

Project INTRA: STUDY VISIT GUIDE



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I. INTRODUCTION

From times of Adam Smith, David Ricardo and later authors such as E. Heckscher, Ohlin or B. P. Samuelson, scholars of the economy are externalizing a growing interest in offering a comprehensive understanding the phenomenon of International Trade.

Globalization has made this process easier, mainly through the usage of internet. The dynamics of the global economy as well as the opening of local economies are transforming the whole world into a new big market. The current international economic environment is characterized by dynamism and requires from companies a cosmopolitan view of economic activity and business strategies.

What is the Internationalisation of Companies?

Business internationalisation is the process through which a company creates the necessary conditions to face the international market.

The present document represents the common Methodology to be followed by INTRA Partnership for the implementation of the Study Visits, as part of the Exchange of Experiences exercise foreseen in the project.

As part of INTRA Project, two rounds of Study Visits will be organised. The scope of these visits is to acquire an extensive knowledge of the good practices selected and to be implemented in the specific context of each partner region.

II. METHODOLOGY

The Study Visit Methodology will allow partners to identify the challenges, barriers and support instruments which one must bear in mind while aiming to achieve Internationalisation, as well as best practices and success stories from both SMEs and Agencies¹ that are already making headway in the field of internationalization.

Regarding the selection criteria Project Partners need to consider when organizing the Study Visits, we will all follow the “INTRA GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE” developed by CUE. This document establishes the minimum requirements an INTRA practice must comply with in order to be identified as Good and Transferable.

An action/project/initiative is an INTRA practice if:

- It is an action/project/initiative/service that promotes/enforces/helps/supports SME Internationalisation
- Final beneficiaries of the action/project/initiative are SMEs that are interested in international activities
- The action/project/initiative is focused on the SME internationalisation or can be implemented within a broader scope where the SME support is included (such as partner searches, funding, brokerage services ...).
- According to the compiler, the action/project/initiative has some element/feature/tool that can be transferred to another region/area/context
- Is a type of action/project/initiative listed in question number 7 (Good Practice template)

As already mentioned, the Study Visits will be carried out in two Rounds.

Starting with the “Site Visits Preparation” and finishing with the “Evaluation of the Donor Partners” we will, step by step, describe how this methodology is structured.

We will collect the data using different types of methods in order to adequate them to each phase of the methodology and in order to obtain valid, reliable and adequate results.

¹ By “Agencies” we understand any entity that provides support to SMEs for their internationalisation (governmental agencies, university, chamber of commerce, etc.).

1. FIRST ROUND OF STUDY VISITS

The First Round of Study Visits will allow all project partners to learn about different good practices developed in each participating regions. Therefore, all partners will visit all regions in order to guarantee the policy learning experiences.

The duration of the 1st Round of Study Visits will be a minimum of one and half working days, where around 6 entities per region (both Agencies developing support policies/instruments and SMEs) will be presented (either through presentation at the venue, or in situ visits – at least two).

The number of participants per project partner will be of minimum 2 and maximum 4 representatives excluding the external experts.

TIMETABLE

This First Round of Study Visits will be held during Semesters 1, 2, 3 and 4.

There is a clear distinction between visits to support ecosystem of internationalization and SMEs for the First Round of Study Visits.

In the case of support environment the objective will be focused on learning from those policies already in practice aimed at fostering the SMEs Internationalisation.

In the case of SMEs, the objective will be focused on learning about the good practices related to their internationalisation plan and the experience related to the use of support policies implemented.

Each PP will pursue the following STEPS in order to gather the necessary information needed to transform each visit in a learning experience suitable to be transferred to other EU Regions:

- Preparation for site visit
- Site tour
- Interregional Task Force Meeting

1.1 Preparation for Site Visit

The essential preparation work should be done BEFORE the study visit take place.

An **initial meeting or phone discussion** with the supporting institution and/or SME to be visited will be organised and held with the person/people in charge of internationalisation instruments/issues. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the visit and reasons why this entity has been selected. At the same time, the opportunity will be used to disseminate about Project INTRA's purposes.

At this stage of the First Round of the Study Visits, partners will use as reference information the one already collected within the **COLLECTION OF PRACTICES TEMPLATE** prepared by CUE.

REMINDER: Each Project Partner will have to identify 9 good practice examples (54 in total), of which 5 or 6 will be selected as Study Visits.

Site-visit documentation: The agenda and the Good Practices description will be sent to the project partners at least 15 days prior to each Study Visit in order to allow in advance to fully prepare for the exchange of experience while participating in the Study Visits exercise.

1.2 Site Tour

As project partners will already receive the site-visit documentation in advance, the purpose of the each visit will be to gather more detailed knowledge about the internationalisation process developed and carried out by the SMEs (together with an in situ visit of SMEs), and the policies and instruments developed and offered by the support environment.

Moreover, in the case of visits to the SME's premises, the project partners will have the opportunity to interact with SME's staff and, in this way, obtain added information relevant to identify a possible transferability to their own Regions.

In order to assess the different visits, project partners should use the Study Visits Report & Evaluation (Annex I) created for this purpose. Internal evaluation will serve as a support mechanism whose objective is ensuring a good cooperation, high quality of outputs and project partners' orientation.

Annex I should be fill in and send back to FUNDECYT-PCTEX (as leader of this task) as well as to the Donor Partner (organiser of the study visits) and to MRA (lead partner of the project) no longer than 15 days after the visit.

1.3 Interregional Task Force Meeting

After the conclusion of each site tour, Interregional Task Force Meetings will be held. The purpose of these meetings will be to highlight all lessons learned and exchange different points of views.

It will also provide necessary inputs to guarantee high quality, effectiveness and efficiency of the policy learning exercise as well as generate new knowledge.

Each ITF Meeting will evaluate the Study Visits **previously** carried out, as explained in the Table below:

INTERREGIONAL TASK FORCE MEETINGS		
PLACE	LENGTH/DATE	CONTENT
VARNA (BG)	0.5 days September 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ITF set up and experts' introduction - Presentation of methodology for the work of the experts, calendar, obligations and responsibilities, etc. - Forecasting exercise - Lessons learned from Study Visits – How to connect GPs with planned policy changes - <i>Evaluation of the GPs presented in the 1st study visit (Varna)</i>
BADAJOS (ES)	0.5 days December 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experts' introduction (if necessary) - Mapping of the different internationalisation support policies - Follow-up of the Exchange of Experiences activities - <i>Evaluation of the GPs presented in the 2nd study visit (Extremadura) and 3rd study visit (Maribor)</i>
ABRUZZO (IT)	0.5 days June 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experts' introduction (if necessary) - Preliminary information about the State of Affairs reports - Follow-up of the Exchange of Experiences activities - <i>Evaluation of the GPs presented in the 4th study visit (Abruzzo)</i>
COVENTRY (UK)	0.5 days December 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experts' introduction (if necessary) - Evaluation of GPs from the perspective of its transferability - Follow-up of the Exchange of Experiences activities: Regional and Joint State of Affairs reports, methodology for the policy recommendations, methodology for development of regional action plans, - <i>Evaluation of the GPs presented in the 5th study and 6th study visit (Coventry)</i> - Discussion and agreement about 2nd Round of study visits
ALGARVE (PT)	0.5 days May 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experts' introduction (if necessary) - Final selection of GPs (process led by CUE) - Follow-up of the Exchange of Experiences activities: Policy recommendations and Action Plans - <i>Feedback on 2nd Round of study visits</i>

MARIBOR (SI)	0.5 days December 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experts' introduction (if necessary) - Presentation on final version of the regional action plans - Follow-up of the Exchange of Experiences activities: Final discussion of EE deliverables - <i>Feedback on 2nd Round of study visits (if necessary)</i>
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2. SECOND ROUND OF STUDY VISITS

Within the framework of Interregional Task Force meeting #4 (Coventry) held right after the last Study Visit of the First Round, project partners will have to select up to two regions to perform a second round of site visits in order to acquire extensive knowledge of certain good practices.

Those regions selected will be named as **Donor Partners** and those partners re-visiting certain regions will be named as **Receiver Partners**.

The duration of Study Visits within **SECOND ROUND** will be of minimum 1 working day and maximum 3 working days (depending on the number of good practices selected for the in-depth analysis).

The number of participants per project partner will be between minimum 2 and maximum 5 representatives (including stakeholders).

TIMETABLE

This Second Round of Study Visits will be held during Semester 4 and 5.

2.1 Preparatory activities to be carried out by the DONOR Partner

The Donor Partner will be responsible of preparing the following documentation in order to help the Receiver Partner to better understand the regional context where the selected good practices are developed/located:

✓ REGIONAL REPORT

Where political and economic aspects related to Internationalisation are included, such as:

- Political framework for the Internationalisation support.
- Regional Entities promoting and supporting Internationalisation.

Timetable: this report must be sent to the receiver partner at least 15 days before the study visit takes place.

Note: This content could be collected (when possible) from the **State of Affairs Regional Report**.

✓ **AGENDA**

The Agenda will be divided in two main parts that all donor partners will have to follow:

- **Presentation by an Expert** of the INTERNATIONALISATION situation at regional level.
Regional agents/stakeholders that are identified to have interest in the study visits (SMEs organizations, Clusters, Policy makers, Regional Entities promoting and supporting SMEs Internationalisation, etc.) should also be invited to this workshop/meeting , depending on the valorisation of the donor partner,.
The morning of the first day of study visits will be dedicated to this activity.
- **Site Visits**
The receiver partners will visit again (field work) those companies/entities selected for the study visits.
The afternoon of the first day and all the second day (if needed) will be dedicated to this activity.

***Note:** the donor partner will have to prepare an agenda for each one of the receiver partners if these are interested in different good practices, although the Presentation by an Expert will be common in all agendas.*

2.2 Preparatory activities to be carried out by the RECEIVER Partner

The receiver partner should select the most appropriate staff member(s) with competences in the field tackled by the project and should invite regional stakeholders to attend to the 2nd round of Study Visits.

The receiver partner will have to inform the donor of those Best Practices they are interested in.

Timetable: this information will be sent to the donor partner at least one month prior to the visit in order to give them enough time for the preparation of the visit.

2.3 Training Sessions for Receiver Partner

The aim of the training sessions is to present in detail the best practices selected.

The most important elements of the Second Round are the training/informative sessions both in theory (expert's presentation) and practice (field visits) that should be a tool for the receiver to better understand what are the transferability gaps and provide inputs for the action plan to overcome them.

The day/s of this second round visits will be divided into two blocks, in compliance with the Agenda set by the donor partner:

- **Presentation by an Expert** on INTERNATIONALISATION of SMEs at a regional level. The first part of the study visits will be dedicated to this activity.

This informative session will provide the receiver partner with a broad overview of internationalization in that concrete scenario.

In order to achieve the main objective of this activity a **Minimum Content Report** has been developed that the expert will have to follow and that will show the existing situation in the region. This report can be extended and improved under the expert consideration.

Minimum Content Report
1.- What are the Regional Agents related to SMEs Internationalisation?
2.- What kind of support (legal, financial, advisory...), if any, do SMEs receive and from whom?
3.- Is there an educational/training offer regarding INTERNATIONALISATION (MBAs, Business Schools, Universities...) at the regional level?
4.- Is there a local/regional contact point through which SMEs can network with other organisations, learn about current and best practice, the issues considered to be important and how to get started?
5.- How is the economic landscape changing?
6.- How do SMEs perceive and valorise the facing international markets?

Regional agents/stakeholders that are identified to have interest in the study visits (SMEs organizations, Clusters, Policy makers, Regional Entities promoting and supporting SMEs Internationalisation, etc.) should also be invited to this workshop/meeting, depending on the valorisation of the donor partner.

- **Site Visits**

The afternoon of the first day and all the second day (if needed) or more will be dedicated to this activity.

The receiver partner will visit again (field work) those companies/entities selected for the study visits. As **INTRA GOOD PRACTICE HANDBOOK** will be already finished at this point, we will use it as reference for the second round of visits, especially for the Success Factor Description section where transferability to other regions will be analysed in-depth.

In order to monitor if the training is in line with the expectations and needs of the receiver partner, two evaluation forms will be provided to the receiver partner after the study visits:

Annex II.- Evaluation of the Good Practice (one per each Good Practice)

Annex III.- Evaluation of the Donor Partner

The receiver should fill in the Evaluation Forms and send them back to FUNDECYT-PCTEX (as leader of this task) as well as to the Donor Partner (organiser of the study visits) and to MRA (lead partner of the project) no longer than 15 days after the visit.

Outcome of the SECOND ROUND

At the end of the second round of the study visits, the receiver should be able to understand which are those elements of success related to the best practices that can be transferred to its regional context, as well as those barriers that selected SMEs and support environment actors are most likely to face in their process of INTERNATIONALISATION.

2.4 Monitoring & Quality Control of the Process

The methodology presented above also includes the monitoring of the whole exercise.

Monitoring is “the process through which the implementers of a project ensure that actual activities conform to the planned and intended ones. It is employed to make things happen in accordance with the plans, programmes and timeframes initially specified. It is a systematic effort to compare performance with laid-down objectives and standards in order to determine whether progress is in line with them. It also envisages the taking of remedial measures where slippages occur, the foreseeing of difficulties before they arise and making on-line corrections to keep the programme on track”².

It is important to understand it as a continuous and dynamic process. Planning and monitoring are closely interlinked as planning sets the course and monitoring ensures that things stay on-course.

This task is under the responsibility of FUNDECYT-PCTEX and to guarantee a proper monitoring it is necessary to set up an Effective Feedback Mechanism. FUNDECYT-PCTEX is applying a Resulted Oriented Monitoring approach. In practical terms this means the monitoring activity is mainly focused on the final outcome of this second round of study visits.

The elements that will be taken into consideration to verify whether the visits are in line with the expectations are:

- **Relevance** which describes how well the study visits addresses a real problem of the receiver and how well it matches with the regional strategic objectives.
- **Efficiency** that stands for how well the inputs are transformed into outputs and outcomes. (Gap analysis and adaptation plan).
- **Effectiveness** that measures the degree to which the study visits outputs provided benefits.

² UNESCO Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Techniques for Trainers, 2005.

- **Impact** that describes how and to which degree the study visits have contributed to the solution of the problem and to the achievement of the overall objective.

FUNDECYT-PCTEX will collect all the assessment forms (Annex II and III), and will prepare a monitoring and quality summary with the general conclusions about the Second Round of Study Visits.

3. ANNEXES

Annex I. STUDY VISITS REPORT & EVALUATION

Date:

Partner author of the report:

Name of the Good Practice:

Owner of the
GP:

Country:

Brief description of the organization and services/strategies/actions/etc. carried out regarding Internationalisation.

Statement	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Neutral	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
The selection of this entity as Good Practice was adequate					
Site Visit documentation facilitated before the Study Visit was suitable and reliable					
The presenter communicated the information clearly					
Questions to entity' staff were answered accurately, clearly and effectively					
The length of the Site Tour was appropriate					
Success factors suitable to be transferred were clearly identified					
Barriers to Internationalisation were identified					
Concluding remarks were efficiently presented					
The Study Visit has met the stated objectives fully					
The general organisation of the Study Visit was well-coordinated					

Key issues of the site visit	
Please describe the success factors identified in the site visit:	

Please describe the barriers to internationalisation identified in the site visit:	
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RELEVANCE OF THE GOOD PRACTICE UNDER THE FOLLOWING SUB-THEMES	RELEVANCE			
	Very relevant	Relevant	Partly relevant	Not relevant
Leadership, organization and management of internationalization policies				
Training, human resources needed for internationalization				
Financial resources for internationalization				
Other (please specify) _____				

Please justify:	
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TRANSFERABILITY POTENTIAL OF THE GP		
Transferability Aspects	Recommended strategies (pathways) to achieve the transferability	Specific actions recommended to be implemented within each strategy

RECOMMENDATION		YES	NO
Good practice should be selected for the GP Handbook			
Reasons for decision:			

Annex II. EVALUATION OF THE SECOND ROUND OF STUDY VISITS

Name of the good practice: _____

Region: _____

Presenter: _____

Date: _____

Please evaluate the presentation of the Second Round of Study Visits that was given to you and indicate your agreement or disagreement with these statements:

Statement	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Neutral	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
All basic information needed for the future understanding of the good practice was given at the beginning					
A clear purpose of the good practice was conveyed					
Organization of presentation was appropriate					
Presenter pointed out the main characteristics of the good practice					
Key objectives of the good practice were presented and supported with actual facts					
Course of actions for implementation of the good practice was appropriately proposed					
All relevant information about the good practice were presented					
Information about the potential assistance in implementation of the good practice was given					
The supporting material was relevant and up to date					
Questions were answered accurately, clearly and effectively					
Concluding remarks were efficiently presented					

Objectives of the presentation stated at the beginning were achieved

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How would you rate the overall presentation of the good practice?

1	2	3	4	5
Not very successful	Could be better	Average	Quite good	Very good

If there is any particular observation you wish to make about the presentation that is not covered above, put the details in this box.

Partner: _____

Author: _____

Annex III. EVALUATION OF THE DONOR PARTNER

Organization: _____

Region: _____

Date: _____

Please evaluate the Second Round of study visits and indicate your agreement or disagreement with these statements.

Statement	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Neutral	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
The execution of study visits was in compliance with project's objectives, desired quality and preferred effectiveness					
My expectations about the study visits were met					
The documentation that was provided as guidance was useful, accurate and comprehensive					
Study visits were well organised					
The information received during the visit was relevant and useful					
The presentations provided in the study visits were well organised					
Information about the potential assistance in the implementation of the good practice was given					

1. How would you improve the organization of the study visits as donor partner? (check all that apply)

- Provide better information before the start of study visits.
- More precisely clarify the objectives.
- Reduce the duration of presentation of individual good practice.
- Increase the duration of presentation of individual good practice.
- Improve the instructional methods.
- Improve the exchange of information between stakeholders.
- Provide more comprehensive information about good practices in general.

2. Please provide additional proposals for improvement of organization of study visits as donor partner.

Partner: _____

Author: _____