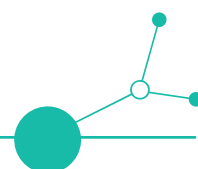


x-Inno Joint Practice Report

Pilot 2: Integrating maker skills in innovation ecosystem of industrial regions



Pilot 2: Joint Practice Report



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Senior lead: Stebo (PP8)

Junior lead: ARRSA (PP4)



Contact person: Esther Vandebroek

Email: esther.vandebroek@stebo.be





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Preamble

This practice report of x-Inno Radar pilot no. 2 “Integrating maker skills in innovation ecosystem of 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

Pilot objective and overall approach

The pilot aimed to strengthen the integration of maker skills into the innovation ecosystems of industrial regions by recognising and unlocking the often-overlooked innovation potential of makers, tinkerers, autodidacts, creatives and grassroots innovators. These communities possess valuable competences - such as experimentation, improvisation, exploratory learning, practical problem-solving, low-budget innovation and collaborative working - that are highly relevant for industrial innovation but are rarely recognised or systematically connected to formal innovation ecosystems.

To address this, the pilot developed and tested practical approaches that both increased interaction between makers and established innovation actors and strengthened the entrepreneurial capacities of grassroots makers themselves. Through a combination of experiential learning formats, networking activities, collaborative workshops, study visits, innovation safaris and tailored business support, the pilot demonstrated how maker competences can become a more visible and integrated part of regional innovation systems. The activities promoted learning at eye level, encouraged mutual inspiration between makers and R&D actors, and supported makers in developing the skills needed to professionalise and sustain their activities.

Regional challenge and rationale

The pilot addressed a recurring challenge faced by many long-standing industrial regions: despite the presence of vibrant maker communities alongside strong industrial and research sectors, these actors often operate in parallel with limited interaction. As identified in the project's survey and comparative report, innovation support systems mainly focus on established companies, research organisations and universities, while the practical knowledge, creativity and innovation capacity of makers frequently remain invisible, undervalued and disconnected from existing support structures.

At the same time, many grassroots makers encounter barriers when seeking to develop their activities into sustainable businesses. Although they possess strong technical and creative competences, they often lack entrepreneurial knowledge, business networks and an understanding of legal, financial and communication aspects needed to access markets and innovation support.



The pilot therefore tested complementary approaches that lowered barriers between makers and institutional innovation actors while simultaneously strengthening the capacity of makers to actively participate in regional innovation ecosystems. In doing so, it demonstrated that both stronger cross-sector connections and targeted entrepreneurial support are essential for fully integrating maker competences into industrial innovation systems.

Target groups and benefits

The pilot targeted industrial and technological SMEs, R&D organisations, universities, makers, creative entrepreneurs, grassroots innovators, students, start-ups, early-stage micro-enterprises, business support organisations and regional innovation intermediaries.

The activities enabled participants to build new cross-sector networks, exchange knowledge and experience complementary ways of working through practical collaboration and peer learning. Industrial and research organisations gained greater awareness of the innovation potential and soft skills present within maker communities, while makers and creative entrepreneurs established valuable contacts with businesses, researchers and innovation support organisations.

At the same time, grassroots makers strengthened their entrepreneurial competences through practical guidance on business development, branding, communication, legal frameworks and financial aspects, enabling them to transform informal creative activities into sustainable market-oriented initiatives. Across all target groups, the pilot enhanced transversal skills such as communication, collaboration, adaptability and creative problem-solving, while creating stronger connections between informal maker communities and formal regional innovation ecosystems.



B. Pilot Test Zone A: Garages meet R&D

1. Test Zone Approach

1.1 Specific intention and content

Test zone 2A focused on testing practical formats that connected makers, creative practitioners and industrial and scientific R&D actors through direct encounters and shared experiences. Rather than promoting traditional networking events, the test zone explored experiential formats—including innovation safaris, study visits and hands-on workshops—that enabled participants to get to know each other in authentic working environments and collaborate on practical challenges.

1.2 Target groups

This test zone responded to the needs of industrial SMEs, R&D organisations, universities, makers, creative entrepreneurs and business support organisations for more accessible and trust-based forms of collaboration. Many of these stakeholders had limited opportunities to interact despite sharing complementary expertise. The local actions therefore created low-threshold environments where participants could build relationships, learn about each other's strengths and experience the value of maker skills in innovation processes.

1.3 Joint methodological approach

Across the three participating regions, a common methodological approach was pursued. Each local pilot created informal, non-hierarchical learning environments that brought together participants from different backgrounds at eye level. A central element was the safari format: guided visits and discovery tours took participants into authentic production and R&D settings, where they could observe processes behind the scenes, meet makers and company representatives directly, and discuss concrete innovation practices in a relaxed atmosphere. The pilot emphasised experiential learning, peer-to-peer exchange, real-life production environments and practical collaboration instead of formal presentations or predefined innovation outcomes. By combining curiosity-driven exploration, storytelling, informal networking and, where relevant, hands-on prototyping, the actions showed that trust and direct contact were effective mechanisms for stimulating cross-sector collaboration and making the innovation potential of maker communities visible.

1.4 Overview of local pilot tests

This test zone was led by PP8 - Stebo Competence Centre Community Development (Belgium) serving as the senior leader.

PP2 - Creative Region Linz & Upper Austria (Austria) implemented “From Classroom to Workshop: Maker Safari Salzkammergut”: a one-day study tour connecting university students and teachers with regional handcraft businesses through experiential learning and informal dialogue in authentic production environments.

PP8 - Stebo Competence Centre Community Development (Belgium) implemented “Safari: R&D Roadshow”: a VIP innovation safari connecting makers, creatives and tech enthusiasts with innovative SMEs through behind-the-scenes visits to company R&D departments, creating opportunities for networking and future collaboration.

PP10 - Association of Cultural & Creative Industries Chemnitz & Region (Creative Chemnitz, Germany) implemented “Bridging Maker Culture, Research and Industry”: a two-day hands-on maker workshop where makers, creatives and R&D professionals collaborated on a shared prototype challenge to strengthen soft skills and cross-sector cooperation.



1.5 Peer mentoring / observation

Partners maintained regular peer exchange during online meetings and physical transnational meetings, sharing progress, challenges and implementation experiences. Cross-wise observation focused on approaches to connecting makers and creatives with R&D and industrial environments, including company visits and joint travel formats. Partners also supported each other in developing the approach and naming of the Safari concept, which was discussed during partner meetings. Where relevant, partners were invited to local pilot actions to observe implementation directly and exchange with local stakeholders.

1.6 Consistency review

The testzone leader reviewed all local pilot application entries and their presentation in the x-Inno Radar Toolbase, providing feedback and requesting adaptations where needed. The review focused on completeness, consistency and comparability across local actions. The Lead Partner provided a final check, while Stebo (PP8) tested and supported the roll-out of the common structure for content, images and categories/rubrics.

1.7 Joint reflection

Joint reflection within the testzone supported the development of the blueprint, with Stebo, OTELO and IFL working on a uniform structure for presenting local actions and blueprints. Ahead of the **“Inspired By” session on 29 June 2026**, all partners were invited to read the local pilot actions and vote for those they considered most inspiring and relevant for peer learning. The selected actions were presented in three-minute pitches covering the approach, key surprises/challenges and impact, followed by Q&A. This exchange helped identify common lessons, success factors and transferable elements for the blueprints.



2. Joint Implementation

Timing	Pilot team / single PP	Joint / local key activities
Preparation phase (Mar - Jun 2025)		
Mar 2025	Pilot team	Joint concept development during the 2nd partner meeting (Czech Republic); definition of the "Garages meet R&D" pilot methodology.
Apr 2025	Pilot team	Online coordination meeting to translate the joint concept into regional pilot approaches.
May 2025	Pilot team	Online meeting to refine local pilot concepts, exchange progress and prepare implementation.
Implementation phase (Jun 2025 - Apr 2026)		
Jun-Aug 2025	PP8	Mapping innovative SMEs, R&D departments, makers and creative entrepreneurs; personal meetings with companies and ecosystem partners; development of Safari concept.
Jun-Sep 2025	PP2	Identification of regional handcraft businesses; trust-building with hosts; coordination with the University of Art and Design Linz; design of the Maker Safari route and programme.
Aug-Sep 2025	PP10	Selection of makerspace (Vector Lab), workshop design, participant mapping and invitations to makers, creatives, R&D actors and innovation intermediaries.
Sep-Oct 2025	PP8	Selection of companies and innovation theme; preparation of company visits; development of participant database; organisation of transport, keynote, catering and networking programme.
Sep-Oct 2025	PP2	Finalisation of host network, participant recruitment, travel logistics and experiential learning programme.
Sep-Oct 2025	PP10	Workshop preparation with facilitators; preparation of CNC equipment, materials and collaborative prototype challenge.
Oct-Nov 2025	PP10	Delivery of the two-day Bridging Maker Culture, Research and Industry workshop, including collaborative prototyping, peer learning and evaluation.
Nov 2025	PP2	Delivery of the Maker Safari Salzkammergut , connecting university students and teachers with regional handcraft businesses through experiential site visits.
Nov 2025	Pilot team	Exchange of interim experiences and monitoring of pilot implementation during the 3rd partner meeting (Slovenia).
Nov-Dec 2025	PP10	Documentation, participant evaluation, analysis of outcomes and preparation of transferable practice.
Nov 2025 - Feb 2026	PP8	Final preparation of the Safari Roadshow; confirmation of participating companies, keynote speakers and participant recruitment.



Mar 2026	PP8	Delivery of the Safari: R&D Roadshow , including visits to innovative SMEs, networking on the bus, keynote session and informal matchmaking between creatives and R&D actors.
Apr 2026	Pilot team	Consolidation of local pilot results and exchange of lessons learned across the x-Inno Radar partnership.
Assessment and reporting phase (Apr - May 2026)		
Mar 26	Pilot team	Jointly assessing pilot implementation in 4 th partner meeting Germany
Until May 26	Pilot team	Joint preparation of the pilot implementation report and identification of transferable methodologies and lessons learned.
Roll-out phase (Jun - Nov 2026) - to come		
Until Sep 2026	PP2, 8, 10	Development of follow-up actions and regional plans for repeating or transferring the tested formats (Maker Safari, R&D Roadshow and collaborative maker workshop).
Until Oct 2026	Pilot team	Joint development of the blueprint, documenting the tested methodologies and recommendations for replication in other industrial regions.

3. Local Pilot Tests

Annex 1: From Classroom to Workshop: Maker Safari Salzkammergut

Annex 2: Safari: R&D roadshow

Annex 3: Bridging maker culture, research and industry



C.Pilot Test Zone B: Boots for Roots

1. Test Zone Approach

1.1 Specific intention and content

The specific intention of test zone 2B was to integrate grassroots maker skills into regional innovation ecosystems by supporting local creators in transforming their hobbies, passions and informal activities into sustainable, legally compliant businesses. The content focused on bridging the gap between creative work and entrepreneurship. It provided practical knowledge on branding, product presentation, communication tools, professional networking, including LinkedIn, and essential financial and legal frameworks required to formalise business activities.

1.2 Target groups

This pilot zone intended to meet the demands of local creators, artisans, grassroots makers, students, start-uppers and early-stage micro-enterprises. These target groups primarily lacked the business competences, soft skills and legal knowledge needed to move from a hobby or informal activity to a professional market presence. The activities responded to their need for accessible, hands-on business guidance, peer-to-peer networking, practical mentoring and opportunities to test and present their own business ideas.

1.3 Joint methodological approach

This test zone pursued a practical, experiential and interactive joint methodological approach. Instead of relying on purely theoretical lectures, the approach combined expert-led interactive training with hands-on, product-based learning, where participants applied concepts directly to their own products, ideas or business models. This framework was complemented by real-world mentoring, including success stories from experienced regional entrepreneurs, and interactive challenge and feedback formats such as hackathons and pitching sessions. These methods supported the development of self-presentation skills, teamwork, confidence and entrepreneurial readiness.

1.4 Overview on local pilot tests

This test zone was led by PP7 - Regional Development Agency in Bielsko-Biala (ARRSA) serving as the junior leader.

PP3 - The Regional Chamber of Commerce of the Karlovy Vary Region (KHK KK) implemented the local pilot test “Regional EXPO workshops”. It consisted of practical workshops for budding entrepreneurs and sharing of experiences from those who had achieved success.

PP4 - Padova Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Crafts and Agriculture (CCIAA Padova) implemented the local pilot test “Training and Hackathon ‘How to monetize a hobby?’”. It was a 3-day training and hackathon for turning grassroots maker skills into business through ad-hoc support.

PP7 - Regional Development Agency in Bielsko-Biala (ARRSA) implemented the local pilot test “From Passion to Business”. It was a free 3-part workshop series on branding, business basics and pitching for makers.



1.5 Peer mentoring / observation

Partners maintained regular peer exchange during online meetings and physical transnational meetings, sharing progress, challenges and implementation experiences. Cross-wise observation focused on stakeholder engagement, participant activation and different approaches to supporting grassroots makers in developing entrepreneurial skills. Partners compared experiences from different local formats, including workshops and networking with experienced entrepreneurs (PP3), intensive training and hackathon activities (PP4), and the “From Passion to Business” workshop series focused on branding, business basics and pitching (PP7). Regular monitoring meetings also provided opportunities for cross-wise feedback on maker engagement methods and workshop structures, helping partners identify useful elements that could be adapted to other regional contexts.

1.6 Consistency review

As junior leader of the test zone, PP7 - Regional Development Agency in Bielsko-Biała (ARRSA) reviewed all local pilot descriptions from Test Zone B in the x-Inno Radar Toolbase, providing feedback and requesting adaptations where needed. The review focused on completeness, clarity and comparability across local actions and on maintaining the common logic of the “Boots for Roots” approach. Particular attention was paid to the description of target groups, activities and the contribution of each local action to supporting makers in moving from informal creative activities towards more professional and sustainable business concepts.

1.7 Joint reflection

Joint reflection within the test zone supported the development of the common “Boots for Roots” blueprint. Partners exchanged experiences from the three regional pilot actions and reflected on different methods of business support, practical learning, mentoring and pitching. Ahead of the online “Inspired By” session on 29 June 2026, all partners were invited to review the local pilot actions and vote for those considered most inspiring and relevant for peer learning. Selected actions were presented in three-minute pitches covering the approach, key surprises/challenges and impact, followed by Q&A. The exchange helped identify common lessons, success factors and transferable elements for the blueprint.



2. Joint Implementation

Timing	Pilot team / single PP	Joint / local key activities
Preparation phase (Mar - Jun 2025)		
Mar 25	Pilot team	Joint concept development in 2 nd partner meeting Czechia
Mar - Jun 2025	Pilot team	Local preparation of pilot actions, including selection of trainers/experts, preparation of workshop content, planning of venues, communication with target groups and recruitment of participants.
Implementation phase (Jun 2025 - Apr 2026)		
Sep 25	PP3	Local Pilot Implementation & Field Mapping: Executed the regional EXPO workshops and networking sessions in the Karlovy Vary Region. Connected local grassroots makers and hobbyists with seasoned entrepreneurs to share real-world business success stories and practical market entry experiences.
Nov 2025	Pilot team	Jointly monitoring of ongoing pilot implementation in 3 rd partner meeting Slovenia; shared initial feedback on maker engagement methods and workshop structures.
Nov 2025 - Mar 2026	PP4	Local Pilot Campaign & Training Tracks: Launched an outreach campaign followed by the experiential "How to monetize a hobby" workshops and a monetization hackathon. Provided ad-hoc business support, soft-skills development, and distributed FabLab/incubation vouchers to top-performing maker projects.
Feb 2026	PP7	Local Pilot Workshop Series: Executed the "From Passion to Business" interactive training tracks in Bielsko-Biala. Focused on building capacities in branding, creative presentation, and legal/financial basics for local makers. Developed pitching structures to help participants transform their craft-based hobbies into viable micro-enterprises.
Mar - Apr 2026	Pilot team	Local evaluation: Evaluated individual workshop feedback, finalized local maker indicators, and selected promising creators for international visibility.
Assessment and reporting phase (Apr - May 2026)		
Mar 26	Pilot team	Jointly assessing pilot implementation in 4 th partner meeting Germany
Until May 26	Pilot team	Jointly elaborating pilot implementation report
Roll-out phase (Jun - Nov 2026) - to come		
Until Sep 2026	Pilot team	Locally defining future action planning based on pilot results
Until Oct 2026	Pilot team	Jointly elaborating pilot blueprint



3. Local Pilot Tests

Annex 4: Regional EXPO workshops

Annex 5: Training and Hackathon “How to monetize a hobby”?

Annex 6: Mural Soft Skills in Your Company

Disclaimer

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