

TEMPLATE

Output factsheet: Strategies and action plans

Version 1

Project index number and acronym	CE 393
Lead partner	Pomurje Technology Park
Output number and title	T1.1 Transnational Food Mentor Scheme strategy and action plan
Responsible partner (PP name and number)	LP (Pomurje Technology Park), PP8 (University Hohenheim)
Project website	http://www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/I-CON.html
Delivery date	05/2017
Summary description of the strategy/action plan (developed and/or implemented)	

In project I-CON elaborated Transnational Food Mentor Scheme Strategy and Action Plan (TFMS-AP) represents developed joint cooperation strategy to integrate and transfer skills, experiences and knowledge in three important food sector topics: 1) mechatronics, 2) food safety, quality and labeling, 3) food design. TFMS-AP reflects the goal of all partners and their regions to create and offer the integrated knowledge hub for food processing SMEs (ATLAS mapping tool) by meeting their need for good, practical, real solutions in the domain of three food sector topics (mechatronics, food safety, quality, labeling).

No matter this output serves as essential fundament for further stages in the project execution, it will be upgraded, improved during the time of the project time in order to enable better sustainability of activities after the completion of the project.

Strategic part of TFMS-AP is based on S3/4 national and EU level strategies striving to make EU SMEs more globally competitive and innovative. It contains Basic principles of mentoring, Mentor Scheme Plan and its structure, Programme management, Operations delivery and Evaluation.

Action plan is operational and has form of protocols/recommendations needed to be followed by mentors/facilitators when transferring the knowledge in selected food sector topics. Protocols are as follows: Mentoring in practice, Tools and models for mentoring, Mentor scheme programme design and planning, Guidelines to increase uptake of the programme, Detailed action plan, Programme timeline check list, Programme management check list, Mentor application form, Mentee application form, Facilitator application form, Mentoring agreement, Mentoring contract, Code of conduct, Mentor progress report form, Impact assessment questionnaire.

NUTS region(s) concerned by the strategy/action plan (relevant NUTS level)

FOOD SECTOR is traditional industry that is through smart specialization identified as the most potential sector to achieve socio-economic multiplier effects. In I-CON project included remote regions in SI, HU, PL, SK are facing declining employment opportunities in traditional industries as a result of structural change. This emphasizes the need to take steps to stimulate economic activity with employment generating potential in maintaining a critical mass of facilities to support economic development. Transnational Food Mentoring Scheme Strategy and Action Plan (DT1.4.1) (TFMS-AP), elaborated within I-CON project, directly contributes to building and maintaining a critical mass of facilities that support economic development by generating employment potential and raising the level of competence and knowledge.

I-CON KNOWLEDGE partners are from more developed regions and provide expertise in the food sector specific areas :1) mechatronics, 2) food safety, quality and labeling, 3) food design to I-CON regional partners coming from less developed remote regions:

Expertise	Knowledge partner	NUTS
1) Mechatronics	BIZ-UP-PP3	3AT312, Linz-Wels
2) Food safety, quality, labeling	CBHU-PP4	HU101, Budapest
3) Food design	UNISEF-PP7	ITH34, Treviso
1) Mechatronics 2) Food safety, quality and labeling, 3) Food design.	UHOH-PP8	DE111 Stuttgart, Stadtkreis

I-CON REGIONAL partners (receivers of expertise) are from remote regions, as follows:

Regional Partner	NUTS
PTP-LP	SI011, Pomurska
CCIS-CAFE-PP2	SI021, Osrednjeslovenska
STRIA-PP5	HU231, Baranya
CNA ER-PP6	ITH55, Bologna
KIGPSiO-PP9	PL127, Miasto Warszawa
SCCI-PP10	SK010, Bratislavský kraj

They serve as testing areas and implement project actions on a regional level.

Transnational Food Mentoring Scheme Strategy and Action Plan (DT1.4.1) is based on deliverables from Period 1:

- collected trends in Food sector and measures of support e.g. opportunities to reach various financial resources (D.T1.2.2 - Food sector global market trend analysis report; D.T1.2.3 - Regional sector related knowledge diagnosis report),
- real needs of SMEs (D.T1.2.4 SMEs critical factor diagnosis report).

TFMS-AP is defined as a continuous process of interaction between mentors/facilitators on one side who offer knowledge and solutions to another side that are SMEs in need. With TFMS-AP mentor program, food production SMEs will benefit in next project periods and after the completion of the project:

- integrated cross-sectoral experts approach services (mechatronics; food safety, quality, labeling; food design),
- availability of transnational pool of experts coming from different EU regions,
- mobility of experts,
- focus oriented program which will increase competences and skills in Cost efficiency and Quality assurance.

TFMS-AP foresees that facilitators are front-end of “intercepting” needs of SMEs in regional environments. In next period Atlas Mapping Tool SMEs will be elaborated (online tool with geographic data positioning and identified solution providers) that will underpin contact to specific (either by competence or country) facilitator, who will audit the issue of SME and forward “needs” to most competent transnational mentor in transnational pool of experts. TFMS).

The strategy applied in TFMS and implemented in Atlas mapping tool platform is easy transferable to any other programme area or these can be linked to this particular platform.

Expected impact and benefits of the strategy/action plan for the concerned territories and target groups

TFMS impacts regions by enabling:

- regional authorities involvement and by that knowledge transfer;
- regional and EU supporting policies for SMEs being bottom-up coordinated and developed;
- SMEs concrete access to resources needed (information, knowledge, finances, equipment, coaching and consultancy or business administration/risk management and services/solutions provided in in 3 specific topics: mechatronics, food safety and labelling and design/packaging);
- overview of concrete tools and good practices/solutions;
- sustainable and well-structured mentoring business model (defined roles of interaction between experts like mentors/facilitators and SMEs);
- a list of solution providers and Information how to use / implement available tools and resources.
- regional SMEs to raise their business potential to new, higher level or to reach it in shorter time, either profiting from obtained
- development of Atlas mapping tool e.g. e-platform, where SMEs are able to intuitively search and match available resources to overcome bottlenecks in their development.

Sustainability of the developed or implemented strategy/action plan and its transferability to other territories and stakeholders

Majority of partners involved are intermediaries, sincerely interested in tools and resources available for their tenant or member companies; also associations and clusters are interested in such a form of “one-stop-place where various solutions can be found; with assistance of facilitators even quickly linked through their own networks.

TFMS is a long term wish of project partners, especially for knowledge partners and definitely to majority of regional partners, definitely for LP. Such a scheme can be after testing and if proven as valuable, can be a model (kind of franchise tool) to be transferred in other regions or programmes’ areas and on the other hand a place for national / regional authorities to get feedback on actual needs and good practices abroad on supporting ensures stimulation development of SMEs in remote areas or those active in food processing sector, which now are considered as lower added value, though proven to steady/stable in economic cycles and crisis.

The pool of experts (competent mentors) and access (or information on) to available funding schemes, together with facilitators’ experiences and networks are good components to raise the competitiveness of SMEs in food processing sector.

Daily activities of PPs and preconditions at selection of facilitators give additional and fundamental ground for ensured sustainability; especially if we consider the idea of bringing experiences from pilot testing to responsible policy level, who can incorporate “recommendations from ICON into its future policies and supporting measures, and by that perpetuating the component of available funding schemes available on ATM for activities offered through TFMS (mentors). The project is of course transnational, so it is important that majority of partners finds this idea worth investing time...also new mentors are going to be involved, but on other bases (their own funding potentials). The idea is to grow this platform to become recognizable “hub” for meeting food processing companies’ needs with resources (all kind of) available.

Lessons learned from the development/implementation process of the strategy/action plan and added value of transnational cooperation

Lessons learned:

- 1) Methodological approach and good understanding of all partners is of uttermost importance for successful project implementation. Focused, strong and clear leadership is required, due to different vocational background of project partners and their expert teams. If so, more effective and fruitful cooperation is possible and more constructive contributions are achieved in shorter time. Essential are “knowledge partners” in coordination role and by that vision how to design and implement activities and reach deliverables.
- 2) Based upon collected data from different regions we got certain transnational status-quo, which shows similarities among regions as well as small differences in policies, measures and SME practices. This enriches this CE programme area as it enables transfer of good practices between more developed and “less” developed regions in both ways.
- 3) TFMS attracted a lot of interest from regional authorities as well as other implementing actors (e.g. ASTER srl from Italy) as they find “business” model - structure interesting and wait for testing results as well (pilot phase). It can be knowledge and experiences they can implement in their models and activities; therefore it is very important to keep parties interested informed all the time;
- 4) While structuring scheme it is also important how to design the pre-conditions of selection of mentors, facilitators, time available for SME audits, budgeting through the project, what or how to guarantee sustainability and similar.
- 5) What we learned is that this model is LIVING LAB that can’t be fixed as business environment is changing (especially the one in supporting SMEs). Prediction is, that later project activities can have impact on strategy alteration: feedback from testing, also new inputs based on presented results to authorities and their feedback on potential improvements of the strategy as well as to the plan (more precise time-line definition).
- 6) Value added in transnational approach: all involved regions with knowledge and experiences from own regional partners implementing I-CON can jointly approach competent authorities, not only in CE programme area but also EU level Good practice cases collected within TFMS and presented on Atlas mapping tool could become transnational beyond CE programme area.
- 7) Transferability to new programme areas (“new” regions, partners) or implementation/upgrades is possible through new projects.

References to relevant deliverables and web-links

If applicable, pictures or images to be provided as annex

Concrete document (report on TFMS strategy) is available on official I-CON website

<http://www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/I-CON.html> (under publications).

Atlas mapping tool is the visualization of TFSM available as an e-platform made by the end of the year 2017. It is expected that data base will grow with the time. Link to AMT is also available on project I-CON official website.

Inside this AMT one will find facilitators helping SMEs to find regional strategic measures of support (financial sources to finance various activities) and concrete solution providers (mentors) coming from three topics identified as most common bottlenecks in SMEs development (mechatronics, food safety and labelling and design and packaging). Elements of TFMS and partners’ involvement in projects dissemination create a huge network across regions involved and growing database of solutions (concrete companies) available, firstly provided via project partners, later by “supply” driven interest to create additional channel of possible dissemination of services for wider audience, and where it creates necessary critical mass for assuring sustainability even after project ends.