

Bio- and circular economy to boost sustainable economic growth of the Baltic Sea region

*Bio- and circular economy has emerged as a central field alongside the digital economy in discussions of relevant and promising areas of cooperation strengthening the Baltic Sea Region in the global competition. At the 7th annual forum of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region in Stockholm, which gathered an astonishing 1300 participants from 42 different countries, the **BSR Stars S3 project** highlighted industrial symbiosis as an essential area for cooperation among regions.*

In all countries in the Baltic Sea region, the bioeconomy is - in one way or another - linked to the regional smart specialization strategy priorities and strategic national policy programmes, as in Finland where bio- and circular economy is one of the major priorities in the Government Programme. The key aspect of developing the bioeconomy is a comprehensive transfer from fossil fuels to renewables. For the circular economy, the sustainable use of raw materials and the concept of industrial symbiosis are at the core. Industrial symbiosis introduces innovations (or expands existing practices) that allows one company to utilize the waste and/or side products of another company. The positive impacts to the Baltic Sea from transferring to circular economy and to the use of bio-based products (instead of plastic) include the decrease in waste amounts ending up in the sea.

The **BSR Stars S3** project, co-funded by the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme, focuses on enhancing bio- and circular economy through investigating and piloting tools and operational models that motivate companies, researchers, public sector and decision makers to work together on new solutions and innovations in the field. The Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM), partner to the project, recently established the Baltic Sea Region Bioeconomy Council to speed up the political dialogue between Nordic Countries, as well as to support the identification and analysis of good practices.

"Our region offers great potential in both the circular economy and the bioeconomy. The move towards the circular economy is likely to cut carbon emissions by almost 70% by 2030. We will have new bio-based, reusable and clean products and services. Through ecological leadership we improve competitiveness. And we will see remarkable gains in employment" remarked Prime Minister of Finland Mr. Juha Sipilä at the annual forum, emphasizing the significance of bio- and circular economy.

Transnational cooperation is definitely needed to realize these positive impacts and the **BSR Stars S3 project** supports exactly such cooperation through a focus on regional smart specialisation. More concretely the project offer activities such as public-research-business matchmaking events, transnational business coaching, a transnational voucher system pilot focusing on bioeconomy test facilities, a transnational smart specialization accelerator camp, and study visits to sites in the regions working on these issues. The knowledge and experience acquired through these activities will be shared in the form of policy briefs, to the benefits of other regions and stakeholders.

At the annual forum, the project organised a workshop where representatives of industrial symbiosis platforms from Finland (Tampere/Nokia Eco3 bio- and circular park), Denmark (Kalundborg in Sjælland), and Sweden (Paper Province cluster in Värmland) had a chance to present and discuss their experiences with industrial symbiosis. In the discussion, it was brought up how essential it is to exchange experiences between the regions in this field, as the regions are usually focused on a certain expertise and use their own model of industrial symbiosis.

Now is the time to build an active network of bio-, circular and digital industrial parks as well as research and testing facilities in the Baltic Sea Region. These can support companies to develop their innovations where the best experience and know how on that particular issue exist. Therefore, the BSR Stars S3 project works to speed up the creation of such macro-regional development platform and related support methods to strengthen the Baltic Sea Region in smart specialization in bio- and circular economy.

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