

x-Inno Joint Practice Report

Pilot 1: Strengthening Transversal Soft Skills and Cross-sectoral Inspiration in Industrial Regions



Pilot 1: Joint Practice Report



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Preamble

This practice report of x-Inno Radar pilot no. 1 “Strengthening transversal soft skills and cross-sectoral inspiration in industrial regions” covers

- the joint pilot approach,
- the joint pilot implementation and
- the local pilot implementations.

It supplements the corresponding programme output factsheet.

A. Overall Pilot Approach

Key intention and basic content

Pilot Activity 1, running under the theme "Cross-Innovation: Strengthening transversal soft skills and cross-sectoral inspiration in industrial regions," was designed to explore, promote, and embed human-centric soft skills within traditionally technical environments. The primary intention of this pilot was to upgrade creative and transversal soft skill competencies in technologically oriented small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and public administrations. Up to now, industrial regions have rarely tapped into the potential of cooperation and cross-inspiration between the soft and tech skill realms, creating a major barrier to modern innovation.

To bridge this gap, the pilot was structured into two distinct, interconnected test zones that address the challenge through complementary formats:

- Pilot Test Zone 1A: Creative trainings for introducing transversal skills such as creativity, communication, cooperation, self-reflection in tech-oriented economic and administrative setting
- Pilot Test Zone 1B: Living labs as cross-sectoral meeting options for bridging creative and tech skills amongst professionals

Challenge addressed

This pilot targeted profound, systemic transformations taking place across Central European non-metropolitan industrial regions. Due to global economic shifts, environmental pressures, and rapid digital transformations, these regions can no longer rely solely on technological expertise or hard engineering components to remain resilient. Insights compiled from the x-Inno Radar regional profiles, expert surveys, and comparative data highlighted the urgency of addressing these re-occurring issues:

- Soft Skills Demand: The project's comprehensive survey reveals that 90% of expert respondents reported a continually increasing or significantly increasing demand for soft skills specifically driven by the green and digital transitions.



- **Soft Skills Paradox:** Regional screening data identified a distinct paradox. Essential soft skills competencies such as communication, risk taking and team collaboration are simultaneously noted by experts as the most pronounced skills in daily professional reality and the most urgently needed for targeted long-term development to handle increasingly complex human-machine and interdisciplinary environments.

Target Groups

The pilot activity explicitly focused on a specific mix of target groups across the regional innovation landscapes:

- **Industrial and tech-oriented SMEs:** Traditional industrial enterprises and tech firms were thought to be central beneficiaries. Through the creative training courses and joint workspace encounters, their technical staff and managers gained essential transversal skills. This directly improved their internal communication, adaptability, problem-solving capacity, and overall innovative output.
- **Public Administrations and Local Public Institutions:** Municipalities, local provinces, and public bodies benefitted by embedding creative thinking—such as Art and Design Thinking—into their everyday operations. This enabled them to modernize policy-making, humanize administrative workflows
- **Creative Sectors and Cultural Entrepreneurs:** Creative SMEs, designers, makers, and facilitators acted as the core soft skill providers. They benefitted by gaining a structured, visible platform to demonstrate the tangible and intangible impacts of their creative processes directly to hard-skill industries.
- **Research Entities and Business Support Organizations (BSOs):** Chambers of Commerce, innovation clusters, and research centers received tested, replicable tools, process documentations, and pilot blueprints. These resources allowed them to possibly integrate informal, hands-on learning methods directly into future regional soft skill strategies, educational agendas, and Regional Innovation Strategies (RIS3) to secure long-term regional competitiveness.



B. Pilot Test Zone A: Creative Trainings for Introducing Transversal Skills in Tech-oriented Economic and Administrative Settings

1. Test Zone Approach

Specific objective and content

The collective intention in the testzone was to systematically modernize workplace training in technologically oriented, traditional, and administrative settings by replacing unengaging, theoretical instruction with dynamic transversal skill development. Across all three regions, organizers aimed to address distinct localized gaps where high technical proficiency or rigid corporate traditions historically overshadowed essential human competencies like communication, creative problem-solving, and collaboration. Ultimately, the pilots intended to build reproducible training models that unlock the relational and creative potential of employees and entrepreneurs.

Under this framework, the three partners involved developed their own activities and actions, following and adapting the format to the needs coming from the local territory.

In Poland, this manifested as a two-day collaborative workshop where tech employees co-created an original street-art concept and physically painted a mural on company premises to foster motivation and deep group ownership. Slovakia implemented a series of eight interconnected sessions leveraging hands-on frameworks like LEGO Serious Play, Design Thinking sprints, and high-intensity peer role-playing to transform complex organizational challenges into physical 3D models. Meanwhile, Italy utilized immersive four-hour outdoor sessions featuring theatrical improvisation games, collaborative storytelling, and active listening drills designed to push entrepreneurs past routine boundaries and evaluate team dynamics via the Social Style Model.

Needs of the target group(s) addressed

Although all partners agreed on following a common pilot concept, regional demands and the target groups involved were different, according to the specific needs of the regions.

Local entrepreneurs and employers of local SMEs, both from traditional or technological sectors were invited to discover different collaboration paths and skills instruments for adopting innovative cooperation techniques during the ordinary company processes. Economic development agencies, BSO, Chambers of Commerce got the opportunity to acquaint themselves with creative approaches for supporting cross-sectoral collaboration and for linking the creative sector with public administration.

Common methodological approach

The three partners cooperated for drafting a common concept for zone 1A and focusing on a shared approach for its development:

- Tailoring joint guidelines for the pilot whilst allowing reflection of local conditions and regional needs.
- Maintaining communication among partners to identify and engage the right target groups for pilot testing.



- Sharing implementation insights and directly incorporating practical lessons learned into the preparation of the Blueprint.

Overview of the local pilot tests

- Chamber of Commerce of Padova (PP 4) - Mastering Soft Skills through outdoor experience
“Unleash your Relational Intelligence with dedicated outdoor session with soft skills experts”
- Regional Development Agency in Bielsko-Biala (PP 7) - Mural Soft Skills in your company
“Two-day team mural workshop combining soft skills development with collaborative art creation”
- Creative Industry Kosice (PP5) - Creative trainings for innovation in the Kosice region
“Strengthening transversal soft skills and cross-sectoral inspiration through creative trainings”

This test zone was led by the Chamber of Commerce of Padova.

Peer mentoring / observation

Padova Chamber of Commerce as test leader for the zone, maintained close contacts with the Regional development agency of Bielsko-Biala (Poland) and Creative Industry Kosice (Slovakia) through online bilateral meetings and email exchange to share information on the development of the local activities, including the reaching of target groups. Broader discussion on the implementation schedule has been held during the dedicated session of the Transnational Project Meeting in Kranjska Gora

Consistency review

As testzone leader, PP4 reviewed all local pilot application entries (attached PDFs), provided feedbacks to the partners involved and finally incorporated the answers of the partner in the final version of the document

As testzone leader, PP4 was responsible for the cross-reviewing of the practice report and for providing modifications according to the suggestions of Lead Partner for the final check-

Joint reflection

In accordance with the Test Zone 1A, reflection took place for the blueprint setup

During the partner online meeting on 29th June 26 partners undergone a mutual reflection session with reference to Pilot Action reports and their development-

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2. Joint Implementation

Timing	Pilot team / single PP	Joint / local key activities
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Preparation phase (Mar - Jun 2025)		
Apr 25	Pilot team	<i>Joint concept development in 2nd partner meeting Czechia</i>
Apr - May 25	Pilot team	Follow up joint concept development, translation of joint concept to local regions
Jun 25	Pilot team	Detailed elaboration of activities and timetable of the concept
Until May 25	PP5	Identification of key stakeholders
Implementation phase (Jun 2025 - Apr 2026)		
Jun - Oct 25	PP5	Key stakeholders engagement
Sep-Nov 25	Pilot team	Pilot action planning and preparation (planning phase) - preparation and recruiting phase
Nov 25 - Apr 26	PP5	8 trainings implementation
Dec 25	PP4	Contacts with external expert for the preparation of the workshops
Dec 25	PP7	Space and concept alignment
Jan - Feb 26	PP7	Individual pilot action development (concept development, mural implementation)
Jan 26	PP4	Promotion of the activity (open call, newsletters, posts on social)
Feb 26	PP4	Pilot activity implementation (2 outdoor workshops)
Mar 26	PP4	Conclusion of the pilot activity and internal assessment
Mar 26	PP7	Evaluation and follow up
Assessment and reporting phase (Apr - May 2026)		
Mar - Apr 26	Pilot team	Jointly assessing pilot implementation in 4 th partner meeting Germany
Apr-May 26	PP5	Reflection, evaluation and follow up
May 26	Pilot team	Elaborating local pilot application reports for website, cross-checked by pilot leader
July 26	Pilot team	Joint development of reporting deliverables related to pilot
Roll-out phase (Jun - Nov 2026) - to come		
Until Oct 2026	Pilot team	<i>Jointly elaborating pilot blueprint</i>
Until Oct 2026	PP4, 5, 7	<i>Development of follow-up regional action plans as supplement to or for integration into regional strategies</i>



3. Local Pilot Tests

SK_Local-Action

PL_Local-Action

IT_Local-Action



C. Pilot Test Zone B: Living Labs as Cross-Sectoral Meeting Options for Bridging Creative and Tech Skills amongst Professionals

1. Test Zone Approach

Specific Objective and content

The common goal of Test Zone 1B was to improve networking and collaboration among technical and creative professionals through cross-sector meetings and to highlight soft skills as equally important as hard skills. The initiative drew not only on previously implemented projects but also on suggestions from regional focus groups and examples of best practices. The test zone was implemented in four partner regions (Austria, Belgium, Czechia, and Germany) and addressed their specific needs.

In most cases, local pilot actions took the form of live, moderated discussions held at inspiring venues, where participants from various target groups (creatives, manufacturing companies, researchers) either physically demonstrated their mutual collaboration or each group presented its services, products, or experiences to the other group in the form of a study tour, trade fair, or conference. These methods helped participants get to know one another, successfully broke down mistrust, and led to networking opportunities among event participants, which fostered deeper connections between individuals from different target groups. In all cases, soft skills such as presenting, storytelling, discussion, sharing experiences, finding low-cost solutions, empathy, communication, and trust-building were utilized.

Target groups

SMEs from various industrial sectors thus discovered that collaboration across disciplines can bring innovation to their companies. For researchers, this test zone provided an opportunity to find suitable partners for applying their innovative approaches and products or to gain insights for further research directly from real-world practice. Business support organizations were also involved in all activities; they need an overview of the innovation ecosystems in their regions and the potential for cross-sector collaboration so they can organize similar events that support innovation processes and regional transformation.

Common methodological approach

All four partners collaborated on designing a joint concept for Zone 1B, taking into account their specific characteristics but with a shared focus on cross-sectoral cooperation in soft skills. In particular, we used:

- a summary of general guidelines for the pilot area, incorporating the specific local conditions and needs of the partner regions,
- ongoing communication with partners to identify and engage appropriate target groups in the pilot testing,



- sharing experiences from implementation and incorporating them into the preparation of the Blueprint.

Overview of local pilot tests

- Creative Region Linz& Upper Austria GmbH (PP2) - Cross Innovation Talk & Match Making. Curated talks and targeted matchmaking to spark cross-sector collaboration.
- Stebo Competence Centre Community (PP8) - Creative Collab. Interactive day with creatives and CEO's of technical companies: brainstorm about real challenges.
- Association of Cultural and Creative Industries Chemnitz and Region (Creative Chemnitz)(PP10)- Fail Forward: Sharing Failure to Build Cross-Sector Trust. Cross-sector storytelling night connecting industry, makers and creatives through failure culture.
- The Regional Chamber of Commerce of the Karlovy Vary Region (PP3) - Regional EXPO lab. Providing the grounds for successful interaction between creatives and tech companies.

The testing zone was led by PP3, the Karlovy Vary Regional Chamber of Commerce (KHKKK, Czechia).

Peer mentoring / observation

As the strand leader for Test Zone 1B, KHKKK maintained transnational partnerships with STEBO (Belgium), CREARE (Austria), and Kreatives Chemnitz (Germany) through bilateral mentoring and joint monitoring meetings, during which partners exchanged information on reaching target groups and processing the outcomes of individual local events.

Consistency review

- As the strand leader for Test Zone 1B, KHKKK reviewed all local pilot application entries (attached PDF files) in accordance with the approved concept and sent comments to the individual partners. After the comments had been incorporated, KHKKK conducted a final review.
- As the strand leader for Test Zone 1B, KHKKK cross-reviewed the practice report against the specified structure and incorporated the LP's comments into the final version.

Joint reflection

- Within the Test Zone 1B team, reflection took place on an ongoing basis according to blueprint setup; see the timeline in the table in Chapter 2.
- Furthermore, a mutual reflection session took place across all pilots during an online meeting of all partners on June 29, 2026, resulting from a subsequent broad discussion.

2. Joint Implementation

Timing	Pilot team / single PP	Joint / local key activities
Preparation phase (Mar - Jun 2025)		



Apr 25	Pilot team	Joint concept development in 2 nd partner meeting Czechia
May 25	Pilot team	Online meeting: follow up joint concept development, further planning of local pilot ideas and sharing progress
Jun 25	All PPs	Detailed elaboration of activities and timetable of the concept
Implementation phase (Jun 2025 - Apr 2026)		
Jul 25 - Apr 26	All PPs	Preparation of Local Live Lab Formats
Sept 25	PP3	Implementation of Local Living Lab Formats
Oct 25	PP3	Post-event communication (videos, articles)
Nov 25	Pilot team	Jointly monitoring of ongoing pilot implementation in 3 rd partner meeting Slovenia
Nov 25	PP10	Implementation of the Local Living Lab Format (Part 1)
Jan 26	Pilot team	Exchange on current status of partner implementation
Feb 26	PP 8	Implementation of the Local Living Lab Format
Feb - Mar 26	PP 8	Post-event communication (videos, articles)
Mar 26	PP10	Implementation of the Local Living Lab Format (Part 2)
Mar 26	Pilot team	Exchange on current status of partner implementation
Apr 26	PP10	Post-event communication (videos, articles)
May 26	PP2	Implementation of the Local Living Lab Format (alternate date due to an accident)
May 26	PP2	Post-event communication (videos, articles)
Assessment and reporting phase (Apr - May 2026)		
Mar / Apr 26	Pilot team	Jointly assessing pilot implementation in 4 th partner meeting Germany
May 26	Pilot team	Elaborating local pilot application reports for website, cross-checked by pilot leader
July 26	Pilot team	Joint development of reporting deliverables related to pilot



Roll-out phase (Jun - Nov 2026) - to come		
Until Sep 2026	PP2,3,8, 10	Locally defining future action planning based on pilot results: Development of follow-up regional action plans as supplement to or for integration into regional strategies
Until Oct 2026	Pilot team	Jointly elaborating pilot blueprint

3. Local Pilot Tests

GE_Local-Action

CZ_Local Action

BE_Local Action

AT_Local Action

Disclaimer

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