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Regional branding for attracting tech-savvy visitors, (re)designing community-based services: the final report

Motivation of the host to call for an interregional peer review

Põlva County, together with its neighbours Võru and Valga Counties, forms the Southeastern Estonia region. This region has long been described as one of the periphery in Estonia, as it is located near the Estonia-Latvia border and Estonia-Russia border.

Põlva County has had the desire to change its image and, together with neighbouring counties, to show that there is life in Southeast Estonia! On one hand, we have developed the image of a green county, and on the other hand, we have been trying to invite people to come here to work.

At the agreement of the Ministry of Finance and three counties, the remote work network named Kupland has been funded for over 3 years. In Kupland, over 30 companies have been offering remote work services.

Although this project has been successful, we pondered on how to attract even more suitable migrants and talents to our region. We were confident that there are experiences in Europe on how to achieve this. So, we applied for interregional peer review.

Specification of the policy challenge encountered

We knew that we could make updates in the action plan of Põlva County's development strategy, which is refreshed annually. Also, we were aware that soon the Southern Estonia PR plan, involving the collaboration of the three counties and the ministry, will be updated.



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We said that would like to learn how we could communicate our region strengths in a smart way – so that visitors know why to choose us. Also, how to support our SMEs so that they will be more sustainable in long term, developing any kind of services to tech-savvy visitors. Also learn some good examples in terms of infrastructure, connectivity (public transport).

Participating peers

Interreg Europe

Laurentiu David, Interreg Europe Programme Secretariat

Elena Ferrario, Thematic Manager

Rene Tönnisson, Policy Expert – Smarter Europe

Mart Veliste, Policy Expert – Social Europe

Irish peers

Stephen Carolan, National Hubs Network Manager, Western Development Commission

Pauline Leonard, Atlantic Economic Corridor Project Executive, Western Development Commission

Allan Mulrooney, CEO, Western Development Commission

Deirdre Frost, Policy Analyst, Western Development Commission

David Murphy, GIS & Data Analyst, Western Development Commission

Leah Fairman, National Hubs Executive, Western Development Commission

Karen Sweeney, Western Development Commission

Rebecca Farrell, Economic Regeneration Officer / Atlantic Economic Corridor Officer, Leitrim County Council

Nicola McManus, Broadband Officer, Leitrim County Council

Briege Shannon, Economic Development Officer Leitrim County Council

Suzanne Duffy, Senior Executive Officer, Community and Corporate Services

Joseph Gilhooly, Interim Chief Executive, Leitrim County Council



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Geraldine Crean, Department of Rural and Community Development, Government of Ireland

Christine Collins, Broadband Officer, Longford County Council

Daniel Peeters, Broadband Officer, Cavan County Council

Lisa O Connell, Business Adviser with the Local Enterprise Office

Joe Lowe, Head of Enterprise in Leitrim County Council

Colm Keane, Manager, Hive Enterprise Centre

John Mannion, Manager, Mohill Enterprise Centre

Clare McEnroe / Denis Jastrzebski, co:worx Edgeworthstown

Fergal McPartland, The Food Hub, Drumshanbo

International peers

Eeva Arpala, Leader Aisapari programme coordinator and Coordinator of national network of coworking hubs, South Ostrobothnia, Finland

Femke van Akker, Tourism policy officer, Province of Fryslan, the Netherlands

Beneficiary organisation and stakeholders from Estonia

Lennart Liba, Põlva County Development Centre, Centre manager

Lisanna Elm, Põlva County Development Centre, teleworking network „Kupland” manager

Aivo Ülper, Põlva County Development Centre, Development manager

Justina Greblikaite, South East Estonia tourism and Central Estonia DMO project manager

Tiit Toots, Võru County Development Centre, board member

Hellika Kõrnas, General Reek’s House, service provider from „Kupland”



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Policy recommendations

1. Infrastructure, connectivity, and public services for tech-savvy visitors

- 1.1.** Consider setting up a similar booking and management system for Kupland as Connected Hubs.
- 1.2.** Organise workshops for remote work locations on how to design the environment and ergonomics of the workspace.
- 1.3.** Set up a local coworking space similar to the Hive or CO:WORX with latest ICT capabilities.
- 1.4.** Map coworking and remote work opportunities in all of Estonia. Knowledge is power – database is key. 5y ago there was no knowledge in Ireland either.
- 1.5.** Map the governance structure on the topic and put them all in the room to discuss how remote work could be supported on a national level the national stakeholders might welcome the leadership of Kupland or the three counties.
- 1.6.** Startup Estonia regional development expert group – key source of knowledge, but it is currently in the heads of the members. Actionable step: Get the EAS representative to the meeting.
- 1.7.** Consider whether such county-level digital officers would have added value in Estonia.

2. Regional branding and communication

- 2.1.** Review whether you have clarity on which target groups the region wants to attract and whether the messages have been tailored to them.
- 2.2.** Review your international brand and the language you use with corporates.
- 2.3.** Launch a campaign to attract diaspora to the region (either to visit and work remotely for a while or to relocate).
- 2.4.** Pilot a similar „Retreat to South East Estonia“ event with a few large companies.
- 2.5.** Set up a guide or go-to site regarding moving to a region.

- 2.6.** Provide practical and free tools for entrepreneurs: regional image bank, other guidance and tools (e.g. templates, social media packages).
- 2.7.** Collaborate with the Estonian e-residency programme; invite their representatives around the discussion table.
- 2.8.** Consider measuring your success with: local inhabitants acceptance of tourists/tourism (wellbeing); footfall.

3. Community Engagement and Integration

- 3.1.** Be inclusive in your communication – double check if information is easy to find and clear for newcomers (in English and with sufficient detail) regarding events and services. Consider different channels and mediums (sometimes an A4 poster is still relevant).
- 3.2.** Review how the region engages with its youth.
- 3.3.** Continue the discussion on ‘How to extend Kupland as a brand for local people?’ in next community meetups.
- 3.4.** Consider following campaigns, programmes or frameworks could be replicated in Põlva County and Southeast Estonia:
 - 3.4.1.** Vouchers for locals to use the coworking and remote working spaces – the locals can become multipliers of communication.
 - 3.4.2.** Village Hosts volunteer programme – to help newcomers feel welcome and find the necessary info more info about village hosts (also see the spouses programme run by Enterprise Estonia.
 - 3.4.3.** Community Response Forum – community-led response assistance. The Forum, brings together state, private, community and voluntary organisations acting at local level in response to this emergency.

Brief analysis of feasibility and possible calendar of implementation

All the recommendations in this document are worth trying (or at least discussing).

Regional branding for attracting tech-savvy visitors, (re)designing community-based services							
Ireland, 17.-18. October 2023							
Calendar of implementation of the proposed recommendations							
Applicability [1]	Recommendations	Nov '23	Dec '23	Jan – March 2024	April – June 2024	July – September 2024	Comments
Very likely to be applied	1.1., 1.2., 1.4., 1.5., 1.6., 2.1., 2.2., 2.3., 2.4., 2.7., 3.1., 3.2., 3.3.	3.2., 3.3.	2.1., 2.2.	1.2., 1.4., 1.5., 1.6., 2.7.	3.1.	1.1., 2.3, 2.4.	We will start with what is very likely to be applied
Depends on specific political decisions/conditions	1.3., 2.5., 2.6., 2.8., 3.4.		1.3.		3.4., 2.6., 2.8	2.5.	Budget can be a limit here
Rather seen as not applicable at the moment	1.7					1.7.	We can give this as example from Ireland

[1] Applicability of the recommendations – to what extent the proposed measures and given recommendations are seen as applicable by the beneficiary organisation.

Value:

Very likely to be applied

Depends on specific political decisions/conditions

Rather seen as not applicable at the moment



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Conclusions: any additional reflection on the experienced peer review

We are grateful for the opportunity to conduct the peer review meeting in a visitation format. The format was very intense, but well-executed and content-rich. We are aware of the opportunity to apply for a follow-up meeting, and we intend to do so. Thank you.