

Innovation Network Kitzbühel (INK)

A multi-faceted support system to boost innovation in the region of Kitzbühel builds a 'positive error culture' with low-threshold idea testing.

EAFRD-funded projects

Location: Kitzbühel district, Austria

Programming period: 2014-2020

Priority: P6 - Social inclusion and local development

Focus Area: Local development

Measures: M19 - LEADER CLLD

Funding:	Total budget	187 500 (EUR)
	EAFRD	75 200 (EUR)
	National/Regional	18 800 (EUR)
	Private	44 500 (EUR)
	Other sources	49 000 (EUR)

Timeframe: 01/07/2019 - 31/12/2022

Project promoter: Regio-Tech
Regionalentwicklungs-GmbH

Email: niedermoser@regio-tech.at



© START.N

Summary

The Innovation Network Kitzbühel project was initiated by the regional development agency Regio-Tech Regionalentwicklungs GmbH, Austria. The project created an innovation hub for local companies, entrepreneurs and education/research institutions with the aim to jointly combat the loss of human resources out of Kitzbühel into other areas. The project organised networking events, delivered mentoring and consulting services, ran workshops and created a new network dedicated to women entrepreneurs. In addition, open innovation contests encouraged young people to generate new ideas for a set of regional challenges. These activities all worked towards creating a more attractive region to live, work and visit. The project applied a multistakeholder approach to ensure the development of a supportive innovation ecosystem in the region.

Project results

- Over 60 events were held involving more than 800 local participants.
- A total of 125 start-up entrepreneurs and companies were supported (of which 20% were female).
- A new community network (TRAUDI) was built connecting over 250 women.
- Approximately 100 students from five different schools engaged with the project workshops.
- A 90% occupancy rate was achieved in the start-up centre within the first year of operation.





© START.N

Key lessons and recommendations

- Building an innovative ecosystem requires time. The project showed how challenging it can be to involve the population in innovation processes and create an interest in entrepreneurial activities.
- Start-ups, women, and students were easier to engage with than SMEs, especially on topics such as sustainability and circular economy.
- SME-bespoke services can inspire companies to become involved in an innovation network and help inform the content of the network activities.
- An emphasis on creating frequent opportunities for exchanges can help build strong and lasting connections.

Context

The district of Kitzbühel is known as a successful tourist destination. However, a recent study analysing the region's sustainability in terms of economic development opportunities highlighted a scarcity around the topics of innovation and digitalisation. The region suffers from a lack of affordable accommodation which has contributed to a 'brain drain' and limited workforce availability. In addition, young people move to bigger cities to access higher education or research institutions. Most local enterprises operate in tourism, trade or craft sectors and the few industrial companies usually have insufficient resources to invest in innovative pursuits.

In response to the study, the regional development agency Regio-Tech Regionalentwicklungs GmbH and the local chamber of commerce decided to create a platform to improve the promotion of innovation and provide a space where innovative regional companies could network with universities, research institutions and schools. Because the entrepreneurial culture and innovative spirit of the region was low, the partners identified a need for employing a dedicated innovation manager to drive the activities of the platform and to focus on developing an innovation support package for SMEs and start-ups.

Objectives

The main objectives of the project were to:

- Promote innovation in regional SMEs and support the development of start-ups with the aim of building relevant capacities across the local industry.
- Create higher-value jobs and thereby increase the attractiveness of the region for employees and start-up businesses.
- Connect relevant stakeholders (companies of all sizes, start-ups, citizens, business associations and various other regional players) to join forces in driving forward a comprehensive range of innovative actions.

Activities

Project activities included:

- Employing an innovation manager. The innovation manager was crucial for the project's successful delivery and to take care of all the activities initiated by the innovation network. The innovation manager promoted innovation and provided professional know-how as well as community support. The position of the innovation manager was located within the regional development agency to take advantage of established connections and the proximity to other services.
- Delivering business support services. The innovation manager engaged with local companies to offer advice on innovative actions. The work also included assistance in identifying appropriate funding opportunities and accompanying the companies in the transformation process when implementing innovations. In addition, the innovation manager organised an annual innovation award to raise awareness and inspire others.



- Establishing an entrepreneurship and start-up centre. The new start-up centre (START.N) provides a physical space and the first point of contact for (potential) entrepreneurs. The centre offers co-working and affordable office space, mentoring and consulting services. In addition, START.N delivers a community programme using different event formats such as 'pitch events' aiming to create a 'positive error culture' and space for low-threshold idea-testing.
- Implementing workshops to attract new talent. The 'LOOT' workshop series was designed to build a creative and solution-oriented mindset among high school students. In the workshops, a regional company asks students to solve a particular challenge creatively by applying a 'New Work' concept (i.e. applying the dynamics of a digital age setting).
- Hosting an open innovation contest. In cooperation with the University of Innsbruck, an open innovation contest was hosted to identify solutions for the labour shortage in the region. Participants generated over 130 ideas aiming to enhance the region's attractiveness as a workplace for Gen Z.
- Developing a new 'Regio3' app. The app was developed to provide companies, schools, municipalities and individuals an overview of climate-relevant projects, best-practice examples and funding opportunities. The App is easy to use, entertaining and 'low threshold'.
- Implementing a female empowerment initiative (TRAUDI) to connect and empower women. The aim was to foster the exchange of experience and personal development through workshops highlighting gender equity topics.
- A 90% occupancy rate was achieved in the start-up centre within the first year of operation.
- The various project activities and accompanying promotional measures received a lot of media coverage which raised awareness of the potential and opportunities for innovation across the region.
- As a result of the innovation network, many contacts and relationships between relevant actors have been strengthened across the region, fostering exchange and cooperation.
- Participants have gained an increased awareness of gender equity and female empowerment issues.
- Through hosting LOOT workshops, young people (aged 15-18) were involved in the project on a regular basis. Moreover, university students have been working on the open innovation contest. These activities have inspired many young people to become entrepreneurs and to be further supported by the project.
- The project has been able to position itself as a lighthouse project for the national CAP strategy.

Key lessons and recommendations

- The project showed how challenging it is to involve the population in innovation processes and create an interest in entrepreneurial activities and events. It is possible that the lack of an entrepreneurial culture or 'start-up scene' in the region was responsible for this at the outset of the project. Thus, building an innovative ecosystem requires time.
- It was interesting to explore which formats worked best to stimulate innovation. Start-ups, women, and students were easier to engage with than SMEs, especially on topics such as sustainability and circular economy.
- Developing SME-bespoke services can inspire companies to become involved in an innovation network so that they can help inform the content of the network activities. We would advise building a network that has an emphasis on creating frequent opportunities for exchange between all relevant stakeholders so that strong and lasting connections can be built, particularly regarding social innovation.

Main results

- Over 60 events were held involving more than 800 local participants.
- A total of 125 start-up entrepreneurs and companies were supported (of which 20% were female).
- A new community network (TRAUDI) was built connecting over 250 women focusing on female empowerment.
- Approximately 100 students from five different schools engaged with the LOOT workshops.



“The innovation network (INK) is a clear statement of our efforts towards more innovation among our corporate landscape.”

LAG Peter Seiwald, Chairman
Wirtschaftskammer Kitzbühel



“The innovation network with the start-up centre START.N as the main anchor point is one of our many activities in the field of regional innovation over recent years.”

Stefan Niedermoser, CEO Regio-Tech
Regionalentwicklungs-GmbH

Additional information:

www.startn.at/

<https://traudi.tirol/>

www.loot-box.at/

www.innovationsaward.at/



Funded by
the European Union

