

Report from workshop

Sharing Test and Demonstration Infrastructures - an opportunity for Smart Specialisation in the Baltic Sea Region

Tampere, Finland, 6 April 2017

On 6 April 2017 32 stakeholders from Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Finland, Norway, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden met in Tampere to discuss opportunities for sharing test and demonstration infrastructures to support innovation in SMEs in the bioeconomy and digital economy in the Baltic Sea Region.

The workshop was organised within the framework of the project BSR STARS S3, co-financed by the European Union Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme, and more specifically by the project partners Nordic Council of Ministers and Baltic Development Forum. The project lead partner, Baltic Institute of Finland, helped organising the event.

The detailed workshop programme and participants list are attached. Also attached is related workshop documentation.

Below follows a summary of the key findings:

Abundance of specialised test and demonstration infrastructures – learning opportunities

Two mappings of test and demonstration infrastructures – in the bioeconomy respectively the digital economy – demonstrate that there are well-developed national networks of technology service providers that SMEs can benefit from to test new products, services or processes – however currently more such infrastructures in the Nordic countries than in the Baltic countries.

Developing and delivering technology, test and demonstration services is by far an exact science. Because of this complexity a number of stakeholders *expressed an interest for sharing experiences on*

how to successfully deliver bioeconomy and digital economy test and demonstration infrastructures and technology services to SMEs. Particularly such knowledge sharing will benefit those countries, whose test, demonstration and verification infrastructures is currently less advanced than infrastructures in other parts of the Baltic Sea Region. Also, a number of stakeholders from countries already equipped with more advanced test and demonstration infrastructures expressed interest in to work with and learn from peers.

Similarities and complementarities in testbed infrastructures – specialisation opportunities

Looking at complementarities in the bioeconomy, very generally, Denmark has a stronghold in test and demonstration infrastructures in the agriculture-based bioeconomy; Norway has such stronghold in the forestry and maritime-based bioeconomy; and Finland and Sweden have particular in test and demonstration infrastructure excellence in the forestry-based bioeconomy.

Similarly, in the digital economy, Denmark has particular digital testbed excellence related to the energy sector; Norway has particular excellence in related to the maritime sector; and Sweden and Finland have particular excellence related to the communication sector.

For both the bioeconomy and digital economy it was agreed that this provides *opportunities for SMEs in the Baltic Sea Region to access technology services that in some cases are better tailored to their specialised needs if they were able to commission test and demonstration services across borders, rather than “mainly shop for such technology services” at home.*

A first step in such efforts could include additional awareness raising on the various areas of particular excellence and the identified complementarities of test and technology services around the Baltic Sea Region. Provision of test and demonstration infrastructures to SMEs requires significant financial as well as human capital. The same goes for SME's that want to make use of these facilities. Also, test and technology service providers are mandated to provide a rather extensive set of “basic” technology and test services locally and nationally. For these reasons, clear incentives and added value of transnational collaboration is a precondition for taking further steps.

It was agreed that efforts to identify transnational added value should focus on the specific areas where it will be particularly beneficial to concentrate efforts due to complementary advantages. E.g. within the bioeconomy, Denmark could further specialise in “advanced” test facilities related to the agricultural sector, Norway in the maritime sector and Sweden and Finland in the forestry sector. Related to this was a call for “smart collaboration in the Baltic Sea Region” i.e. collaboration in areas of test and demonstration that are too large / too complex for regions and countries to address individually.

Also, it was agreed that because test and technology service providers compete with their neighbouring peers on commissioned services for SMEs it is important to identify a set of cooperation areas that emphasise on complementarities and mutual benefits without risk of impacting negatively on current test and technology service delivery. Among such benefits could be to get access to new knowledge and technologies, a larger market etc. “Sharing” T&D facilities should be seen as “broadening” or extending opportunities.

Sharing test and demonstration infrastructures – encouraging SMEs to work across borders

The existing test, demonstration and verification infrastructures are in principle available for both domestic and foreign SMEs. However, in reality most SMEs shop for test and technology services at home. *It was agreed that if test and technology service providers will be making efforts to benefit from complementarities in excellence – specialisation – there is a real need to develop a mechanism to ensure that SMEs are informed and encouraged to commission test and technologies across borders. “Transnational one-stop-shops” or similar concepts could be developed on a pilot basis.*

Improving the overview/inventory of existing infrastructures, excellence areas, existing equipment and machinery etc. is needed in this regard. Subsequently, obviously it is crucial that this information is made available to the SMEs. It was expressed from SME's that better targeted information, more transparency, more attention to company needs and earlier involvement are important preconditions for engaging SME's in transnational projects as well as looking cross-border for test facilities. A large number of bioeconomy clusters and other intermediary organisations could be engaged in further cooperation efforts for this outreach purpose.

Piloting Innovation Vouchers to SMEs in the bioeconomy

To investigate further the opportunities for specialisation in test excellence and to encourage SMEs to acquire specialised services across borders, *it was welcomed that the BSR STARS S3 project provides funds to pilot innovation voucher scheme that SMEs in the bioeconomy can benefit from when commissioning test services across borders.*

Such vouchers may offer complementary support to national innovation vouchers. *A number of stakeholders noted that in many cases the current national innovation vouchers are not attractive to SMEs because the funds offered are too small considering the costs of carrying out test and demonstration. If a macro-regional innovation voucher could be organised to provide additional funds to national innovation vouchers the support package to SMEs would be more attractive.*

It was agreed that the Nordic Council of Ministers – in partnership with VTT Finland, Danish Technological Institute, Paper and Fiber Research Institute Norway, RISE and more – over the coming months will develop the framework for such Baltic Sea Region Bioeconomy Innovation Vouchers with a view to launch these in October 2017.

Taking the discussion further

The workshop organisers will prepare an “information package” including the two mappings, the conclusions from Tampere and recommendations for further exploring the potential for transnational sharing of R&D facilities in the BSR. This material will be disseminated to stakeholders in the region.

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