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## I-CON PROJECT NEWSLETTER N° 8, MAY 2019



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Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme supports regional cooperation among central European countries: Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, as well as parts of Germany and Italy. The programme aims to make central European cities and regions better places to live and work by implementing smart solutions answering to regional challenges in the fields of innovation, lowcarbon economy, environment, culture and transport.



## IMPROVING COMPETENCES AND SKILLS THROUGH FOOD SECTOR INNOVATIONS

Welcome back to our I-CON newsletter, a half-yearly updating about what's going on at I-CON, upcoming events and activities.

### I-CON FINAL CONFERENCE AND STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING

Our final event for I-CON project took place in Ljubljana, Slovenia on 22 May 2019, where project partners were welcomed by the hosting partner - CCIS-Chamber of Agricultural and Food Enterprises.

We kicked off our three-day event with the final conference, entitled »I-CON, I-CAN« which hosted 15 Slovenian as well as international speakers and over 50 participants.

The conference was an ideal time to present the actions and results of the three-year project to the public. A special welcome speech was done by the representative of the Slovenian Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food. It was followed by another governmental representative, dr. Peter Wostner from Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy of Slovenia. We heard about the Slovenian experience with the smart specialization implementation.

A big interest from the audience was about project partners' presentations of challenges and successful stories that they had achieved during the project time. In addition to speeches regarding challenges, activities and results of the project, we were able to see several short video testimonials from the SME' representatives that were a part of the project. Those SMEs

were able to get solution providers for one of the three areas: food quality, safety and labelling, mechatronics and food packaging design. Many successful stories proved the true value of the I-CON project.

One of the already existing tools that proved to be very useful during project I-CON, was DesignCrowd Platform. It is a freelance platform that connects designers and those who need a new design and has helped many SMEs to get a new design on this platform through project I-CON. It can be used also after the end of the project and we found out that SMEs can get nice new designs for affordable price.

The final conference ended with the round table discussion. We gave to the round table a meaningful title »I-CON, I CAN - Cooperation for future success and innovation boost of food sector«.

The following days were also very busy for project partners. Steering committee meeting, spread over two days, consisted of final arrangements and evaluation of the three-years long project.

A brief overview of the activities was done which showed both - the work that had been done and the work that needs to be done reporting wise. For the last time, topics of reporting and financial issues were discussed. The meetings ended with a positive note and congratulations on job well done among the project partners.

With high satisfaction with the project, the partners discussed about further opportunities for future collaborations.



## How I-CON brought partners in project to I-CAN attitude

On 22nd of May Ljubljana, the capital city of Slovenia hosted final conference of project I-CON. Partners presented results to stakeholders informing and challenging them in particularly in need that good practices should be included in new EU policy programming period 2021-2027

At the end of project I-CON, project partner CCIS CAFE organized well visited conference where various stakeholders from Slovenia and partnering EU countries sat together, listened and debated project I-CON findings and current challenges of agro-food sector (and SMEs) in Interreg CE program area. Participants got familiar with some tools and techniques that result in improved regional performance, either in relation to cost efficiency, quality assurance or human resources and related capacity building. The buzz word was a transfer of knowledge, assisted by tools and solutions in 3 key segments: mechatronics, food safety, quality, labelling and design in food packaging. Over 40 concrete pilot testing cases of Transnational Food Mentor Scheme were implemented and chosen Crowdsourcing Design Platform was tested with over 200 participants; both representing a critical mass to make some suggestions for policy level enhancement that supports agro-food sector ecosystem focused on SMEs. Novel tools, IT solutions are enabling SMEs to be competitive and ready to enter international vertical supply chains, so they need support in accessing knowledge, introducing innovation to their daily business and finding good solutions for their daily challenges. In project I-CON developed Atlas mapping tool offers a joint match-making place web tool, where SMEs can find solutions (providers), funding opportunities, good practices and local facilitators they can trust. In I-CON project trained facilitators assist SMEs in finding best appropriate solution of their needs. It was clearly demonstrated that I-CON project created significant practical added value for transnational partnerships by providing new ways of stimulation of entrepreneurship and regional economy development and address social challenges of brain/job drain in remote areas by introducing available innovation and needed resources. SMEs identify themselves with I-CAN attitude easily if they received some assistance from supporting ecosystem. Successful I-CON project implementation and achieving of all indicators resulted in celebrative atmosphere at the end of conference.

## What impact has made I-CON to SMEs in Slovenia?

It is known that such projects influence national/regional policy development. For testing purposes also pilot implementation cases give realistic insights in status-quo and also bottom-up perspectives with concrete solutions

It is the truth - we can talk about impacts on strategic level, where policy level gets insights to results of various testing in the field (direct information from SMEs), through the testing of tools and good practices (provided by solution providers or so called knowledge partners). We talk about direct transfer of knowledge from more to less developed regions, although often also vice-versa transfer occurs. As no direct transfer is usually possible, we use adapted versions for testing in less developed regions, so in Slovenia we tested "mobile pool of experts" to help at least

8 pilot selected SMEs, and over 190 actors were involved in testing of the second pilot tool called Crowdsource Design Platform. The one serves as first entry point for SMEs to get some initial design solutions for reasonable prices, either related to corporate identity of the company or product (logo), or packaging design. This tool does not give ultimate answers to users, but it gives them opportunity to get brainstorming ideas coming from all around the world.

Upon feedbacks collected from tested SMEs, such projects can be used for bottom up approach in collecting in-real-field and in-real-time information for policy makers and to get them familiar with other regions' good practices of supporting SMEs and connect them with other regions' policy stakeholders and most with SMEs. Closer perspective helps policy level better to understand the "market situation". It also gives opportunities for intermediates to define their role and development of services which are needed by SMEs. Only that way we can expect regional economies to improve. To ensure sustainability of such projects it is necessary to ensure these results and tools to be accessible also after project ending, and also Interreg programme authorities supports sustainability of developed tools (for example: I-CON's Atlas mapping Tool to be widely available after project ending). However, the main task it is upon project partners whether they will use this free tool to develop their services to help their SMEs and regions towards being more effective!



### **I-CON Pilot actions in Hungary**

Campden BRI Magyarország Nonprofit Kft as a Knowledge Partner performed 15 pilot actions in Hungary in the areas of Food safety, quality and labelling and Mechatronics.

SMEs from many sectors (bakery, dairy, meat production, vegetable oil production) were involved in pilot actions which were concluded with a success.

The Hungarian Transnational Food Mentor Scheme testing involved the following actions:

- helping companies understanding and implementing the requirements of the food law,
- performing packaging trials to increase the shelf-life time of the product (with a success now the product has 2-months shelf-life instead of 2 weeks!),
- conducting hygienic trainings and inspection to identify further improvement possibilities,
- providing assistance in explaining and evaluating the requirements of voluntary standards (BRC and IFS),
- helping to identify appropriate water and energy saving solutions,
- providing assistance in finding the right market for a unique product,
- identifying Industry 4.0 applications fitting to the needs of the companies.

We can conclude that almost all aspects of the food production were covered during the activities of Campden BRI Magyarország which again proved that the concept of I-CON was right on point.

### **I-CON Pilot actions in Italy**

CNA Emilia Romagna, regional partner of the project, implemented the activities with the companies starting from a successful experience of sensorial analysis made with the partner UNISEF from Treviso during the ResearchToBusiness (RTB) event held in June 2018 in Bologna. During the event the companies of the Emilia Romagna region have been the possibility to be in contact with UNISEF experts and starting from this experience the activity started.

CNA contacted the companies of the food and packaging sector and 3 expressed their interest towards the proposal: La Salani, producer of bread and pastries, Salumificio Vecchi a producer of salami and other similar products and Red Line, a packaging company focused on gifts box. After the meeting with Red Line the company received the comments and a report with detailed instructions, such as:

- valorize the "selection of products" activities, with emphasis on the attributes of food quality and environmental value
- moving towards more eco-friendly packaging
- moving towards more eco-friendly packaging
- identify own brands with high quality foods: natural, non-industrial, sustainable, traditional, tasty, genuine, local



## I-CON Pilot actions in Slovakia

The region of Slovakia was covered by Slovak Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the frame of the project I-CON. Chamber was active as regional partner of the project.

Slovakia is considered as one of most industrialized countries in Europe. There is a large number of food processing companies. Many of them belong to strong international industrial holdings. The Slovak food production market is divided into various sectors.

As one of pilot regions SCCI was involved in both pilot actions of the project. SCCI has organized regional workshops for Slovak SMEs from food industry. The main purpose was dissemination of knowledge in order to improve competences and skills of companies and improve food industry efficiency. We have chosen companies that were interviewed and Audit reviews were made. After that we were able to matchmake experts and solution providers available from areas of the project, that are food safety, quality and labeling, mechatronics and packaging design for local SMEs.

Within the first pilot activity we added Slovak companies to the platform Atlas Mapping Tool to provide better possibilities for SMEs to enter international markets and support transnational cooperation between companies. We performed activities also within the second pilot that was related to Crowd Design Platform. This platform was presented to participants of organized workshops. For the time being we did not launch any new project in CDP for custom design.



### I-CON Pilot actions in Austria

Over the broad network of the cluster quickly two Upper Austrian companies have been found that have proven to be a concrete solution provider in the area of production optimization. The company Daxner GmbH from Wels, a specialist in bulk material technology, has designed a special plant for the production of spice blends for a Slovak SME. "Thanks to I-CON, we have not only gained a new customer, but we were also able to position ourselves on the Slovak market as an ideal solution provider with an innovative reference project", says Managing Director Mr. DI Christian Daxner.

The MC was able to report two successes of the company Kreuzmayr Maschinenbau GmbH at the final conference in Ljubljana: For a further Slovak SME, the machine specialist for fruit processing from Wallern an der Trattnach has developed a plant for mash production in which the fruits are also washed, gutted and the end product (Schnapps) is finally bottled.

Kreuzmayr has also designed a special solution for filling yoghurt glasses with different layers for a Slovenian company. "Participation in the project was a win-win situation for everyone involved. In concrete terms, we were able to help two food companies to optimize their production - which also means more visibility, awareness and a growing network throughout Europe for us", says Managing Director Hr. Ing. Robert Kreuzmayr convinced of the success of the project.

Partners from seven central European countries join their forces to improve entrepreneurial competences and skills in remote areas through food innovation potentials, led by the Pomurje Technology Park (Slovenia).

## Slovenia

- Pomurje Technology Park
- Chamber of Agricultural and food enterprises

## Austria

- Business Upper Austria

## Hungary

- Campden BRI Hungary Ltd
- South Transdanubian Regional Innovation Agency

## Italy

- CNA National Confederation of Crafts and Small and Medium Sized businesses - Regional Association of Emilia Romagna
- UNISEF - Industry Association Service & Training of Treviso and Pordenone

## Germany

- Hohenheim University

## Poland

- Polish Chamber of Food Industry and Packaging

## Slovakia

- Slovak Chamber of Commerce and Industry

## Who funds us

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Our project is funded by the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme, which encourages cooperation on shared challenges in Central Europe. With 246 million Euros of funding from the European Regional Development Fund, this programme supports institutions to work together beyond borders to improve cities and regions in Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.



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