

Conclusions
KISS ME Interregional Meeting
Semester 3
7 – 9 May 2018

From the 7 – 9 May 2018, the Interregional Meeting of the KISS ME Project took place in Düsseldorf bringing together project partners and their local stakeholders. At the second day of the meeting, a workshop session took place. During the workshop session, several stakeholder presentations on regional development agencies, clusters, and their role within CBC programmes were held. Following each presentation, there were active discussions among the participants.

We would like to thank all the participants for the interesting presentations, the active discussions and the valuable inputs given during the workshops. The insights gained from the workshop session present an important input for the project, its upcoming activities and results.

Presentations:

- Development Agencies in the INTERREG A Germany-Netherlands programme
- Maaïke Büchner, East Netherlands Development Agency Oost NL
- Development Agencies in the INTERREG A Germany-Netherlands programme
- Angel Alava-Pons, Business Development Agency Duisburg
- Cluster policy of the Balearic Islands Government
– Pep Lluís Pons, Government of the Balearic Islands
- Cluster Policy in Catalonia
- Alba Sanchez, ACCIÓ, Government of Catalonia
- Paper Province Cluster, a forest-based Bioeconomy Cluster in Inner Scandinavia
- Paul Nemes, Paper Province Cluster
- INTERREG V-A Hungary-Croatia Cooperation Programme 2014-2010
- Andrea Kakas, Joint Secretariat INTERREG A HU-HR Programme
- Supporting SMEs on the border area of Croatia and Hungary
- Dóra Agócs Göndöcsné, BMFU Development Agency Hungary
- Development Agencies in the INTERREG A Hungary-Croatia programme
- Melita Birčić

Conclusions

1) INTERREG A CBC Programmes:

The INTERREG A CBC programmes significantly contribute to the improvement of cross-border cooperation between a variety of actors, such as municipalities, universities, development agencies, NGOs, etc., and help them to build stronger networks. In this context, however, all regions seem to face similar challenges, such as actually reaching and encouraging a bigger number for SMEs and other actors, and motivating them to engage in cross-border cooperation and to use of the INTERREG A funding.

The following possibilities for programme improvements have been identified:

- **Shortening bureaucratic processes:**
Deconstructing bureaucratic barriers might increase the engagement of SMEs and other actors. This is particularly relevant with regard to the period for project application assessments and period for the reimbursement of costs. These factors often hinder SMEs to participate in INTERREG A programmes.
In addition, the possibilities for INTERREG A Programmes to engage with and apply E-Government processes should be taken into consideration more strongly.
- **Pre-financing:**
Related to the point above, pre-financing of state contribution and establishing other financial support schemes (targeted loans) to some extent could help the project partners, e.g. SMEs, to implement their projects without heavy financial difficulties and would present major incentives for SMEs to engage in the programme. This could be done, e.g., through the planning of financial allocations of the project calls according to the Programme's implementation strategy, based on the real current needs. Proactive tools should be applied to effectively meet the allocation figures.
- **Programme Communication:**
In order to reach the broader public and to engage more actors in cross-border cooperation, it is necessary to improve the communication tools of the programme. In doing so, more attractive and engaging communication tools, such as below-the-line tools, which are more target-group oriented, should be considered.
In this context, programme branding involving the public more deeply into the programme and thus, creating a stronger sense of cross-border identity can be a useful tool. This could also include more matchmaking events for ideas and actors across borders. In addition, concrete programme results and programme related events should be better disseminated. For a proper dissemination of results, special funds could be allocated to this purpose in future programmes

2) Cluster

Cluster policies seem to be a success factor in those regions, in which the Cluster infrastructure is well developed. It is easier for clusters to promote cooperation and innovation on a regional, national and international level than for SMEs on their own due to their stronger bargaining power and network. However, considering that clusters are still underdeveloped in some European regions, such as the Hungarian-Croatian border region, the successful transfer of “knowhow” about Cluster infrastructures between European regions could enhance the development of these infrastructures in regions where clusters are underdeveloped.

Concerning future INTERREG A CBC Programmes, the support of cross-clustering or the building of transnational clusters could be interesting approaches.

3) Language

Language still presents major barriers for CBC. Especially in regions, in which there are huge differences between the national languages, this majorly hems cross-border cooperation. Moreover, English proficiency for the use as working language is not as self-evident as some policy makers think. These language barriers cause high costs in the phase of project building as well as at later stages of project implementations, also with regard to potential that remains unused due to this barrier.

In order to overcome this barrier, future INTERREG programmes should focus more on language and cultural differences and make them eligible parts of INTERREG projects. This could be done, e.g. through the reservation of specific funds within the INTERREG programmes for deconstructing language and cultural barriers. Deconstructing these barriers will ultimately lead to more projects and better implementation of the programme.

4) Trust

Trust is key for successful cross-border cooperation. In order for companies and clusters to work with other partners across borders, it is necessary to have accountable and reliable partners, and to build trust between the partnerships. It is a precondition for actors to engage in cross-border cooperation and to generate innovations.

A possible way to foster the building of trust within programmes could be more face-to-face events, possibly also with a thematic focus to attract partners with similar backgrounds. As illustrated in previous conclusions of the KISS ME project, personal meetings are a more sustainable way to build trust and solid partnerships than communication via email or telephone.

5) “INTERREG Family”

Due to the particularity of the INTERREG programme, e.g. with regard to application processes, specific regulations and funding preconditions, it is easier for actors who have already been involved in INTERREG projects to engage with the programme repeatedly. They are familiar with the programme’s specific set up and its regulations, and already have an established network of partners across the border. On the one hand, this enables partners across borders to establish a long-term commitment and thus, bears the potential for long-term developments. On the other hand, however, this also bears the risk of excluding actors which have not been involved in the INTERREG A programme yet and limits the programmes efficiency and “popularity” to a circle of actors who already knows about the benefits of the programme. The challenge, therefore, is to expand the circle of actors engaging with the INTERREG programme ideally involving both experiences actors and “newcomers” in joint projects.

6) Influence from the political level

Political influence plays a role in cross-border and interregional cooperation, and its implementation. Both CBC programmes and interregional cooperation programmes are influenced by and depending on the level of involvement and interest of higher political levels. This is relevant both with regards to inner political matters which might be prioritized over cross-border and interregional matters, and with regards to project decision and approval procedures which might not always appear to be transparent and coherent.

7) Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and incubators

RDAs and incubators are important instruments to foster regional economic development in all KISS ME project regions. Many SMEs benefit from the RDAs business support, their networks and expertise. The RDAs in the KISS ME project regions all apply different tools and different focuses, e.g. with regards to support schemes, (public) venture capital, manpower, cluster focus, and their focus on start-ups.

This illustrates that RDAs and incubators should be designed to effectively address the needs of the market in the respective region and respond to regional market failures. Moreover, the discussion within the KISS ME framework highlighted that the work and set up of RDAs and incubators should be based on a good analysis of the most relevant market failures and business actors in the region, and that they should be sufficiently equipped with the relevant mandate and resources.

Follow-up questions to tackle at upcoming meetings

- How could the participation of universities within cross-border and interregional programs be utilized in the best way?
- What makes a region successful when it comes to innovations? What is a good innovation climate? What is the key? Conditions for cooperation? (business, academy, institutes and public actors) Culture? Wealth or not wealth?
- How are the KISSME regions working on the preparation for the new program period? (Both dialogue with regional stakeholders, national authorities and the EU).
- Will the good practices collect within the project be of relevance to the Commission and other EU bodies / regional bodies involved in the shaping of the next programme period? Should we consider and discuss the idea of organising a dissemination event or a similar event in Brussels, demonstrating different models for SME involvement? Maybe our Brussels based offices representing our regions could help us. Also the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), where Hedmark, Värmland, the Euregio Rhine-Waal and the Province Gelderland are members, is also an arena for such dissemination.