors was found one of the most important needs that requires attention. Through the face-to-face meetings with actors in ceramics, it was also found out that most actors cherished especially traditional, even vernacular ways of working with clay, including, for example, the use of hand-built wood-burning kilns. It was therefore considered that elements of the Good Practice 'Ceramica made in Umbria' could be developed into an action that can benefit ceramic actors in the South Ostrobothnia region, too.

After the first presentation at the CLAY GP transfer webinar, the GP was analysed with the help of the description on the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform and the related original webpages. It was then discussed at the LSG meetings. Further exchange with the GP owner, Regione Umbria, took place at CLAY joint project meetings and at a bilateral meeting on 12 April 2021, to gain insights on how the GP was developed and running.

Learning to Navigate in the Development Environment

Through the personal interviews and surveys accomplished during the first semesters of the project, it was soon learned that there appears to be a considerable gap between the ceramic actors and the public bodies that hold access to and help with different innovation and business development tools.

In this regard, the Good Practice 'PTI Innovation Springboard Service', presented by the Region of Nouvelle-Aquitaine (PP6) at the CLAY GP transfer webinar in March 2020, was found relevant. This GP is based on the notion that often SMEs find the first step to innovation the most difficult one. Therefore, the Innovation Springboard Service is intended to assist in experimenting innovation-led collaborative projects with external parties that best suit the SME applying this service. Another strength of the GP is seen in that it approves different approaches to innovation, ranging from market studies to improving product design.

In the PP6 GP, the logic is to help SMEs find their way to initial experiments in innovative collaboration projects. We appreciate this approach of the practice and wish to develop this idea further in the regional context of South Ostrobothnia.

Therefore, whereas the Innovation Springboard Service is in the first line a funding tool, the RCSO focuses more on the service path it involves. As was noted, on the one hand, traditional sectors are sometimes cautious or hesitate approaching innovation services. On the other hand, these services sometimes omit the needs and conditions of the more traditional sectors of activity. This can easily lead to a

divergence between the service provision and the prospective service customers (traditional sector SMEs). We see that the PTI Innovation Springboard Service addresses this problem.

After the PTI Good Practice was presented on the Policy Learning Platform, it was soon explained to the Local Stakeholder Group in its meeting on 9 September 2020. In the LSG discussions this GP was related to the advisory and funding opportunities already existing in the region, but that the ceramic artists and other artisans and CCI actors find hard to approach. It was considered that these actors would benefit from 'a springboard' that would help them to find their way to suitable advice and funding instruments that the public bodies hold. This was further justified with the notion that the ceramics sector in South Ostrobothnia is narrow and that all in all especially the traditional crafts sector would benefit from even the basic development measures.

It was thus concluded that the PTI Innovation Springboard Service would best be applied in the form of the Service Path Description that spreads information about development measures among the actors in ceramics, other artisans and the CCI SMEs in general. In this way, the Action serves as pathway for micro and small enterprises to better understand their relevant innovation ecosystem and encourages to find ways to access funding for innovative development.

Specific Activities and Timeframe

The Action starts with the networking event organised in autumn 2021. The event helps these actors to recognize and articulate their shared interests and needs. The event can be additionally amplified with a specific section on storytelling on social media and marketing to inspire actors to more vivid networking and refined customer communication.

As a result of the event, a guideline is created to express the regional ceramic and other CCI SMEs needs in the operative environments of business and innovation development. This guideline is made known to the Regional Board and will be handed to officers preparing the Regional Programme. The guideline will include the notion about the need for a Service Path Description.

Aug/Sept 2021	Networking event for actors in ceramics and other CCI SMEs.
Sept/Oct 2021	A guideline on regional CCI ecosystem and CCI SMEs' needs is written with the approval of the networking event's participants.
Oct 2021	The guideline is made known to the Regional Board and handed to officers preparing the Regional Programme.
Dec 2021	Regional Programme is approved by the Regional Board and published by the Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia.

As the publication of the Regional Programme is due in late autumn 2021, it is vital that the first step is achieved well in time. Following from this, it is considered reasonable to conclude that Step 2, creating and publishing the Service Path Description, is possible first after the Regional Programme has been published. Following information collection and exchange of opinions with relevant advisory and funding bodies in the region, the Service Path Description will be published on RCSO webpage in May 2022 the latest.

Nov/Dec 2021	Start collecting information and materials for the Service Path
Jan/Feb 2022	1-2 consultations with relevant advisory and funding bodies and the ceramics / artisanal community in the region to discuss the design of the Service Path Description.
March/April 2022	Visual development and design of the Description for online use.
May 2022	Launch of the Service Path Description on the RCSO website.
June 2022– May 2023	Monitoring the impacts of Service Path Description in facilitating and increasing access of ceramic businesses from South Ostrobothnia to funding and consultancy for innovation support.

Stakeholders Involved

Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia

The RCSO takes the lead role in implementing the Action and sees that it is accomplished. The Service Path Description is published on the RCSO website.

Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment in South Ostrobothnia

Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment in South Ostrobothnia acts as a key information provider in the Service Path Description development. The outcome of the action is available for this party to apply in their day-to-day work.

Konsti ry., Craft Organisation Taito EP, and Seinäjoki Art Hall

The organisations represented in the CLAY RCSO Local Stakeholder Group are invited to participate the implementation of the Action in the role of an advisory party. They are asked to inform about the Networking event through their communication channels and to consult the writing of the Guideline. These parties are also invited to consult in the Service Path Description process.

Costs and Funding Sources

Implementation of Action requires mainly staff resources from the RCSO. Other expenses are expected from organising the Networking event and consultation meetings regarding the Guideline and the Service Path Description. Also, the visual design of the Service Path Description will cause expenses.

In addition, staff resources are required to a minor extent from the Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment in South Ostrobothnia, the Craft Organisation Taito EP and Seinäjoki Art Hall. From Konsti ry., the implementation of the Action would require allocation of voluntary work hours.

- Organisation of the networking event and consultation meetings (compensations for the use of premises, tools and equipment, related materials, catering): 1000 e
- Compensation for external expertise on advice about representation and sharing stories on virtual platforms and social media): 1500 e
- Visual design of the Service Path Description: 1000 e

Approximate costs: 3500 e

These costs are covered by the RCSO from its budget allocations on cultural affairs and international affairs.

Risk and Contingency Plans

Risks for implementing the Action are low. This is achieved by the RCSO taking the lead role in implementation. Possible risks are mainly related to the development of the corona pandemic. Unforeseeable changes can bring about situations where staff resources are tied to other tasks.

The development of the pandemic is steadily observed and, depending on the circumstances, the planned event (Step 1) will be adjusted by making use of online tools. Depending on the situation, implementation of Action will be adapted (in first line: postponed) in a way that still allows its accomplishment in good time before the end of Phase 2 and that the planned the policy change is achieved.

Monitoring and Indicators

Implementation of the Action will be monitored throughout the Phase 2. Monitoring is accomplished with the help of different indicators that include the following key factors, each marked with a target number in brackets:

Result indicators

- Guideline on regional CCI ecosystem and SMEs' needs (1).
- Service Path Description published on the RCSO website (1).
- Ceramic, other artisanal and CCI SMEs applying advice and funding instruments offered by public bodies (5).

Output indicators

- Organisation of the networking event (1) and number of participants (10).
- Stories about ceramic and other artisanal and CCI SMEs published in different media channels following the networking event (15).
- Number of further measures to influence the policy instrument (e.g. meetings, emails, negotiations) (7).
- CCI innovation development objectives applying to ceramics in the Regional Programme (incl. references to the Service Path Description). (3)
- Meetings and participants arranged for developing the Service Path Description. (3)

Date: 28.6.2021

Signature:



Name and position: Asko Peltola, Region Mayor, Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia

Stamp of the organisation:





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