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FINAL REPORT THE PEER REVIEW

Building an integrated support system for the participation of local and regional entities in EU-funded innovation and research programmes

Peer Review hosted by
The Marshal Office of the Pomorskie Voivodeship

30 June – 1 July 2022, Gdańsk,

Pomorskie Region, Poland

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Brief presentation of the beneficiary and its motivation to host a peer review

Pomorskie region is located in the north of Poland on the Baltic Sea coast. From the northeast, it borders with the Kaliningrad Oblast belonging to Russia. Through the Baltic Sea, Pomorskie region borders with Sweden.

The capital of the region is the city of Gdańsk with approx. 455,000 inhabitants. Gdańsk together with Sopot and Gdynia form the agglomeration called TriCity. The entire agglomeration has almost one million inhabitants.

The Pomorskie Voivodeship covers an area of over 18 thousand square kilometres, which is about 6 percent of Poland's area. We have a population of 2.3 million people, most of whom are city citizens.

Pomorskie is a main economic center – TriCity Agglomeration (Gdańsk, Gdynia, Sopot). With an investment of around 59,4 million euros, and the number of enterprises being around 272 thousand.

Pomorskie is the 6th academic centre in the country in terms of the number of students¹. In 2019, it hosted nearly 7% of Polish students². Tertiary schools, implementing numerous national and international projects, strengthen their research and scientific potential and position in various rankings. Despite the successive increase in international scientific research and foreign researchers and students³, the level of internationalisation of Pomorskie tertiary schools remains relatively low⁴. A great opportunity and indisputable success in this context is the fact that the Gdańsk University of Technology and Gdańsk Medical University were among the top ten universities in Poland selected in the first competition titled: Initiative for Excellence – Research University, which will allow them to develop science, create international research teams, and acquire prestigious projects, thereby increasing competitive position on the national and international stage in the coming years. The Pomorskie Region is also the seat of specialist scientific and research centres, including those with a maritime profile.

Pomorskie companies are increasing their capital expenditures, but their value compared to other Polish regions is relatively low (7th place). Still, the region remains in 3rd place in the country in terms of the level of R&D expenditures per capita and in relation to the GDP. There is also a relatively high share of the enterprise sector's total R&D expenditure (2nd place) and R&D workers in total employment (4th place). The total expenditure on R&D as well as that of the business sector is steadily increasing. The share of innovative enterprises, in general, is equal to the average of the country, although it is only the 7th result among the regions, while in terms of the share of sales of new or significantly improved products in total sales in the industry, the region is ranked 10th in the country. Despite significant efforts to strengthen innovation, the region is still behind the EU average – on the Regional Innovation Scoreboard, the Pomorskie Region is a moderate innovator and ranks 180th among 238 European regions surveyed.

¹ Despite the decreasing number of students (by 18.5% between 2013 and 2019). GUS data.

² 83 thousand. GUS data.

³ In the academic year 2018/2019, as compared to 2013/2014, the number of foreign students increased almost 2.5 times, while that of foreign academic teachers increased by over 40%. Data of the Gdańsk Statistical Office.

⁴ In 2019, the percentage of foreign students put the voivodeship in 9th place in the country (5.1%, compared to 6.7% nationally).

Despite the activities undertaken and the functioning of specialised units, the potential for scientific and business cooperation in the area of commercialisation of knowledge, patenting of solutions or spin-off creation remains unused. There is no incentive for the implementation of commercially targeted research projects. Companies are unwilling to apply solutions with a higher degree of risk and their interest in cooperation with tertiary schools is low⁵.

On the other hand, Pomorskie's citizens are one of the more entrepreneurial groups in Poland, as evidenced by its 4th place in terms of the number of entities in the national economy per capita⁶. The highest concentration of companies can be seen in the TriCity, where more than 40% of entities are located. Additionally, the highest positive dynamics of change in recent years have been observed in the Gdansk subregion⁷.

The entrepreneurial support infrastructure in the region is well developed, but poorly coordinated. The availability of specialised advisory services to entrepreneurs, as well as specialised scientific institutions, incubators, or clusters providing a specific type of service is insufficient.

Summary:

It is worth mentioning that companies from the Pomorskie Voivodeship are innovative at regional or national levels. However, additional efforts have to be taken to scale up and lift the innovations to the European level.

Companies from the Pomorskie Voivodeship lack the incentive to apply for funds offered by international programmes. Companies, even if they have qualified staff that could apply for these funds, do not take up this challenge.

The Self-government of the Pomorskie Voivodeship is a regional administration responsible for example for shaping the regional policy, social policy, and smart specialisation strategy.

Our motivation to ask for peer review was to know deeper regional support systems for the beneficiaries applying for different financial sources in international instruments such as ETC (INTERREG) or Horizon, EU4Health and others.

⁵ Development Strategy for the Pomorskie Region 2030, April 12, 2021

⁶ The number of entities of the national economy entered in the REGON [*National Business Registry*] per 10,000 inhabitants was 1311 in 2019, compared to 1184 in 2013. GUS data.

⁷ It includes the Gdański, Kartuski, Nowodworski, Pucki, Wejherowski powiats.

Specification of the policy challenge encountered

The purpose of the peer review was to receive ideas and advice for the creation of an integrated support system for the participation of local and regional entities in EU-funded innovation and research programmes

Within the territory of the Pomorskie Region, quadruple helix actors are forming a regional innovation ecosystem. However, a large number of innovation SMEs, Mid-Caps, public institutions and innovation intermediaries are not extensively participating in EU innovation Programmes such as Horizon Europe, EU Industrial Strategy, Thematic S3 Platforms, Digital Europe or Interreg programmes. As our region believes, the participation in European-wide projects can contribute significantly to boosting the innovation performance of local and regional actors.

Consequently, Pomorskie Region would like to learn from other organisations across Europe how to support the local innovation ecosystem in accessing the available EU funds and to increase the participation of Pomorskie players in EU programmes (especially SME and public institutions connected with Marshal Office of Pomorskie Voivodeship).

Pomorskie region would like to involve triple helix stakeholders, namely public institutions and intermediary organisations, and SMEs. These stakeholders should be involved in the process.

During the peer review meeting, different aspects of regional support systems were discussed, including: governance, monitoring and financing, key features and services. The peers presented their experiences and good practices related to the creation and implementation of support systems in their regions, including the impacts and results after implementing solutions in regional policy.

Participants

After approval of the peer review application, Interreg Europe's Policy Learning Platform selected peers from Germany, France Portugal and Netherlands with relevant experience in the requested subject.

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Policy Recommendations

The first day of the meeting was referring to the current situation, opportunities and information about the level of involvement in international programmes in the Pomorskie Voivodeship. After the discussion, the Pomorskie Voivodeship received particularly valuable feedback, and a lot of suggestions for the planned capacity-building activities set out to support the overall development.

The meeting resulted in the creation of recommendations, which has been analysed and considered by the suitable department. The main recommendations included:

<u>Lp.</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Recommendation</u>
1	Key governance issues	Need of coordination for a coordinator to help resolve overlapping and competition between stakeholders at the regional level and ensure good coordination with national calls
		Design and driving a specific regional network that brings together policymakers and stakeholders is important: budget for animation (HR) of the network
		Rely on intermediaries such as clusters to facilitate success for business participants
2	Governance and Regional networking	Considering the networking schemes presented by the Peers (Portugal COMPETE, Hauts de France FRAPPE) for improving regional and local networking
3	Animation of the ecosystem stakeholders	Consider clusters as key partners for engaging with SMEs and other businesses including inter-clustering actions to facilitate business
		Consider testing, with leading regional clusters such as ICT Interizon), the scope for developing new clusters or sector themes aligned with regional priorities such as health
		Use “ad-hoc” calls/vouchers for accelerating cooperation between SMEs and innovation providers from different sectors
4	Funding scheme	Important role and utilisation of ERDF/ROP co-funding and regional funds in supporting Europe and internationalisation
		Building on Broker and Smart Green Progress additional funding for new target groups and EU programmes
		Design new schemes such as vouchers
		Consider resourcing to support the Seal of Excellence
		Diversify funding support instruments for innovation: mix grants, loans, and hybrid financial instruments
5	Networking and Partnership Development	Develop connections with EU leading regions via Vanguard
		Connect with the Seal of Excellence Team

Lp.	Topic	Recommendation
		Further develop positioning within ERRIN Sector Working Groups
		Active participation in Interreg Monitoring Committees and similar bodies and programmes
		Consider connections to KIC/ EIT thematic networks
		Respond to EU calls for experts, evaluators and encourage stakeholders to join also.
		Position yourselves for regional pilot calls and as a speaker, peer. Create the conditions for informal network at the European level.
6	Communication and awareness raising	Promotion and awareness raising videos for key programmes such a Horizon Europe
		Exchanges between evaluators, networks, experts and assessors: share knowledge on project impact
		Share and promote SME success stories of EU winning projects
		Develop use of Brussels Office team to organise targeted visits
7	Barriers for participating in EU projects and networks	Providing support to overcome language barriers
		Build international teams with necessary language and inter-cultural skills
		Provide training and skills development course and services for target groups such SMEs, manager/owner companies.
		Reduce administrative burden with greater simplification of reporting and application processes for SMEs

Possible implementation of the peer recommendations

In the short run, Pomorskie region plans to introduce in a recommendations such as joining the European networks – Seal of Excellence, Vanguard Initiative, ERRIN and KIC after analysing all advantages and disadvantages of participation, budget's possibilities to cover the participation fees, etc.

In the near future, we will try to prepare and submit an application to the INTERREG EUROPE 2021-2027 programme (August 2022 – March 2023). The project will be related to policy changes in the area of increasing the competitiveness of small and medium enterprises. Building on our regional experience and the results of the peer review, the project shall further support our strategic ambitions to internationalise our local eco-systems with the support of EU programmes such as INTERREG, and Horizon Europe.

From a long-term perspective we will try to implement the mechanism Seal of Excellence in our region, and we will continue, after defining financial sources, the system of vouchers from pilot action defined and realized within the project IE 2021-2027 (if approved). Additionally, we will analyse increasing of the intervention transferred to regional strategic projects, like SMART GREEN PROGRESS or SPECTRUM.

<u>Lp.</u>	<u>Recommendation</u>	<u>Response to recommendation</u>
1	Designing and driving a specific regional network. A good mapping of network stakeholders with coordination with national calls/support systems and national policy level and coordinate competition between stakeholders at the regional level	Action requiring a long-term activities. There were meetings, which are an introduction to recognize problems and find solution for designing specific regional network and coordinate competition.
2	Considering the networking schemes presented by the peers (Portugal COMPETE, Hauts de France FRAPPE) for improving networking in the Pomorskie Region.	Action requiring a long-term activities. The suggestions and experiences regarding the support scheme presented by the peers will be considered in details to analyse the possibilities for creating similar actions. The recommendation requires verification of the networking principles and checking the compliance with regulation.
3	Consider clusters as key partners for engaging with SMEs and other businesses including inter-clustering actions to facilitate business. Testing with leading regional clusters such as ICT Interizon) the scope of developing new clusters or sector themes	Action requiring a long-term activities. Planning to recognize problems and find solutions for engaging clusters.

Lp.	Recommendation	Response to recommendation
	Aligned with regional priorities such as health	
4	Design new instruments such as vouchers Building on the existing Broker and Smart Green Progress programmes, with additional funding for new target groups and EU programmes	<p>Preparation and submission of IE project: In September, the International Programmes Unit has started to prepare the project of supporting applicants (SMEs, public entities) in applying for Interreg programmes in innovative areas.</p> <p>Planned application date: January - February 2023</p> <p>The project of supporting applicants at the stage of preparing project applications for Interreg programmes and international programmes is innovative in the aspect of supporting public entities like public administration/ public institutions or SMEs. It seems to be an activity that can realistically contribute to increasing the interest of entities in applying for funds which are directly managed by EC programmes and, hence, boost the innovation capacity of local actors. Moreover, such action would probably facilitate the applicants' preparation process and encourage them to apply for funds directly managed by the European Commission.</p> <p>With the support of vouchers, we aim at assisting local actors in the preparation of an application, prepare documents, expertise, commission expert opinions or write an application. As practice shows, such activities have an impact on encouraging entities to apply for European funds, as well as implementing projects from European funds (often the very preparation of an application is difficult, while the implementation process itself is much easier for entities).</p>
5	Diversify funding support instruments for innovation such as mix of grants, loans and hybrid financial instruments or pre-financing mechanism	<p>Verifying the currently used possibilities of obtaining financial support for entities, which are interested in participating in international programmes.</p> <p>Preparation of the project "support at the start" will be one of the elements of supporting verification for the increase and change in the financing policy.</p>
6	Improving networking and partnership. Developing and connecting with network	In September 2022, an online meeting was held with members of the Vanguard Initiative– the Marshal's Office

Lp.	<u>Recommendation</u>	<u>Response to recommendation</u>
	such as the Vanguard Initiative, Seal of Excellence KIC/EITR thematic networks and active participation in Interreg Monitoring Committees	<p>of the Małopolskie Voivodeship. The aim of the meeting was to find out about the possibility of connecting the Marshal Office of Pomorskie Voivodeship to the Vanguard network and verifying all benefits and costs of the current participation in the network.</p> <p>The innovation coefficient for the Pomorskie Voivodeship does not currently allow us to apply for connection to the Vanguard network.</p> <p>The next step will be verifying the possibility of connecting the Marshal's Office to the Seal of excellence, as a member for improving networking and partnership.</p>
7	<p>Promotion and awareness raising videos for key programmes such as Horizon Europe, Evaluator network/expert/assessors exchanges: share knowledge on project impact; Share and promote SME success stories of EU winning projects</p>	<p>The Department of Regional and Spatial Development in the Marshal's Office of the Pomorskie Voivodeship undertakes activities aimed at better and more accessible promotion and dissemination of INTERREG programs. On 31 August this year the publication: "Projects implemented with the participation of institutions from the Pomorskie Voivodeship in the programming period 2014-2020" was completed. The aim of the publication is to inform about the achievements of the European Territorial Cooperation projects and to inspire potential beneficiaries to sign up for new projects.</p> <p>The International Programmes team is preparing a video story about achievements in four chosen programmes implemented in the period 2014-2020.</p> <p>The Marshal's Office of the Pomorskie Voivodeship will improve the promotion via social media, the website and consider new paths for promotion to increase the outreach to our target group.</p>
8	<p>Build international teams with necessary language and inter-cultural skills; Provide training and skills development course and services for target groups such SMEs, manager/owner companies; Reduce administrative burden with</p>	<p>The Marshal's Office of the Pomorskie Voivodeship in a long-term perspective considers trainings for the international programmes team. Among others: language courses, workshops and training in personal development.</p>

<u>Lp.</u>	<u>Recommendation</u>	<u>Response to recommendation</u>
	greater simplification of reporting and application processes for SMEs	Verification of the access and possibilities of SMEs in improving the team's qualifications and increasing the knowledge of entities in the field of international programmes.

The final results depend on agreements and results of meetings with appropriate institutions.

Conclusions

The peer review on the topic of “Building an integrated support system for the participation of local and regional entities in EU-funded innovation and research programmes” was a valuable experience meeting.

Peers' presentations allowed the finding of a new perspective on existing problems and obstacles regarding the participation of local actors in international programs available for the Pomorskie region. The exchange of experiences showed new insights into existing problems, highlighted weak and strong sides, and found the possible ways towards the best solution in achieving our regional development goal.

We plan to stay in touch with peers, who visited Pomorskie on 30 June/ 1 July 2022 in order to exchange information and documents (like public tenders in France). We also plan to meet with peers from the Land Brandenburg in Germany, due to similar aims in increasing the regional beneficiaries' awareness and in applying for international funds.

The activities of the Voivodeship are currently focused on the process of searching for partners for the project proposal preparation on support system generation in Pomorskie.

The Marshal's Office of the Pomorskie Voivodeship is very thankful towards the Experts for the knowledge, and new perspectives on the challenge, and also thanks the Interreg Europe Secretariat for the opportunity to develop our region.

Gdańsk, 1st of October 2022,

Unit of International Programmes, Pomorskie Region