



REGIONAL COUNCIL
OF LAPLAND



Improving
Structural
Funds for
better
delivery of
R&D&i policies

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Regional Council of Lapland

Project overview



IMPROVE
Interreg Europe



European Union
European Regional
Development Fund



Research &
innovation



Policy instrument

In Lapland, the structural funds programme and EU funding play an instrumental role in regional development. Due to start of new programming period, the Policy instrument originally selected for improvement is changed to Finland's structural funds programme **Innovation and Skills in Finland 2021–2027**, with focus especially on Priority Axis 1: Innovative Finland. The objective is to promote research and innovation capabilities of regions and companies with a particular focus on business and working life, and the introduction of new technologies. The funding will advance the growth and competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Another objective is to utilise digitalisation for the benefit of citizens, businesses and public administration.

Structural funds programme is closely linked to the implementation of Lapland's Smart Specialization Strategy. It outlines the strategic importance of the development of arctic business and expertise, innovation internationalisation. "Arctic smartness" is a way for the region to success improve development activities and utilisation of EU resources.



Good practices

Lapland's regional working group for structural funds management

A regional working group for structural funds management has been established in Lapland with the aim to increase coordination between regional authorities. Lapland has set up a working group in order to facilitate better cooperation and to take into account the priorities and funding from international/interregional programmes, agricultural programme and national development funding. The group consists of those officials who are directly responsible for the evaluation of the project applications.

All project applications must be presented for the group for a joint discussion. The group does not have the authority to evaluate or approve projects, for which the members of group are responsible in their own organisations. The aim is to coordinate different funds and programmes and to create cooperation with ongoing projects, as well as to prevent overlapping projects and actions. The value of joint discussions and debate is in the views and knowledge of the group and in the learning process that the joint meetings facilitate. As a practice for transferring of knowledge, inter-organisation learning and coordination of funds may be considered to be interesting.

Link: <https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices/item/5134/lapland-s-regional-working-group-for-structural-funds-management/>

ELMO - Cross-regional cooperation on S3

The collaboration is about shaping the future of the regions of East and North Finland (ENF) together. The core of the collaboration consists of smart specialisation that leads the way to identifying regional strengths and competences. The goal is to develop new practices that help enterprises to utilise the expertise and versatile network of innovation platforms in the ENF area.

As a result of taking part in the European Commission's Industrial Transition piloting, the ENF regions produced a joint smart specialisation strategy in 2018. Based on the strategy, a cluster development model of existing network of innovation platforms was created. Good practices have been identified and a basis for future joint development actions have been found. The project also identified e.g. joint value chains and S3 enabling conditions for the programming period 2021-2027.

The practice has been useful for the participating sparsely populated regions for defining common strategic goals and to provide a platform for learning, identification of common strengths, and establishing networks of R&D environments. As a positive outcome, regions with limited resources have been able to benefit from the synergies and have gained more visibility for their activities.

Link: <https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices/item/5602/elmo-cross-regional-cooperation-on-s3/>





Specific issues and areas of improvement

Project team has identified **developing cooperation between SMEs and RDI organizations** as a specific issue that IMPROVE project will address. The participation of SMEs and developing of funding processes are in the core in future actions.

In addition, areas of improvements are related to **monitoring and evaluation for structural funds**. Lapland`s aim is to improve monitoring and evaluation methodologies for structural funds, especially focusing on Smart Specialisation projects in order to enhance the steering effect of regional development measures.

Currently, there is not systematic monitoring model for structural funds and smart specialisation strategy. The data and indicators provided by the policy instrument are mostly geared towards specific outcomes in SMEs and are not optimally suited for the evaluation of broader projects including other beneficiaries. Stakeholders and target groups are not systematically involved in the monitoring and evaluation of the policy instrument.

Strategy level and operational level interaction can be strengthened. The ways in which the Regional Plan “Lapland Agreement”, Smart Specialisation Strategy (Arctic Smartness) and the structural funds programme (ERDF and ESF) guide the actions taken in the region can be developed. While the Regional Plan is broad by its nature, in RIS3 the region makes choices and should focus on core competences. These can have a more direct role regionally in the design and smart use of structural funds through regionally set criteria for projects.



Identified solutions to specific issues

Experiences and practices learnt from the peer reviews and workshops have provided valuable information and cases that will serve the elaboration of the action plan. Project team has identified possible solutions based on other partners experiences and practices for specific issues mentioned above. Solutions are related to tools for monitoring of structural funds and smart specialisation strategy as well as stakeholders` involvement. Project team has found especially interesting good practices produced by **Centre-Val de Loire** and **City of Tartu**, which will be used for preparing future actions.

Centre-Val de Loire`s practices are interesting in terms of **monitoring smart specialisation priorities** and strengthen the **governance and coordination dynamics of the ecosystem within the priorities**. In addition, project team find useful and worth to learn more about developing of **entrepreneurial discovery process**, such as the involvement of different actors and setting priorities.

Project team identified that City of Tartu has developed a strong start up ecosystem with many events, active incubators and accelerators, networking and a good infrastructure. As an interesting good practice from Tartu Science Park, **ADAPTER** was identified to be explored more specifically. Special consideration will be focused on **developing cooperation between SMEs and RDI organizations and building up business ecosystem**. Also the role of Tartu city was found interesting taking the position to support the creation of business environment, to work as creator of solution for the ecosystem and as an innovator and investor, especially in Smart City initiatives.



Main stakeholders involved in the project

Main stakeholders involved in project activities and developing of future actions are ELY-Center, Lapland`s RDI organizations as well as business developers of cities and municipalities.

