



European
Commission

RegioStars Awards

10 years of
success stories

*Regional and
Urban Policy*

RegioStars Awards – Ten years of success stories

European Commission
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RegioStars Awards

10 years of
success stories



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RegioStars: ten years of success stories

Innovative, stimulating and life-changing: the RegioStars Awards mark their 10th anniversary this year. This is thus the time to stress the tremendous achievements of outstanding EU-funded regional projects, whose impacts often transcend borders.

RegioStars reward excellence in regional development and highlight original and innovative projects, inspiring others to get involved. And by doing so, they have become the standard-bearer of regional policy and its achievements.

Over 10 years, the RegioStars Awards have attracted over 1200 applications from across the whole of Europe; over 10 years, an independent jury has evaluated these applications before picking finalists and a winner in each category. The Awards ceremony takes place in Brussels during the European Week of Regions and Cities.

First-person testimonials of success

From stimulating job creation and sustainable growth to revitalising dilapidated urban areas and promoting social inclusion, the winning projects illustrate Cohesion Policy's contribution to Europe's prosperity and shared future – improving EU citizens' lives on a daily basis.

This publication features those projects that responded to the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy's request to all 49 winners over the decade to contribute updated information on the impact of the Awards.

Testimonials from the winners and some of the project beneficiaries demonstrate the long-lasting effects of EU investment on their lives, careers and well-being.

**Corina Crețu**

EU Commissioner for Regional Policy

They also show how winning an award has helped projects gain attention regionally, nationally and EU-wide. In some cases, this attention has attracted support and additional investment to continue their work.

The Awards have also helped to share best practice across Europe, thereby helping other regions to solve common problems. The projects have often served as a stepping stone, demonstrating how something that starts small can make a big difference in the long run.

We would like to thank all the jury members and jury presidents for their service to the Awards over the decade.

We encourage you to take a look at the winning projects from over the past 10 years. As EU Commissioner for Regional Policy, I am really proud of them and I am sure you will be both impressed and inspired.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Crete".



Projects featured in this publication and participating countries



- 1 Centre for Excellence in Aeronautical Research (Cenaero)
- 2 Eco World Styria
- 3 Science And Technology Park of the University of Porto (UPTEC)
- 4 Scandinavian Game Developers
- 5 Bio Base NWE
- 6 EkoBiz
- 7 EnergyAgency.NRW
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- 9 Green and blue space adaptation for urban areas and eco-towns (GRaBS)
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- 11 BEACON
- 12 Centro Bio: bio-industries, biorefineries and bioproducts
- 13 Innovative Low-Carbon Public Services
- 14 Computer literacy basics for a Lithuanian e-citizen
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- 17 Academy of Social Economy (ASEDP)
- 18 Coordination to improve gender-based violence survivors' labour market integration & social inclusion
- 19 C-Mine Centre
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- 33 Jonvabalai (Fireflies)



Cécile Goffaux

Business Development & Innovation Manager

“ Receiving the RegioStars Award clearly confirmed our strategic orientation, motivated us to pursue our efforts and had a positive impact on the cohesion of our young team. ”



High-tech ticket to success

Cenaero is a Belgian research centre that offers specialised scientific and technological support to companies in sectors mainly linked to the aeronautics industry – helping to boost their innovations and creating jobs in the process. Cenaero provides companies with expertise in digital modelling and simulation, which are key tools for improving the development of new products, processes and services. It has also played an important role in the economic renewal of the Belgian region of Wallonia. Cécile Goffaux, Cenaero’s business development and innovation manager, says receiving the 2009 RegioStars Award in the ‘Research, technological development and innovation’ category motivated the team to focus on the future.

For a relatively new research centre such as ours, receiving the RegioStars Award was welcome recognition of the competency of our teams and confirmation that we made the right strategic choices when we started out.

We also consider it important that this prize provided an international and high-level perspective of our project – one that was initially intended to be purely regional.

Receiving the RegioStars Award clearly motivated us to pursue our efforts and had a positive impact on the cohesion of our young team.

Catalyst for growth

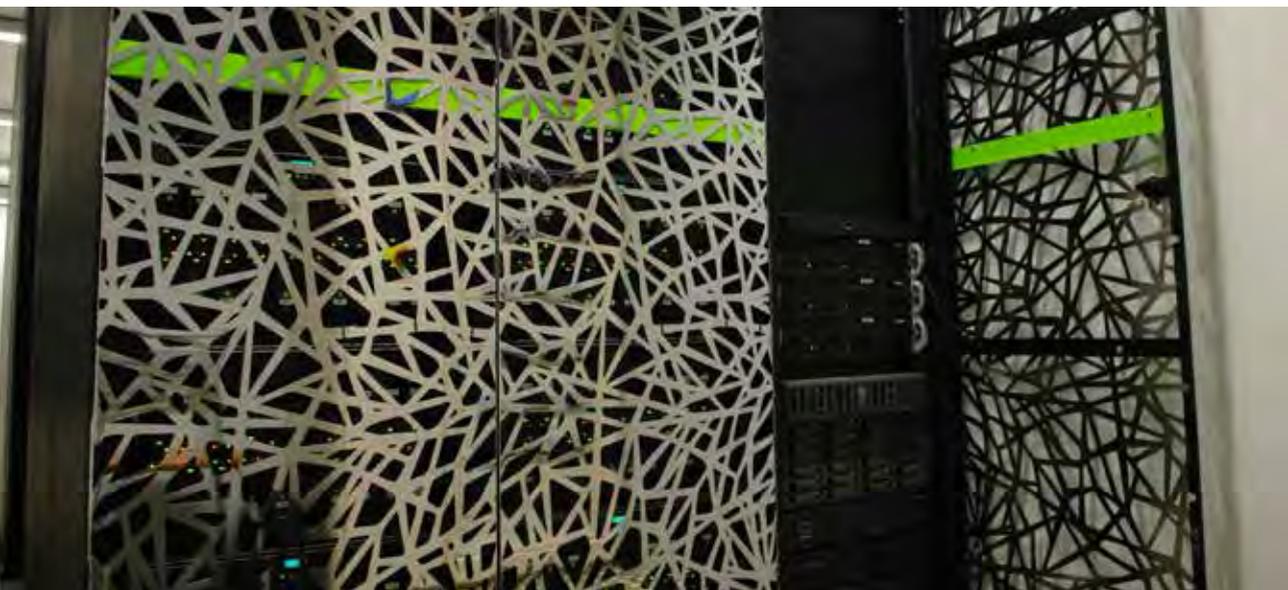
Since winning the RegioStars Award, Cenaero has continued to grow – both by increasing its staff and building more ties with local and international partners in industry and science. As such, the prize served as recognition of the quality and dynamism of our centre. In its wake, therefore, we were able to strengthen our strategic positioning in the fields of numerical simulation and optimisation of a range of issues in the aerospace sector for which the project was first launched. However, we have also been able to branch out to other sectors, including energy, as well as smart buildings and cities.

Supercomputer

As a technologically-focused centre, the project has helped many companies carry out innovative projects. In 2016, for example, we supported more than 30 businesses – both SMEs and large companies – with the development and enhancement of new products.

We have enabled software publishers to upgrade their offerings by integrating advanced tools developed by, or in conjunction, with Cenaero. The centre is also the operator of a powerful supercomputer that is accessible to both researchers and industry, prominently positioning us on the map of high-performance computing in Europe.

At a regional level, Cenaero has played an important role in promoting economic renewal in Belgium's Wallonia region via research programmes with local companies, as well as engaging in business-oriented cooperation with area industries. Some regional companies have also benefitted from our supercomputing facilities.





Philippe Samyn
CEO of Philippe Samyn and Partners

The Belgian architecture and building engineering firm has carried out a wide array of projects incorporating Cenaero know-how.

“ For years now, we have worked closely with Cenaero in the development of our projects. The input we receive from Cenaero simulations often determines our final architectural decisions. ”



Thomas Duquesne

Science & Technology Manager at Stûv, a Belgian company that designs and makes wood-burning stoves and other products.



“ Stûv has regularly used the expertise and simulation tools developed by Cenaero in areas such as heat transfer and indoor climate management, allowing us to come up with innovative technologies that we’ve already used in new and successful products. ”



Bernhard Puttinger

Director of the Green Tech Cluster

“ The project has played an important economic role in our region, with the positive effects especially prominent on the labour market. Between 2012 and 2015, approximately 4400 new jobs were created in the field of environmental technology. ”



Creating a 'cleantech' hub

Eco World Styria was created in 2005 to position the southern Austrian state of Styria as a hotspot for clean-technology players specialising in energy and environmental engineering. Set up as a public-private partnership, it is now known as the Green Tech Cluster and plays an important role in the local economy. Home to some 200 companies and research institutions, it has generated jobs and taken eco-innovation to new levels, drawing interest from around the world. Director Bernhard Puttinger describes how winning the RegioStars Award for 'Smart growth-service innovation' in 2012 sparked international media attention and underscored the project's significance.

I was very proud that despite strong competition, our project prevailed and convinced the 2012 RegioStars jury in the 'smart growth' category. Since receiving the award, our public profile has increased significantly — TV stations from all over Europe and even China have increasingly reported on the Green Tech Valley.

Styria, and in particular the Green Tech Valley, have come a long way in recent years. In 2015, environmental technology sales totalled EUR 4.4 billion, up 6.4% from the previous year. The number of employees, meanwhile, had risen to 21 700.

Growing recognition

Since winning the award, innovation, active project development and growth have become an increasing focus. Concretely, the Green Tech Cluster, together with more than 200 cluster partners, has initiated and developed new research and development (R&D) projects and supported them with customised services.

As our role has evolved, so has our name and logo – in 2016, we became the 'Green Tech Cluster Styria GmbH'. Our new logo symbolises the various green technologies that stand as a symbol of growth.

Generating jobs

The project has played an important economic role in our region, with the positive effects especially prominent in the labour market. Between 2012 and 2015, approximately 4400 new jobs were created in the field of environmental technology. Significantly, a majority of these were high-level R&D opportunities. This, in turn, boosted the R&D rate in Styria, which rose from 4.3% to 4.8% during that period.

With international technology companies increasingly looking for ways to connect with young and creative minds, the project has also noticeably improved the culture of cooperation among businesses. This has been especially beneficial to young companies and start-ups keen on feedback and exchanging ideas.



Werner Färber

Managing director of EcoCan GmbH,
a company that produces environmentally
friendly cans.



“ Thanks to the Green Tech Cluster, our product is seeing success on the market and we were able to collaborate with a major research institute in a move that could lead to promising new developments. ”



Peter Oberauer

Managing director (commercial) at ATT
advanced thermal technologies GmbH

“ Two product developments for customers resulted from the ideas and contacts made at an event hosted by the Green Tech Cluster — we are so glad to be a part of this diverse and rich network. ”



Clara Gonçalves

UPTEC Executive Manager

“ It was inspiring and highly motivating to think that the European Union validated and recognised our work. It changed things for me and all UPTEC collaborators and partners by providing independent endorsement of our efforts – not even a decade after we started. ”



Promoting innovation in Porto

The UPTEC - Science and Technology Park at Portugal's University of Porto has played a key role in driving innovation, entrepreneurship and business development in the surrounding Norte region traditionally dependent on a range of low-tech and export-focused industries such as textiles, shoes and furniture. Through specialised centres promoting knowledge sharing, the university has helped create and support a range of companies focused on technology, biotechnology and the creative industries – resulting in regional jobs and foreign direct investment. UPTEC Executive Manager Clara Gonçalves recalls how winning a 2013 RegioStars Award in the 'Smart growth' category was inspirational.

The RegioStars Award was an important landmark in my career. It was inspiring and motivating to think that the EU recognised our work. It changed things for me and all UPTEC collaborators and partners by providing independent endorsement of our efforts.

Big interest

Since 2007, UPTEC has supported the growth of around 450 business projects in areas such as nanotechnology, new materials and production, energy, health, biotechnology, information and communication technology, digital media, architecture, interactive marketing and content production.

Currently, UPTEC supports the development of some 200 projects, including start-ups and innovation centres. Around 2 300 people have found jobs with these endeavours, 90 % of them highly skilled graduates or postgraduates.

And we're far from done. We work to attract international companies to base their technical centres at UPTEC. And we seek to expand our global cooperation networks with universities and multinational investors, including from the UK, Sweden, Poland and Brazil.

We also cooperate with institutional partners, such as the University Technology Enterprise Network (UTEN) set up between the Portuguese government and the University of Texas at Austin in 2007. We also constantly try to establish partnerships with international organisations such as the European Space Agency.

Money matters

In 2014, the economic impact of UPTEC and the companies incubated in our park contributed EUR 76 million to the national gross domestic product. Also that year, UPTEC companies generated EUR 16 million in fiscal revenue and a turnover of EUR 45 million, of which exports represented almost half of the overall total with EUR 22 million.

In terms of the impact on the local population, the 2 300 jobs that have been created have opened up a new realm of career opportunities and encouraged highly skilled professionals to remain or settle in the region.

Local companies with clout

EFACEC settled in the UPTEC Innovation Centre in 2012. Since then, it has developed various cooperation projects with the University of Porto. One example is photovoltaic technology that was developed to convert the sun's light into energy. The research generated a patent that was sold to the Australian sustainable energy company Dyesol for EUR 5 million.

Veniam was created in 2012 by João Barros and Susana Sargento, professors at the Universities of Porto and Aveiro, respectively.

In 2014, Veniam virtually linked over 400 buses in Porto and enabled Wi-Fi access for nearly 60 000 people per month. With offices in Portugal, the United States and Singapore, the company has secured EUR 24 million of investment. It has also signed an agreement with the second largest telecommunications operator in Singapore to install Wi-Fi hotspots in thousands of Porto vehicles.





Adélio Mendes

Professor in the engineering faculty at
the University of Porto

“ The research lab spaces and management provided by UPTEC starting in 2013 were of critical importance for my research activities and the reinforcement of my collaboration with several national and international companies. ”



Tiago Sá

Founder of Wisecrop, startup
incubated at UPTEC



“ UPTEC always played - and still does - an important role in Wisecrop development. From the very beginning, UPTEC’s mentors have always supported our decisions and provided resources such as infrastructure, access to specific services and relevant networking so we could better execute them. UPTEC’s robust reputation both in Portugal and internationally has helped us position Wisecrop well when presenting the project. ”



Tove Viggers Ingerslev

Head of the projects department at the Viden Djurs School

“ We’ve been able to provide enhanced advice and support to new companies in the incubator, and to continue the process of getting more young people on to a self-employment career path. ”



Giving gamers a leg up

The Scandinavian Game Developers project is a collaborative effort between Denmark and Sweden that has helped fledgling computer game entrepreneurs get off the ground. Through guidance and business incubators, start-ups that otherwise would have little support and uncertain futures are able to reach for the stars. Tove Viggers Ingerslev, head of the projects department at the Viden Djurs School, describes how winning the 2015 RegioStars Award for ‘Smart growth’ has helped young gamers pursue successful careers.

Winning the RegioStars Award was a great honour and gave us much-needed legitimacy that helped attract national media attention and additional investment. Since the gaming industry is traditionally seen as ‘fringe’, we had previously found it difficult to get the word out about our efforts but that changed when we won the award. As a result of the increased flow of funds, we have been able to provide enhanced advice and support to new companies in the incubator, and to continue the process of getting more young people on to a self-employment career path.

Setting sights higher

Since winning the award, we have moved on to another project called Game Hub Scandinavia that sets the bar even higher. While the Scandinavian Game Developers project was aimed at creating viable companies, this second initiative seeks to create a viable industry outside the major urban areas of participating partner countries that include Denmark, Sweden and Norway.

Now roughly at the halfway mark, we are thrilled to say that some 45 new businesses and 198 new jobs have been created as part of this endeavour. Our goal is to up those numbers to 100 and 400 respectively.

With an eye on exporting our games, we have opened the window for collaboration with the vast Asian market and entered into partnerships with Chinese universities and publishers.

On the map

The Scandinavian Game Developers project has had a major impact on our region, the Norddjurs Municipality. In particular, it has turned the spotlight on the Viden Djurs School whose Game College attracts young gaming enthusiasts from across Denmark. Subjects taught there have a special focus on game development, with game programming and design classes also on offer. In total, the facility enrolls some 500 students working towards a secondary school diploma.

After graduation, many go on to Dania Games – another area institution that offers post-baccalaureate game programming and design education. It is from here that the Scandinavian Game Developers project has recruited the brightest talent, offering students an opportunity to set up their own businesses in our incubator.

To sum up, the Scandinavian Game Developers project has contributed to establishing an entire ecosystem for game development and gaming companies – to date, in fact, more than 30 businesses began in our incubator.

From a business strategy perspective, the Norddjurs Municipality has committed to supporting initiatives that will enhance the existing gaming cluster and to establishing others based on that model.



Martin Lange
Owner of ClearCut Games



“ Today, we’re making a living from the business we set up in the incubator. This wouldn’t have been possible without the advice we received through the project and the incubator. ”

Martin set up his business in the Scandinavian Game Developers incubator in 2011. He says that, at the time, he and his team of four employees were good at creating games but didn’t know much about running a business.



Emil Alexander Hansen
Co-owner of Campfire Games

Emil Alexander and co-owner Mads Støjko Larsen are American Civil War buffs and created a related computer game called War of Rights that has garnered fans around the world. Their business took off while they were part of the Scandinavian Game Developers incubator.

“ Today, our company is doing so well that we’ve decided to move from the incubator and go it alone – that way, we’re making it possible for other young firms to get the help we got to get our business off the ground. ”



Lieve Hoflack

Project manager at Bio Base Europe Pilot Plant

“The award sends a clear message ... that an experienced state-of-the-art shared pilot facility in combination with an easily accessible voucher system empowers SMEs to turn research into investments and jobs.”



Innovative support for bio-entrepreneurs

The Bio Base NWE network of bioeconomy service providers developed a one-stop shop of services for biotech SMEs in North-West Europe to bring innovative products and services from the lab to market. It provided pilot development facilities, technical and business support and voucher-based financing to entrepreneurs, boosting jobs and growth in this expanding sector. Lieve Hoflack, project manager at Bio Base Europe Pilot Plant, explains how the project's 2017 RegioStars Award for 'Smart specialisation for SME innovation' strengthens green industry in Europe.

We are honoured to receive this award. It means recognition for a dedicated team that spans different organisations. But most of all, it is recognition of a problem that many new, small, innovative companies face – how to go from a concept proven at the small scale to its industrial application.

We care about this problem because the gap is difficult for companies to bridge on their own. They often need to convince investors to fund the work needed to make that step. In Bio Base NWE, we gave them the opportunity to generate data for investors by testing their concept on industrial equipment in a pilot plant facility, with support from the facility's engineers. Companies were able to optimise processes and calculate future operational costs without having to invest in equipment.

The award sends a clear message to European innovators that an experienced state-of-the-art shared pilot facility, in combination with an easily accessible voucher system, empowers SMEs to turn their research into investments and jobs. Support of just tens of thousands of euros can provide sufficient data to convince investors that a technology is ready for the next step – full demonstration in an industrial setting.

From research to jobs

Bio Base NWE focused on the bioeconomy, a growing sector where industrial processes are based on renewable inputs and underutilised organic sidestreams instead of fossil resources. This not only creates jobs, but helps Europe reduce its carbon footprint, greenhouse gas emissions and fight global warming.

Our project had a huge leverage effect: out of 30 SMEs that received technological support, 16 now have concrete plans to build a dedicated pilot line for further development or a new production line, with total investment of over EUR 71 million. This resulted in 43 new jobs during the project, while an estimated 275 more will be created in the coming years.

Inspiring new support

We are committed to building on Bio Base NWE's success. At the Bio Base Europe Pilot Plant, we are running two follow-up projects with improved SME voucher systems. In two other projects, we have installed more industrial equipment to expand the range of processes that can be tested.

Bio Base NWE also inspired projects in other sectors. And we often receive phone calls from potential coordinators of new pilot support projects asking for advice.

On a larger scale, we hope we have built the foundation of a European-wide voucher system for innovation support. In the meantime, we are setting up a network of shared pilot facilities and talking to governments to improve shared facility programmes to develop sustainable jobs and industries across Europe.





Mark Simmers
CEO of Celtic Renewables Ltd.

With support from Bio Base NEW, Mark and Martin's start-up scaled up its innovative technology to convert whisky by-products into biobutanol, a replacement for fossil road fuel.

“ The Bio Base NWE innovation coupon was the start of an amazing adventure. We expect to start construction of a EUR 20 million facility in late 2017. It will be operational in 2019, providing jobs for an estimated 25 to 30 people. ”



Pattanathu Rahman
Founder and director
of TeeGene Biotech Ltd



“ The scale-up work was very successful. We are now considering the possibility to build our own pilot line and have received interest from investors for biosurfactant manufacturing at commercial scale. ”

Pattanathu's company makes chemicals based on extracts from algae, plants and microorganisms. In Bio Base NEW he scaled up innovative biosurfactants – greener versions of a type of ingredient used in many industries.



Jelena Petrov

Senior advisor, Public Institution for the Development and Coordination
of Split-Dalmatia County (RERA SD)

“ The award will promote young Croatian organic producers and Split-Dalmatia County’s development of organic agriculture. This will have a very positive impact on the regional authority, as a strong organic sector is a priority for us. ”



Raising organic farmers

In Split-Dalmatia County in Croatia, the EkoBiz project supported local people to start organic farms, creating jobs and building up a regional specialisation in this high-value industry. It gave training and business advice to future farmers, and promoted wider interest in the sector through the project's organic food fair, Eko Fjera, and activities in schools and nurseries. Jelena Petrov, a senior advisor at the Public Institution for the Development and Coordination of Split-Dalmatia County (RERA SD) – which managed the project – describes the impact of winning the 2017 RegioStars Award for 'Education and training'.

I feel deeply honoured that we have received this RegioStars Award. All of us have put a lot of effort, care and personal involvement in the EkoBiz project. It is wonderful to have this recognition from the European Commission.

The award will promote young Croatian organic producers and the Split-Dalmatia County's development of organic agriculture. This will have a very positive impact on the regional authority, as a strong organic sector is a priority for us.

We want to increase entrepreneurship in rural and island areas of the county, and to attract young people back to depopulated rural areas. Even though the region has a rich variety of plants and animals, we do not make enough use of these natural resources. Our agricultural sector is relatively unskilled and adds only low value to produce. Meanwhile, most people buy all their food in supermarkets rather than from local producers.

Development of organic agriculture is an opportunity to tackle all of these problems. It produces high-value goods and is based on a skilled understanding of the environment, local ecology and business development. That makes it attractive to people who want to start an interesting business. It also gives us the chance to promote local farming and healthy eating.

Over the course of the project, we trained more than 100 young organic farmers. The project had two key impacts for them. First, they learned a lot about agronomy, and organic farming in particular, which increased their yields and made their farms more profitable. Second, they received European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development grants, which helped them invest in equipment, seeds and other inputs to be more competitive. It also led to the start of 15 new businesses, funded through the EAFRD.

Growing interest

Awareness-raising activities targeted young people in particular. Children in schools and nurseries took part in projects on organic farming – from herb growing to poster displays – to get them interested in the industry. Other projects brought organic food into schools to promote healthy eating. For young adults, we held a concert at our trade fair, now the biggest organic food event in Croatia, and made a film on slow food for the Mediterranean Film Festival in Split.

The project has had a huge impact, especially when you consider its low budget of just over EUR 40 000. EkoBiz has created momentum for organic agriculture on a regional and national level. Split-Dalmatia is now known in Croatia as an expert region for the sector and we will continue to fund most of the project's activities. Significant ERDF funding for agri-business infrastructure has also been pledged, which will consolidate the exciting work we have started here.



Božo Vukušić

Olive farmer



“ New skills and knowledge are very important in farming. EkoBiz taught me about production techniques, plant protection and funding. I now have the knowledge I need to manage my farm. ”

Božo followed farming and business training through EkoBiz and helped the project start EkoFjera. He has his own organic olive farm, producing olive oil that he sells internationally.



Zrinka Filipović Dermić

Dairy farmer

From a non-farming background, Zrinka used EkoBiz training to develop a high-welfare dairy farm founded with her family. She is now vice president of the Association of Organic Farmers of Dalmatia.

“ I took the best from of all courses and started to apply the knowledge on my farm. As a result, I decided to apply for EAFRD [European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development] funding for young farmers. My project got selected and we’re halfway through implementation. ”



Frank-Michael Baumann and Lothar Schneider

Managers, EnergyAgentur.NRW

“ The RegioStars Award provided important credibility to the project by acknowledging that the answer to improved energy management lies in the direct engagement of both consumers and suppliers. ”



Powering energy progress

The EnergyAgency.NRW provided innovative solutions and impartial guidance on energy management to companies, local authorities and citizens in Germany's North Rhine-Westphalia region where more than one million people work in energy-related industries. The project successfully developed strategies for better policies and practices, including in the areas of energy efficiency, climate change and renewables. Project managers Lothar Schneider and Frank-Michael Baumann explain how winning the 2009 RegioStars Award in the 'Adaptation to or mitigation of climate change' category motivated them to forge ahead.

Receiving the RegioStars Award was a true honour and marked an important acknowledgement of work we are still very proud of today. It also spurred us on to continue our hard but successful efforts, providing every single EnergyAgency.NRW employee with additional motivation to keep up the good work.

When we won the prize in 2009, the region of North Rhine-Westphalia was striving to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by a third compared to 1990 levels, which represented a considerable challenge. Since then, our agency has been recognised for achieving a breakthrough in renewable energy and for being a crucial element of the region's improved energy management. We have also been commended for contributing to the creation of 65 000 jobs in the state's energy sector. The region has since been praised as a prime location for companies to work on renewable energy resources.

‘People power’ plants

The EnergyAgency.NRW had great impact by centralising all experience around a single and impartial contact point and developing direct outreach strategies with all actors in the region. In collaboration with regional chambers and others, we carried out energy checks on countless buildings and fostered improvements to over 62 000 private households. We also gave energy efficiency advice to over 90 000 individuals.

Crucially, our work has had practical and direct effects on both individuals and society as a whole. Providing direct guidance and advice to citizens has enabled them to more effectively cooperate with other partners and purchase generation capacities in renewable energy sources available from public power plants. This has initiated a pioneering shift within North Rhine-Westphalia, converting energy consumers into producers, and ensuring all actors are aware of their collective responsibility to manage their energy consumption sustainably.

Bright future ahead

The RegioStars Award provided important credibility to the project by acknowledging that the answer to improved energy management lies in the direct engagement of both consumers and suppliers. With rising power costs and the increasingly significant impact of climate change, companies and others have continued to place their confidence in our advice and guidance.

By motivating businesses to become more energy efficient, we have become a symbol of good practice and testament to the importance of participative policy to widely and effectively identify, develop and implement collective energy solutions. This helps us, as a society, to achieve our fundamental goals of protecting our environment, cutting energy costs and contributing to job creation.





Jörg Heynkes

Entrepreneur and vice president of the regional
Chamber of Industry and Commerce

The project helped the regional Chamber of
Industry and Commerce develop two successful
energy efficiency projects.

“The EnergyAgency.NRW proved to be a valuable partner by providing knowledge, practical advisory skills and adopting an empathic approach in their contact with citizens. With their help, we were able to successfully campaign for resource efficiency and energy transition. Whatever the energy sector, big transformations are required in order to tackle the challenges of the future – but together, it can be achieved.”



Monika Jönsson

Policy advisor for research and innovation, Region Dalarna

“ The award gave everyone renewed and strengthened confidence that what we were doing was important and on the right track. Some of the project’s activities aimed to create new contacts on a European and international level ... RegioStars was an important part of the process of connecting to partners and stakeholders internationally. ”



Smart Swedish cooperation for growth

North-Middle Sweden is transforming its traditional economy, based on industries such as paper and steel, into a knowledge-focused, innovative one. The SLIM (System Management for Innovative Platforms) project aimed to boost growth and employment in the Dalarna, Gävleborg and Värmland regions by supporting cooperation between industry clusters, companies, researchers and regional authorities to develop products and services for this new economy. Monika Jönsson, policy advisor for research and innovation at Region Dalarna, describes the positive impact of winning the 2011 RegioStars Award for ‘Anticipating economic change’.

It was very gratifying that our work with cluster development was highlighted at the EU level. It felt like confirmation that the work that we carried out was cutting edge, even by international standards. We also welcomed seeing our conscientious long-term work pay off.

The award gave everyone renewed and strengthened confidence that what we were doing was important and on the right track. Some of the project’s activities aimed to create new contacts on a European and international level, to expand their and our understanding of what clusters are and what they can do. RegioStars was an important part of the process of connecting to partners and stakeholders internationally.

Clusters that took part in SLIM are now leading several ERDF-funded projects that are engaging hundreds of companies. These projects support innovation, internationalisation and business development to both transform regions and find solutions to societal challenges such as the need for cleaner industries or more sustainably built environments. Some clusters have also become beneficiaries of the Swedish cluster programme Vinnväxt, and have participated in audits by the European Secretariat for Cluster Analysis (ESCA).

The regions and all clusters are continuing their cooperation from SLIM in the Smart Specialisation in North-Middle Sweden project, funded by the 2014-2020 ERDF Operational Programme “North-Central Sweden”. This project builds on the experience of regions and clusters by exchanging resources and knowledge to improve priority areas and implementing smart specialisation.

Making a mark

SLIM had a huge impact. The clusters involved in the project covered about 700 companies and 60000 employees, operating in sectors ranging from IT and services to traditional industries. Our support built up our region’s capacity for skills, research and business development.

Most people in companies linked to participating clusters never came into direct contact with the project but many have benefitted from the growth and sustainability it helped achieve. We also emphasised social and environmental sustainability. For instance, the project promoted awareness of gender in clusters to increase equality, primarily in traditionally male-dominated manufacturing industries.

Another main pillar of SLIM was the development of impact measurements at cluster and company levels. The exercise showed that companies participating in the clusters had a higher growth rate than control groups.

On a broader level, the project led to a more systematic way of working with cluster development and policies, both regionally and nationally, for continued innovation support. It is very satisfying to see our project have such a long-lasting impact.



Britta Haag
Process Leader, FindIT



“ SLIM was a perfect introduction to the world of clusters for me. I quickly developed an understanding of the other clusters in the region and their areas of excellence. It also resulted in a joint project with several clusters and many additional joint activities. ”

Britta joined the industrial IT cluster FindIT from the world of business to help local steel, paper and pulp companies, research organisations and IT companies co-develop new companies, products and processes.



Lena Norrström
Communications officer,
High Voltage Valley

Based in Ludvika, Dalarna, the High Voltage Valley technology cluster manages projects between local SMEs, universities and public authorities that develop the region's electrical engineering industry.

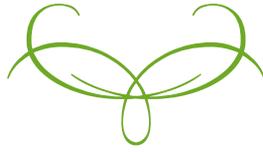
“ In SLIM, regions and clusters with very diverse areas of focus and expertise exchanged knowledge. Even though we were different, we enjoyed many great benefits from getting to know and learning from each other. ”



Diane Smith

European Advisor, Town & Country Planning Association (lead GRaBS project partner)

“Winning the RegioStars Award was a tremendous boost not only to the profile of the project but also to the profile of its cause, which is to help policymakers understand the impacts of climate change on people and places across Europe.”



Prepping for worst-case weather

Adapting to climate change and the threat of extreme weather events is a growing challenge for people living in towns and cities. To help communities brace for what's to come, GRaBS provided urban designers, architects and planners with the tools and know-how to make buildings and outdoor spaces more resilient to the potential threats posed by climate change, such as flooding and intense heat. Project manager Diane Smith says winning the 2012 RegioStars Award for 'Sustainable growth — eco-system services' was a tremendous boost and recognition of the role of green infrastructure and climate adaptation strategies.

As the lead partner, the UK-based Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) was delighted to receive the RegioStars Award on behalf of the project and its 14 partners from eight EU countries. It was a tremendous boost not only to the profile of the project but also to the profile of its cause, which is to help policymakers understand the role of green and blue infrastructure in the adaptation of urban areas to the impacts of climate change.

Winning the award was an acknowledgement of the success of GRaBS in raising awareness of these issues and also recognition of the importance of strategic planning for climate change adaptation to better prepare our towns and cities for flooding and intense heat. Local municipalities are beginning to prioritise such planning more highly, although there is still much work to do. Finally, receiving the award raised awareness of the power of cooperation among European regions.

Local impact

The TCPA has used many of the outcomes of GRaBS to build the UK Green Infrastructure Partnership, which it took over from the UK government in 2012. The expert papers, case studies, software to assess risks and vulnerabilities, and proposals on adaptation strategies produced by GRaBS have fed into UK government policy and features in the draft London Environment Strategy 2017.

By using GRaBS know-how, local and regional authorities are now better placed to secure high quality green infrastructure in their policies and development plans. In the Italian city of Genoa, the adaptation action plan was coordinated with the provincial plan leading to officers, politicians and the community working together on adaptation measures. Kalamaria, Greece, was the first municipality in the Central Macedonia region to develop and implement adaptation actions, and Amsterdam's Nieuw-West district was the first local authority within the Dutch city to adopt a comprehensive adaptation strategy.

Full steam ahead

A new EU-funded project began in January 2017 building directly upon the success of GRaBS. PERFECT uses several of the GRaBS good practices and expert papers developed between partner countries to explore the power of green infrastructure to boost the social, economic and environmental success of areas. In this context, many of the techniques that worked well in GRaBS, such as peer working and the development of expert papers, are being used as part of an interregional learning process.





Christine Schwabinger
Department for Spatial Planning,
Provincial Government of Styria, Austria.

“ During the years we participated in GRaBS and also afterwards, I learned a lot about climate change adaptation and, in particular, about the many case studies we have here in the southern Austrian city of Graz. Winning the RegioStars Award made our politicians take note and become aware of the project.”



Age Niels Holstein
Project manager, City of Amsterdam



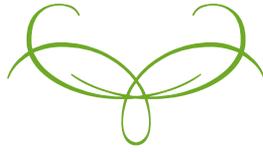
“ The success of GRaBS and the RegioStars Award resulted in sustained attention to climate change adaptation strategies not only in the Nieuw-West district of Amsterdam but across several city districts. Nieuw-West is featured in a video clip on the INTERREG site which has also generated much interest.”



Samantha Nicholson

Programmes director at ENWORKS

“ The 13 500 businesses that have received our support have also created more than 8 300 jobs between them as a result. These numbers show that our support drives economic development alongside environmental improvements, as well as enhancing the lives of those working in local businesses. ”



Eco-friendly business advice

ENWORKS provides advice to companies in north-west England on how to become more resource-efficient and sustainable while boosting their bottom lines and competitiveness. Support is tailored to the needs of each specific business and covers a wide range of issues such as managing environmental risk and waste, and cutting energy and water use. Director Samantha Nicholson explains how winning the 2013 RegioStars Award for ‘Sustainable growth’ gave ENWORKS the confidence to build upon its success.

Winning the RegioStars Award was testament to all the hard work that we and our partners had done over the previous 11 years to support SMEs towards sustainable growth. To be nominated alongside projects from across the EU was a great honour. It really confirmed that we were not only making a significant impact at home, but also driving the agenda with policymakers and fellow projects on an international scale.

Being recognised as an example of best practice at the EU level gave us the confidence to shout about our achievements and continue sharing our learning with others. It is critically important to us that we encourage others to replicate our success and use our experience as a springboard for their own.

Expanding services

Since winning our RegioStars Award, ENWORKS has branched out from resource-efficiency support to other emerging areas of importance to sustainable economies. This includes rolling out specialist assistance for companies in the low-carbon and environmental goods and services sector, and helping businesses from all sectors not only to increase efficiency but also to become more innovative with their products and services.

We have also become integrated in a wider range of business services as part of the Business Growth Hub in Greater Manchester where we are based. This means our sustainability message is now mainstreamed alongside more traditional forms of support, such as getting finance or start-up advice.

Driving economic development

Our continued efforts have shown substantial results for both businesses and the planet. In 2015, we passed the milestone of saving 1 million tonnes of CO₂e (carbon dioxide equivalent) – which is more than the total annual emissions from every home in Manchester combined!

To date, our support has saved businesses more than EUR 388.5 million and helped to safeguard or increase sales by a further EUR 424 million. The 13 500 businesses that have received our support have also created more than 8 300 jobs between them as a result. These numbers show that our support drives economic development alongside environmental improvements, as well as enhancing the lives of those working in local businesses.



Lees Whitehead

Managing director of Newhey Carpets,
a textiles manufacturer in Rochdale,
Greater Manchester



“ The programme has been hugely helpful in helping us build a business case for new investments and ensuring we remain on top of our game in terms of reducing our carbon footprint. ”

Lees says his family company is committed to reducing its environmental impact and credits ENWORKS with helping him to deliver this ambition.



Mo Hanslod

Chief executive of Bri-Tek Technologies,
an LED lighting company in Bolton,
Greater Manchester

“ ENWORKS has provided excellent support in helping my business to grow and meet our development ambitions in Greater Manchester’s low-carbon sector and beyond. In particular, we have recently received expert support with launching a first-of-a-kind innovation to the market place, which we are manufacturing locally. ”



Iain Donnison

BEACON project director

“ Since receiving the award, we have moved on to BEACON+, a four-year, EUR 13.7-million project that will ensure that our region of Wales has technologies that match its own resource base. ”



Making the most of biomass

The BEACON initiative, led by the UK's Aberystwyth University in collaboration with partners at Bangor and Swansea universities, aims to develop new functional and inexpensive products using biomass instead of oil. It focuses specifically on biorefining, a process that uses non-food crop feedstocks, in much the same way as oil refineries use crude oil, to produce a wide array of goods. Iain Donnison, BEACON's director, highlights how winning the 2014 RegioStars Award for 'Sustainable growth' gave the project a big boost.

We were delighted to have won the RegioStars Award. It was international recognition of the importance of the innovative work we are doing, driven by the challenging targets for adopting green technologies and reducing greenhouse gas emissions that have been set by national governments and the European Union.

Low-carbon technologies, including biorefining and industrial biotechnology, are seen as important growth sectors and will need sustainable supply chains that will generate economic activity and jobs. And that is precisely what we are focused on.

The reward, therefore, also reflects the impact that the project has had in supporting businesses and its strategic value in developing sustainable alternatives to crude oil and other fossil fuel-based feedstocks.

BEACON+

Since receiving the award, we have moved on to BEACON+, a four-year, EUR 13.7-million project that will ensure that our region of Wales has technologies that match its own resource base. Working with SMEs, the project focuses on the use of available natural resources and/or those that can be grown or are produced locally, such as daffodils, timber, high-sugar grasses like rye and food waste. Our goal is to help rebalance the Welsh economy through green manufacturing and to help Wales reach its sustainability and greenhouse gas emission reduction targets.

Stimulating growth

BEACON has been successful in facilitating business growth that would otherwise not have happened. Businesses have seen increased sales, developed new products and processes – and created new jobs. A number have also reached commercialisation, thanks to BEACON support, and expect significant growth in the coming years. Products developed include a novel anti-fungal useful for treating various diseases, biodegradable packaging and a process for converting wetland grass and rush to biofuel. Like all R&D projects, business effects take time to materialise and the impact of BEACON is likely to become even stronger in the long term.





Jonathan Hughes
Director of Pennotec

The company's 'green' ethos is to use every piece of timber that comes through its gates.

“ BEACON has provided considerable support to Pennotec, including network support for the future development of the business. ”



Alan Jones
Chairman of Clifford Jones Timber



“ At Clifford Jones Timber we always try to be imaginative and diverse whilst adding value to our product range and processes. Without BEACON's scientific knowledge and research facilities we would not have been able to explore such wide-ranging and innovative concepts. ”

The company provides a venture that provides advice and technology to help businesses convert manufacturing waste into marketable resources.



João Nunes

President and CEO of the BLC3 non-profit that oversees the Centro Bio project

“The prize significantly raised our profile and led to a growth spurt. Following our win, we saw a surge in interest not only at local and regional levels but also nationally and from around Europe. For us, that was a definite boost resulting in greater cooperation, team spirit and satisfaction.”



Revolutionising rural growth

Portugal's Centro Bio project has developed a bio-based rural economy that sources fuel and raw materials sustainably and fosters the sharing of resources to avoid waste. It works with researchers and local farmers, foresters and entrepreneurs to generate new industries – and jobs – from by-products and overlooked resources. It helped create a cutting-edge refinery that produces bioproducts and biofuel from leftover plant matter and has also set up a scheme to prevent forest fires, in addition to providing mentoring to start-ups. João Nunes, president and chief executive officer of the BLC3 non-profit that oversees the project, recalls how winning the 2016 'Sustainable growth' RegioStars Award was momentous.

Receiving the prestigious RegioStars Award was a unique and unforgettable moment for us and we saw it as invaluable recognition of our collective team effort and courage to think outside the box and take risks.

The prize significantly raised our profile and led to a growth spurt. Following our win, we saw a surge in interest not only at local and regional levels but also nationally and from around Europe. For us, that was a definite boost resulting in greater cooperation, team spirit and satisfaction.

The project has since grown significantly – we have increased our business connections and inquiries are up from industrial players and other potential stakeholders who want to know more about it. What's more, the Portuguese government has been taking a closer look at our efforts to see how we might be able to provide solutions for dealing with one of Portugal's biggest problems – forest fires.

We have also frequently been asked to make presentations and have heard from many young people who want to work with us. Area schools and students cooperated a great deal with the project and there was much delight seeing a local endeavour recognised at the highest level in Europe.

At a regional level, the RegioStars Award also helped elevate the profile of our BLC3 non-profit association that oversees the Centro Bio project and is aimed at supporting the fabric of inner rural regions through technologically-focused research and development. This has led to positive discussions about the circular economy and its emphasis on reuse and recycling for a better tomorrow.



Jorge Fernandes and Rita Lagos of Dent Hi-Tech

A dental prosthesis laboratory supporting various clinics and the development of new oral health improvement concepts that used Centro Bio's incubator to get their business off the ground.



“ Through Centro Bio's incubator we had all the support needed for the launch of our start-up. We were able to realise one of the greatest goals of our lives, which otherwise may not have happened or been much more difficult to achieve. ”



Jorge Estima, Luis Caseiro,
Carlos Martins, Pedro Silva,
Martinho Simões, Marco Ferreira

Tech company Enging
Consisting of a six-member team,
credits Centro Bio for its success

“ The Centro Bio project allowed us to make a dream come true – develop our own project from scratch and watch it become a reality. We feel fulfilled by this and value the training and mentoring we received that helped us get to where we are today. ”



Kristiina Nurmenniemi

Project manager, Micropolis Ltd.

“ The cooperation between citizens, companies, decision-makers and development experts has brought well-being, comfort and a cleaner environment to people’s lives. It is something the municipality can be proud of. ”



People power for a cleaner environment

For the Innovative Low-Carbon Public Services project, citizens, experts and local authorities in the Finnish municipality of Ii, are redesigning public services together to cut CO₂ emissions. The project builds on Ii's already impressive 50% reduction between 2007 and 2015, achieved through energy savings, cleaner transport and a switch to renewable energy. The citizen input puts Ii on track to achieve an 80% reduction by 2020. Kristiina Nurmenniemi of project manager Micropolis Ltd. describes how the 2017 RegioStars Award for 'Energy Union: climate action' has inspired project partners to share this approach.

We are honoured to receive this award. We have achieved great results by involving citizens in planning our low-carbon solutions right from the start. The cooperation between citizens, companies, decision-makers and development experts has brought well-being, comfort and a cleaner environment to people's lives. It is something the municipality can be proud of.

The Finnish Environment Institute, SYKE, wants to cut CO₂ emissions by 80% by 2030. We want to achieve this by 2020. This award inspires us to continue to work towards sustainability while co-designing services with everyone involved. It helps us share our practices with a wider international audience and strengthens our belief that we're doing the right thing.

Engagement for success

We involved citizens in service design because ordinary people's activities are responsible for around 68% of greenhouse gas emissions. Although it is difficult to change behaviour, we can create products, services and social innovations that make climate-friendly, sustainable choices desirable and easy in everyday life.

Nobody knows better how services can be improved than the citizens who use them and the front-line staff who provide them. In Ii, new citizen-inspired ideas for cutting transport emissions – one of our biggest sources of pollution – have included shared electronic vehicles, innovative transport and improvements to cycle paths.

People don't always find it easy to express their ideas, so we used a variety of design research methods – such as journaling and competitions – to help people articulate their thoughts. These methods also build better understanding of the common goals between the town's developers and users. For example, activities to save CO₂ that involved citizens and schoolchildren in redesigning Ii's centre were matched by similar events for municipality decision-makers.

Culture shift

Another significant accomplishment is that the project has strengthened our public sector service culture, making it one of cooperation and co-design. It has also increased cooperation between departments. It engages all stakeholders in designing services that are sustainable, people-centred and cheaper than current services.

The project has also shown that innovative ideas can arise from and be tested in small communities. We are grateful to the Council of Oulu Region, the Designers' Association of Northern Finland, and Palvelumuotoilu Palo Ltd for their support in this project.

Our mission is to make our work visible locally and nationally, and even internationally. Ii has about 10 000 inhabitants, which is typical of Finnish municipalities. We hope that other municipalities will adopt similar strategies in their own areas. Together we can make a huge difference.





Heidi Takalo

Citizen of Ii

“ I took part in designing our city centre. I really felt equal and thought my input made a difference. On the basis of another consultation, the municipality is making the cycle routes safer and reorganising public transport. For this, I am really thankful. ”



Jarmo Berg

Managing Director, JBE Service Ltd.



“ We are proud to be part of this environmentally positive and community-minded municipality. Its wind power enthusiasm and positivity to entrepreneurship have fuelled our growth. ”

JBE Service Ltd. is a wind turbine maintenance, installation and repair company based in Ii. The company grew rapidly in 2016, in part thanks to the municipality's support for carbon savings.



Loreta Križinauskienė

Managing director, Langas į ateitį

“ We were delighted that what grew out of a good idea and a great deal of trial and error gave 50 400 people the courage and skills they need to go online. ”



Bridging the digital divide

The Langas į ateitį association project ‘Computer literacy basics for a Lithuanian e-citizen’ was a joint effort in 2006-2008 between businesses, local communities, government and the European Social Fund to reduce the country’s digital divide and get everyone, regardless of their age or social standing, comfortable using computers. In particular, it sought to foster e-literacy among residents in remote rural regions, as well as the elderly and disabled. Loreta Križinauskienė, the project’s managing director, describes how winning the 2010 RegioStars Award for ‘ICT applications for e-inclusion’ sparked more training that reached tens of thousands – and continues to this day.

We saw winning the RegioStars Award as confirmation that the large-scale computer training we carried out was a major achievement without precedent in Lithuania and neighbouring countries. We were delighted that what grew out of a good idea and a great deal of trial and error gave 50 400 people the courage and skills they need to go online.

Training took off

The success of this project and subsequent EU recognition pushed us to organise new courses that have involved tens of thousands more. We feel we encouraged Lithuanians to improve their knowledge, to learn about e-services and to acquire new IT skills. In short, training gained new momentum.

In fact, since 2010, over 80 000 people from various fields and diverse educational backgrounds have participated in our information and communication technology (ICT) training as we expanded our offers. Our goal was to satisfy the IT needs of various different social groups ranging from students and teachers to retirees. Recently, our particular focus has been on online safety to make people aware of the dangers lurking in cyberspace.

We were able to get the word out about the classes by cooperating with many social partners. What's more, winning the RegioStars Award also stood us in good stead with state authorities, which now recognise and value our ability to organise large-scale training.

More Lithuanians logging on

We are proud to say that the 'Computer literacy for a Lithuanian e-citizen' project has had big direct and indirect benefits for Lithuanian society. Between 2006 and 2008, the time frame during which our initial training programme was active, there was a 10% increase in numbers of people logging on. Recent years have seen an annual rise of 3 to 5% among residents using the web, e-services, etc.

Our portfolio of activities and responsibilities has also expanded considerably since winning the RegioStars Award. For example, we have been managing Lithuania's National Digital Coalition since 2013. We have also formed important alliances with organisations in other EU countries and in 2010 became a member of All Digital, previously known as Telecentre Europe, a Brussels-based association that supports Europeans lacking digital skills.



Vida Tamonienė

Retired former medical professional
and course participant



“ I usually turn on my computer in the evening and once I immerse myself in my favourite subjects or listen to lectures on health, I hardly notice that I have been online for three hours. I can frankly say that I need the internet – it is now a part of my everyday life. ”

Vida, a 77-year-old with a passion for health and politics, attended Langas į ateitį computer literacy classes. She now logs on regularly to keep abreast of the latest news and developments in the medical field and uses social media to communicate with relatives.



Regina Dovidavičiūtė

Vice Chair, Association of Universities of the Third Age/Project coordinator and student, Medard Czobot Third Age University which partnered with Langas į ateitį

Regina, 68, says she often encounters older adults who are afraid to even touch computers and commends Langas į ateitį training initiatives, in particular those focused on online banking.

“ A clear and comprehensive explanation to senior citizens by a bank representative about why seniors should not be afraid to use online banking and how to do it safely, as well as his answers to questions, provided significant practical benefits. ”



Matthew Thomson

Chief executive, Fifteen Cornwall

“ International recognition made our trainees feel special, our staff feel celebrated, and gave our funders and partners additional confidence that their investment and support makes a real difference. ”



A recipe for success

The Fifteen Cornwall Apprenticeship Programme in the UK's Cornwall region is part of a public-private social enterprise that includes a restaurant inspired by celebrity TV chef Jamie Oliver. The programme trains unemployed young people in the skills needed to become professional chefs. They work as apprentices in the restaurant for a year. Matthew Thomson, chief executive of Fifteen Cornwall, describes the boost provided to the programme by winning the 2014 RegioStars Award for 'Inclusive growth'. The category recognises projects that create jobs for young people.

Receiving the RegioStars Award meant a huge amount to everyone building an inclusive economy in Cornwall, including other organisations like ours working to help the most disadvantaged people in the region find employment, education or training.

International recognition made our trainees feel special, our staff feel celebrated, and gave our funders and partners additional confidence that their investment and support makes a real difference.

Going forward, the award opened doors for us. We were introduced to international networks we were not even aware of. Over the next few years, we were invited to contribute to and collaborate with vocational education and training providers across the EU.

The award also attracted media interest from Germany, Finland, Italy, Spain, Lithuania and Japan, among others. I am sure that this has helped the commercial element of our social enterprise by promoting Jamie Oliver's Fifteen Cornwall in new markets, reinforcing the positive feedback of the award.

New youth programme

The Fifteen Cornwall apprenticeship programme has not changed materially since winning the award and we have continued to take on groups of up to 15 disadvantaged young people each year and train them in our busy restaurant kitchen.

We have also taken the programme's successful formula and distilled it into a short community training programme called FoodWorks. This helps people take steps to improve their well-being and work opportunities by developing their practical food skills and personal efficacy.

We crowdfunded FoodWorks to get it going and have now built a Cornwall Food Partnership around it, connecting with community food enterprises to increase opportunities for disadvantaged people through better thinking, growing, cooking and trading activities.

This has led to a successful European Social Fund application for a new project called Food for Change, which is starting this year.

Training the unemployed

This new initiative is part of our efforts over the past 11 years to showcase the best of Cornish food, small and micro food producers and contribute to the local food economy.

We employ 75 people in year-round jobs and have trained almost 200 unemployed, under-educated young people as professional chefs, with 124 completing the whole Fifteen programme. Of these, 80% are still chefs, several running their own kitchens, and over 90% are in stable employment.

We have also raised over GBP 3 million (EUR 3.4 million) for charity, enabling the Cornwall Food Foundation to expand its work developing people, communities and professional skills, inspiring people through food to make meaningful changes in their lives.





Katie Gillmon
Owner and head chef,
Wood and Green

Katie graduated from the Fifteen Cornwall Apprentice Programme in 2011. She now owns her own café in Wadebridge, Cornwall and employs five people.

“ The programme changed my life by giving me direction and a clear focus, which has been something that has stayed with me. It gave me the drive and confidence to go for the things I wanted. ”



Lee Murray
Baker, Da Bara Bakery



“ It totally turned my life around, gave me inspiration and taught me how to keep motivated and set me up with a career for life. Completing the course has given me a future. ”

Lee graduated from the Fifteen Cornwall Apprentice Programme in 2009 and has been working at Da Bara Bakery in Grampound, Cornwall for the last four years.



Giulia Veneziano

Regione Puglia project manager

“ The prize was not just a badge of quality that confirmed the effectiveness of the project, but was also international recognition of how we used EU funding to implement an innovative and creative strategy. ”



Making school cool

The ‘Diritti a scuola’ project in the southern Italian region of Puglia seeks to stop students from failing and dropping out of school to maximise their chances of success in life. The initiative takes a preventive approach, promotes social inclusion and pays particular attention to youth considered most at risk, in particular those with academic problems or from disadvantaged families. In addition to strengthening Italian and mathematics skills through enhanced teaching methods, the project provides counselling, career services and intercultural mediation to students and their families. Project manager Giulia Veneziano recounts how winning a 2015 RegioStars Award in the ‘Inclusive growth’ category was a welcome sign of appreciation.

Receiving the RegioStars Award – a first for Italy – was a major honour that caused much joy and professional satisfaction. For me, the prize was not just a badge of quality that confirmed the effectiveness of the project, it was also international recognition of how we used EU funding to implement an innovative and creative strategy.

The prize created new opportunities for improving primary and secondary education and addressing our ultimate goal of ensuring that young students stay in school and graduate. It has also helped support the process of building an inclusive education system, especially for pupils from unfavourable family or socio-economic backgrounds.

Help desks a hit

Building on our solid experience, we implemented several significant changes to the 2016-2017 renditions of Diritti a scuola. I'd like to highlight the increase in the number of help desks to address the problems faced by those students at risk of social marginalisation. Set up to provide counselling and information, the support has proved hugely popular with more than 50 000 students and 10 000 families using these services.

Recently, in addition to providing psychological support, intercultural mediation and educational advice, the help desks have also sought to raise awareness of the importance of being law-abiding citizens.

Other innovative changes involved enhancing school-to-work orientation courses, developing staff training and information sessions and kicking off a trial programme for teaching English to pre-schoolers in line with our strong belief that children at risk of falling behind need to be targeted and helped early on in life.

Dip in drop-outs

Thanks to Diritti a scuola, the region of Puglia has seen much success in keeping students in school. In fact, between 2004 and 2013, the drop-out rate fell from 30.3% to 19.9%.

Between 2009 and 2014, 3757 projects involving 1473 educational institutions were carried out at a cost of roughly EUR 140 million. More than 200 000 students participated, alongside some 7000 part-time teachers and 3000 part-time administrative and support staff specifically hired to ensure the projects were successful.

In conclusion, the project had an overall positive impact in the schools where it was implemented. The most important result for many students was that it boosted their motivation to learn and got them thinking twice about skipping school.



Giovanna Vernola
Giovanni XXIII Comprehensive
Institute, Adelfia



“ The Diritti a scuola project helped me become a more efficient teacher who could better understand the problems and concerns that keep children from doing well at school. Over time, the youngsters I taught warmed to me and now they almost see me as a friend who has their best interests at heart. It has been rewarding to see their attitudes toward maths soften and their academic performance improve. ”

Giovanna, a maths teacher, began working with the Diritti a scuola project in the 2009/2010 school year and says she has gained a lot from it, both professionally and personally.



Antonio is a recent graduate and attributes his success to the Diritti a scuola project.

Antonio Grassi

“ I just graduated from school and am about to start a plumbing apprenticeship — so fortunately things are going well for me. The guidance I received from a Diritti a scuola counsellor gave me the confidence to believe in myself and helped me identify my talents and aspirations. ”



Wioletta Wilimska

Director, Regional Centre for Social Policy in Krakow, which implemented the Academy of Social Economy Development Project (ASEDP)

“ In implementing the project, we demonstrated that with well-planned actions grounded in experience and cross-sector collaboration, social activities and business can be combined effectively. ”



Social economy stimulus

The Academy of Social Economy Development Project (ASEDP) played an important role in fostering a vibrant community of non-profits and other welfare-focused players in the southern Polish region of Malopolska. Specifically, it sought to create a social economy capable of supporting at-risk individuals such as the unemployed, disabled and homeless. It set up a financial support structure to provide newly established, job-generating cooperatives with subsidies and also created a popular ‘Information and Consultation Point’ where those involved could meet and share know-how. Wioletta Wilimska, the director of the Regional Centre for Social Policy in Krakow, describes how winning the 2016 RegioStars Award for ‘Inclusive growth’ was highly motivating and gratifying.

We see the RegioStars Award as affirmation that the European Commission appreciated the broad scope of our efforts to develop cooperative entrepreneurship and this gave us the motivation to move forward with full confidence. We treat this European accolade not only as recognition of our results but above all as a commitment for the future.

In implementing the project, we demonstrated that with well-planned actions grounded in experience and cross-sector collaboration, social activities and business can be combined effectively.

Results that resonate

Efforts linked to our project have provided assistance to nearly 2000 people and 250 actors in the social economy sphere.

Three hundred new, permanent and high-quality jobs have been created for individuals considered as disadvantaged on the labour market. What's more, the number of social cooperatives in Malopolska has doubled as a result of the project.

Our project's educational and image-shaping actions have elevated the profile of social economy actors and made them more recognisable in their local communities. As a result, young people have started to view work in cooperative businesses, owned and run for the benefit of those using their services, as a viable career path.

Good groundwork

Experience gained from our project, which was completed in 2015, has helped shape the current social economy support system in Malopolska. The Regional Centre for Social Policy in Krakow, which coordinates social economy development actions in the area, is continuing to implement efforts it initiated within ASEDP. By so doing, it is fostering ongoing collaboration within and between sectors and promoting a positive image of social economy players.

Support for socially minded businesses is currently being provided by accredited organisations in all of Malopolska's subregions in the form of business creation initiatives, consulting and, most importantly, grants to further the creation of new jobs and the growth of existing enterprises.





Teresa Misina
President, Social Cooperative
'Równość', based in Krakow

Teresa says that without ASEDP funding, her catering business would not have been able to grow from a staff of seven to one of 20, including 12 with severe disabilities.

“ Development funding for our cooperative has allowed us to boost employment, expand operations, diversify income sources and buy much-needed equipment, enabling us to provide catering services for events of up to 700 people with our own resources. ”



Ilona Majka

Kitchen assistant in a canteen run by the Social Cooperative 'Przystań' in Raciechowice



“ The Przystań cooperative gave me stable employment and brings a lot of satisfaction. It is great to be part of a team whose members want to work together and succeed together. ”

Ilona credits the cooperative with creating jobs in a largely rural area that has limited employment opportunities.



Alejandro Zamora López-Fuensalida

Director General, Murcia's Regional Service for Employment and Training

“ We are also interested in transferring best practices in this area to other vulnerable groups, such as the long-term unemployed, people at high risk of exclusion, or refugees. ”



Skills training for vulnerable women

Spain's Region of Murcia developed its coordination to improve gender-based violence (GBV) survivors' labour market integration and social inclusion to better help vulnerable women find jobs to rebuild their lives. The programme provides GBV survivors with action plans, training and grants to help them find work, supported by regional services, specialist professionals and businesses. Alejandro Zamora López-Funsalida, Director General of Murcia's Regional Service for Employment and Training, explains more about the programme and what the 2017 Award for 'Women empowerment and active participation' means to it.

The Region of Murcia and I are proud of the work done by all the professionals involved in the project. This initiative was developed under a priority employment programme that supports vulnerable groups.

This Award is a great encouragement to everyone committed to the empowerment of women survivors of GBV. It motivates us to continue working in this area and improve their access to the labour market.

We expect the Award to be an incentive to engage public administrations, professionals, companies and society even more in our project. In particular, it makes the programme more trustworthy and attractive for companies. Their role is critical to ensure that women's inclusion in the labour market and society is a comprehensive and sustainable process.

Women-centred process

By June 2016, 3500 women had developed personalised plans for labour market integration under our scheme and nearly 2000 women had been hired. It means that its labour market integration rate has reached 57% — higher than similar projects for other groups.

We have achieved our success by following a woman-centred process. We focus on each woman's needs and circumstances in terms of GBV, personal and social issues. Service provision also follows a gendered approach. All of this allows us to design and implement a set of personalised actions that have a real impact on their lives, especially for their employability.

Actions go beyond training to learn new skills. For example, women might not have the financial resources or social network to ensure children or relatives are cared for if they attend a course. Through this project, they can receive grants for professional care services and for transport if the distance from their home to the training centre is more than 3 km.

Women survivors of GBV also have access to financial support to create their own companies, thanks to the European Social Fund, while for companies there are incentives to hire women on a permanent contract.

Success through cooperation

Coordination between the Regional Service for Employment and Training and the DG Women and Equal Opportunities was key to this project's success. We plan to strengthen this cooperation to design and implement new measures with managers, front-line practitioners and women and to foster collaborative learning groups.

We are also interested in transferring best practices in this area to other vulnerable groups, such as the long-term unemployed, people at high risk of exclusion, or refugees.

Cooperation with other European regions is also a priority. We would like to work with European partners towards a common set of EU standards for services in this field.



Successful job-seeker

Anonymous at her request



“ This programme helped me to restore my self-confidence, be aware of my capabilities and not feel alone. I can now support my family and retake control of my life. ”

This woman found a job through the programme after experiencing gender-based violence. It gave her the independence to build a better life for herself.



Participant in the programme

Anonymous at her request

Following a difficult home life, this woman followed an entrepreneurship programme and counselling programme that are helping her work towards her dreams.

“ I wanted to run my own business, but I was living a situation that did not allow me to feel any enthusiasm. Since I asked for help, I feel much more supported and I am sure I’ll get it. ”



Kathleen Monard

C-mine Synergy Manager

“ We were very honoured to receive the RegioStars Award. The redevelopment of the former Winterslag mine site into a creative hot spot, C-mine, was a major project for Genk – a medium-sized Belgian city – that could never have happened without help from Europe. ”



From vacant to vibrant

The C-mine project in the Belgian city of Genk transformed a former industrial site – an old coal mine – into a trendy destination and breathed new life into a once dilapidated area. Today, the sprawling space houses an incubator for young entrepreneurs and even a movie theatre, and regularly hosts events and exhibitions. C-mine Synergy Manager Kathleen Monard explains how winning the 2010 RegioStars Award in the ‘CityStars: innovative use of brownfield sites in an urban context’ category helped spread the word about the endeavour, drawing droves of tourists.

We were very honoured to receive the RegioStars Award. The redevelopment of the former Winterslag mine site into a creative hot spot, C-mine, was a major project for Genk – a medium-sized Belgian city – that could never have happened without help from Europe.

For us, the award was evidence that smaller cities can carry out meaningful projects and that the design of C-mine was well received internationally. The best proof is the current success of the site, which welcomes a million visitors each year.

On the radar

The RegioStars Award has given us increased exposure. It has been an asset for setting up international partnerships and has led to cultural collaborations, funding, as well as cooperation with tourist associations and international institutions.

The project developed in a number of phases over the last 10 years. The Genk City Council took the lead, working with a mix of partners, including the LUCA School of Arts, the artist Piet Stockmans who has since set up a studio at C-mine, and a number of creative companies. Currently, the C-mine business zone is in full development.

By repurposing the former coal mine, we ensured that an important period in Genk's history remains ingrained in our collective memory. The city's heritage is a source of great pride for the local population, many of whom come from mining families and therefore appreciate our efforts.

Economic engine

The project has created jobs, with 600 people currently working at C-mine. That includes creatives who formerly had very limited options in the city. C-mine has clearly given Genk a cultural boost, as evidenced by the growing number of artists, performers and creative collaborations.

The revamp of the site has also led to the revival of Vennestraat, the former commercial street connected to the mine. Over the past decade, its vacancy rate has dropped from 70% to practically zero, with business owners closely involved in C-mine activities and profiting from their success. Today, with its multitude of restaurants and stores, the street is often buzzing with activity and boasts Mediterranean flair.

In short, C-mine has greatly enhanced what the city of Genk and the province of Limburg have to offer. Visitors now have a reason to linger, often staying overnight and boosting the local economy.





Sabine Neyens
Manager, C-mine Visitor Centre

“ C-mine has spent the last 10 years turning into a leading tourist attraction. The combination of authentic heritage and new innovations such as the C-mine expedition, an underground adventure through the former mining galleries, provides the kind of powerful experience today’s visitors are after. Our strong cultural programme is also a big attraction. The greatest pleasure I get is from seeing the pride of former miners when they show their families and friends around the site. ”



Jasper Olaerts
Manager, C-mine Crib, which provides office space and coaching for creative start-ups



“ As a meeting point and incubator, C-mine Crib provides opportunities for entrepreneurs who are just starting out to develop and grow strong businesses. We are currently near full capacity and expanding our space by another 1600 m². The site exudes a creative vibe that allows young people to feel at home, meaning they are more likely to come to the region to live and work. ”



Maaike Osieck

Head of Communications and Engagement, Amsterdam Smart City

“ The Award gave an even bigger boost to our development. It created exposure among the right stakeholders, leading to exchange of ideas with international partners and several new innovative collaboration projects. ”



A smart city for all

Rapid population growth in urban areas is driving the demand for ideas and solutions that allow cities to expand efficiently and sustainably. Started in 2009, Amsterdam Smart City is an innovation platform where public authorities, businesses, citizens and researchers team up to tackle urban issues such as mobility, digitalisation, energy and waste. Their innovative projects progressively make the city smarter and greener. Maaïke Osieck, Head of Communications and Engagement at Amsterdam Smart City, describes the impact of the 2011 RegioStars Award ‘CityStars: promoting sustainable energy in cities’.

We are very proud of the role Amsterdam Smart City plays in promoting innovative solutions for the challenges we face in urban areas.

The Award gave international recognition to the platform as best practice. We bring together citizens and public and private organisations to develop and test new sustainable technologies and initiatives in the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area. Anyone who has the energy and ambitions to improve the city’s liveability in the city can join, whether they are from companies, governments, knowledge institutions or citizens.

By challenging partners to submit and execute innovative solutions to urban issues, the platform connects the right stakeholders and accelerates this progress. This advances the development of new markets and profits for innovative solutions. Where possible, these solutions are replicated elsewhere in the city.

Regional funding from Europe in our first two years had already been essential to setting up the collaboration. The Award gave an even bigger boost to our development. It created exposure among the right stakeholders, leading to exchange of ideas with international partners and several new innovative collaboration projects.

We evolved from being a new way of creating innovation and sustainability in cities into an innovation community where collaboration is key to making the city more future-proof. We now have 12 core partners and over 300 project partners – and counting – who collaborate to initiate projects. Key partners include the grid manager of Amsterdam, energy suppliers, government authorities, housing corporations, technology start-ups, knowledge institutions, financial institutions and networks.

We are active in six different themes – infrastructure and technology; energy, water and waste; mobility; circular city; governance and education; citizens and living. It is our ambition to create an overview of what is happening in Amsterdam on our themes and to share our knowledge.

To date, the platform has launched more than 190 projects, involving a total of over 300 partners. Two projects funded by the EU's research funding programme have started – TRANSFORM and CITY-ZEN. The community platform website – www.amsterdamsmartcity.com – has over 3500 active members, 60% from the Amsterdam Region and 40% from the rest of the world.

The Amsterdam Smart City way of working also helped Amsterdam to be named as the European Capital of Innovation for 2016-2017, receiving the iCapital Award. Following this, in June 2018 we will host 'WeMakeThe.City', a five-day programme of activities to address urgent everyday challenges in the urban environment.





Joris Jonker
CEO, Quby

Founded in 2004, smart energy device and service company Quby took part in a number of Amsterdam Smart City projects in its early days. Still based in Amsterdam, it now has over 150 employees.

“When we started, it really helped us to work with the ‘big boys’ in the Amsterdam Smart City projects. Now that we are ‘grown-up’ and expanding abroad, we still benefit from the international exposure that we got and the network this gave us.”



John Staunton
Founder, Buzzoek



“Amsterdam Smart City helped us hugely with advice, connections and introductions. The team has opened doors for us and we have been able to contribute towards a smarter and better-connected Amsterdam.”

With support from both Amsterdam Smart City and another programme, Startupbootcamp, start-up Buzzoek developed a low-cost technology system that lets customers of participating retailers use existing chip cards or mobile devices for loyalty programmes.



Claudio Mantero

CIVITAS MIMOSA site manager, representing the city of Funchal, Portugal

“ We believe that respect for the RegioStars Award is an important factor in applying for new sources of funding and has greatly benefited us. ”



Greening Madeira's mobility

The 'Innovative and sustainable mobility in Funchal' (CIVITAS MIMOSA) project focused on promoting a cleaner and more energy-efficient urban transportation system in the capital of Portugal's Madeira archipelago. It was based on recommendations made by CIVITAS, an initiative that helps cities make their public transport more sustainable. As part of the project, operator Horários do Funchal committed to improving the overall level of services offered and implementing the use of environmentally friendly minibuses. CIVITAS MIMOSA site manager Claudio Mantero says winning the 2011 RegioStars Award for 'CityStars: Integrated, clean urban transport projects' was a welcome boost.

When we received the RegioStars Award in 2011, it was still not as well-known as it is today. Nevertheless, I believe the prize elevated the image of our CIVITAS MIMOSA project and subsequently facilitated its implementation. It also served as recognition for the continuous work that Horários do Funchal is doing to improve its services.

I think that awarding the prize to an ultra-peripheral region such as ours was relevant not only for the local community and respective stakeholders but also, and above all, for those who did not expect a project developed in the middle of the Atlantic to be so well designed and developed. In this sense, it was a paradigm shift in the way the work carried out by local authorities in the outermost regions is viewed and assessed.

Regrettably, the public exposure the fleet-renovation project received was not enough to solve the financial constraints we encountered and had to adhere to. In 2011, Madeira faced a financial adjustment programme that blocked access to funding and investment, preventing the project from advancing and being fully implemented. In spite of these difficulties, we still managed to perform a pilot test, show its very promising advantages and present the results.

Respect for RegioStars

Based on the success of this experience we applied for other projects, such as the recently initiated CIVITAS DESTINATIONS, for which we are the coordinators. That endeavour seeks to develop an integrated approach to addressing mobility and tourism at several European destinations, including Funchal. We believe that respect for the RegioStars Award is an important factor in applying for new sources of funding and has greatly benefited us. For example, we referenced the prize in our CIVITAS DESTINATIONS application and believe it was decisive in helping us secure the bid.

The CIVITAS MIMOSA project brought about immediate effects in the region where it was implemented, simultaneously reducing operational costs and increasing customer satisfaction. It also resulted in a more than doubling of the number of reduced-mobility users in the target area, a very significant increase in the number of reduced-mobility users.

Better buses

In attempting to improve our public transportation network, we placed the greatest emphasis on the acquisition and appropriation of certain types of buses, small and medium-sized, which provide service in off-peak hours and on lower-demand routes. Previously seen as innovative, this is now standard practice among transit operators throughout Europe, reflecting the impact of our project.



Joana Sousa



“ Bus trips have become more comfortable and I can now consult an app to check schedules. The creation of new routes has made my commutes so much faster and easier and cut transit times. I hope that Horários do Funchal keeps up its good work. ”

Joana, 25, has used Funchal's public transport system since she was a child and has noticed a substantial improvement in service.



Cátia Prandi

Cátia, 30, is a native of the northern Italian city of Bologna, who moved to Madeira as a postdoctoral researcher in January 2017.

“ I travel frequently and have used public transportation all over the world. I have to say that Horários do Funchal is taking the needs of citizens and tourists very seriously and making a big effort to provide an efficient service. ”



Bertil Nilsson

Project manager (2008-2011), SÖM 'South East Malmö' subproject SÖM Fosite

“ Shining an international spotlight on SÖM was incredibly rewarding for organisers and participants alike. For those involved in the project, the recognition meant a great deal, not least for the young. It also had unforeseen positive consequences. ”



Revitalisation rewards

The SÖM 'South East Malmö' project breathed new life into poor and problem-ridden neighbourhoods in the Swedish city of Malmö by bringing together public, private and non-profit players to promote sustainable development. Subprojects that focused on hot topics like social integration and jobs reduced social exclusion and unemployment and sowed the seeds for further local initiatives to flourish. Bertil Nilsson, project manager for the subproject SÖM Fosie, describes how winning the RegioStars Award for 'CityStars: integrated development of deprived urban areas' in 2012 helped put the initiative on the map and provided opportunities for participants.

Receiving the RegioStars Award was confirmation for us that Malmö is on the right path in terms of working to achieve sustainable urban development, and that it is holding its own well when compared to other, similar initiatives in the rest of Europe. We saw it as affirmation of our strategies and methods, in particular the fact that we created an umbrella project under which we developed several subprojects.

Shining an international spotlight on SÖM was incredibly rewarding for organisers and participants alike. For those involved in the project, the recognition meant a great deal, not least for the young. It also had unforeseen positive consequences. For example, both the RegioStars Award and the project itself have provided opportunities for many of those affected to move on, either via training or work – sometimes in a way that none of us could have believed was possible.

Example for others

The SÖM project has often been used as a reference in the wake of winning the RegioStars Award. For example, when officials decided to implement five area programmes across different parts of Malmö in an effort to improve living conditions, increase security and create more jobs, they turned to us for ideas and know-how. And experience from one of our subprojects, SÖM Fosie, factored into the creation and implementation of a new regional fund project that worked in close cooperation with an area programme in Lindängen and led to the development of a venue where area residents can meet representatives from local government, unemployment services and associations. Taking our project as an example, organisers emphasised integration and ongoing evaluation to ensure its success.

Subproject success

In terms of the impact on our community, I would like to point to our SÖM Fosie subproject, which fostered a citizens' dialogue, encouraged collaboration between schools and area officials, landlords and other stakeholders on development issues, and led to the creation of infrastructure, including a sports field inaugurated in 2011 that is extremely popular and used all year round. It is located in the eco-friendly neighbourhood of Augustenborg, which has developed into a global example of sustainable urban development and received the World Habitat Award.

During the SÖM Fosie project period, close collaboration also took place between the project, the municipal planning office and other parts of the city in order to develop a dialogue process. A large model was built, which was moved between public spaces in the area so that residents could see it and provide feedback. A plan for the entire area was developed and subsequently included in the development of an overview plan for the entire city of Malmö.

A book entitled *A Matter of Trust* was written about SÖM Fosie and has been used in many different ways since it was published, both in everyday life and in the development of new projects. What's more, several of those involved with the SÖM Fosie project continue to work within the area and contribute their valuable experience.





Safija Imsirovic

Safija has worked for many years with a centre in Malmö's Augustenborg neighbourhood, a safe setting where children can spend their afternoons and evenings while their parents study or work.

“ *The SÖM Fosie project improved the area but also benefited me as a person. Previously, there had been a lack of tools and resources but SÖM Fosie made it possible for me to become stronger personally and to invest in my education.* ”



Sadiye Altundal
Sustainable Development Coordinator



“ *Working on the SÖM Fosie project broadened my perspective on life and the challenges facing society, strengthening and humbling me. My experiences shaped my approach as I continued my work in sustainable development.* ”

Sadiye is a Kurdish woman who became involved with the project's work in the city. After the project ended, she was hired by the City of Malmö based on her experience.



Dagmar Buchholz

Who works in the Socially Integrative City unit of Berlin's Senate Department for Urban Development and Housing

“ The prize was also of enormous importance for the standing of Berlin's ‘Soziale Stadt’ (‘Socially Integrative City’) urban development programme behind the initiative since, thanks to its combined focus on construction and social integration, it was portrayed as a model for others to follow. ”



Promoting local empowerment

Neighbourhood Management Berlin seeks to empower residents of marginalised areas in the German capital by encouraging them to have a say in the selection and financing of social projects aimed at improving their everyday lives. This is being done by promoting local community participation in neighbourhood councils specifically set up for the purpose. The goal is to foster solidarity among residents and make them feel they can make a difference. Since kicking off in 1999, activities have expanded to include education and job support in addition to social and ethnic integration. Dagmar Buchholz, who works in the Socially Integrative City unit of Berlin's Senate Department for Urban Development and Housing, describes how winning the 2013 'CityStars: integrated approaches to sustainable urban development' RegioStars Award was fulfilling on multiple fronts.

The RegioStars Award was special in many ways for Neighbourhood Management Berlin. For one, Berlin was the first German city to receive the honour. Also, the prize did not just focus on one project alone but instead acknowledged the collective work of many key players involved in the initiative, which helped foster a great sense of shared achievement.

We viewed the RegioStars Award, which we received almost 15 years after we started, as confirmation that by working in disadvantaged areas we were on the right track all along. The prize was also of enormous importance for the standing of Berlin's 'Soziale Stadt' ('Socially Integrative City') urban development programme behind the initiative since, thanks to its combined focus on construction and social integration, it was portrayed as a model for others to follow.

Communication is key

A defining characteristic of Neighbourhood Management Berlin is that it promotes interactions and exchanges of the highest quality. Citizens discuss, deliberate and collectively make decisions together with representatives from social and cultural institutions and associations, as well as the local business community, about the development of their neighbourhood. The goal is to expand this success strategy to other areas within the municipality.

Spreading the word

Effective neighbourhood management in Berlin is an evolving process. Since receiving the award in 2013, efforts have been under way to encourage citizens, with the support of local regulatory structures, to coordinate amongst themselves. Meanwhile, four new neighbourhood management areas have been added to the programme, while three others were enlarged. What's more, the ways in which the public can participate is to be further expanded and adapted to the different needs and interests of the residents in question.

We believe the impact of the Neighbourhood Management initiative extends beyond empowering local communities and has brought about fundamental change to political understanding and administrative management in the greater Berlin area.



Rima El-Said

Member of the Neighbourhood
Council for the Brunnen Quarter,
Ackerstraße



Rima, born in Beirut, is a pharmacist and mother of four. She was awarded a prize in 2012 for her neighbourly outreach efforts.

“ As neighbourhood councillor I value making direct contact with families. In addition, I’ve taken over sponsorship for various projects. My favourite is the Family Centre Wattstraße, which is a popular meeting place for all generations and has enriched our area. Its goal is to improve opportunities for children from educationally deprived families. ”



Franziska Zeisig

A Berlin native, Franziska is a member of the Körnerpark Neighbourhood Council where she lives with her child and partner. Her experience enabled her to become a neighbourhood coordinator for a public housing company.

“ In the Neighbourhood Council I learned a lot about neighbourhood management and participation in general, about the infrastructure and needs of my neighbourhood and, of course, I got to know many people who all wanted to bring about positive change. The council is a good way to connect with others and make a difference. ”



Tomasz Labuda

Vice president and project manager at the Trolleybus Transport Company

“The RegioStars Award has given credibility to the importance of efficient and sustainable transport solutions, allowing us to continue to confidently build upon the successful results of the project.”



Planet-friendly public transport

The Polish Ecological Transport project overhauled the public transportation system in the city of Gdynia and its surroundings, making it more sustainable and user-friendly. At its core was a major upgrade of the city's trolleybuses, transforming them into a modern, high-quality and eco-friendly fleet. The project improved the quality of life for citizens thanks to more trolleybus lines, shorter travel times and increased safety and comfort. Project manager Tomasz Labuda says winning the 2014 RegioStars Award in the 'CityStars: Investment in sustainable urban public transport' category confirmed his team's commitment to greening transport.

The RegioStars Award was an important symbol of European recognition for all partners in the project, including the trolleybus operator, the city of Gdynia and the Pomeranian region at large. This reaffirmed our commitment to developing sustainable transport systems and reassured us that our objectives were in line with EU priorities.

The project led to improved traffic flow, shorter journeys and local economic benefits. Moreover, the project's new vehicles improved safety and comfort for both drivers and travellers, resulting in fewer accidents and increased use of public transport in the area.

Driving the economy

The project was testament to the fact that an increase in mobility leads to an uptick in work and educational opportunities, thereby fostering local economic development and job creation. More trolley bus lines combined with more detailed and accurate travel information, as well as a website and a search engine for consulting routes and timetables, have made a huge contribution to the efficiency and use of the transport system.

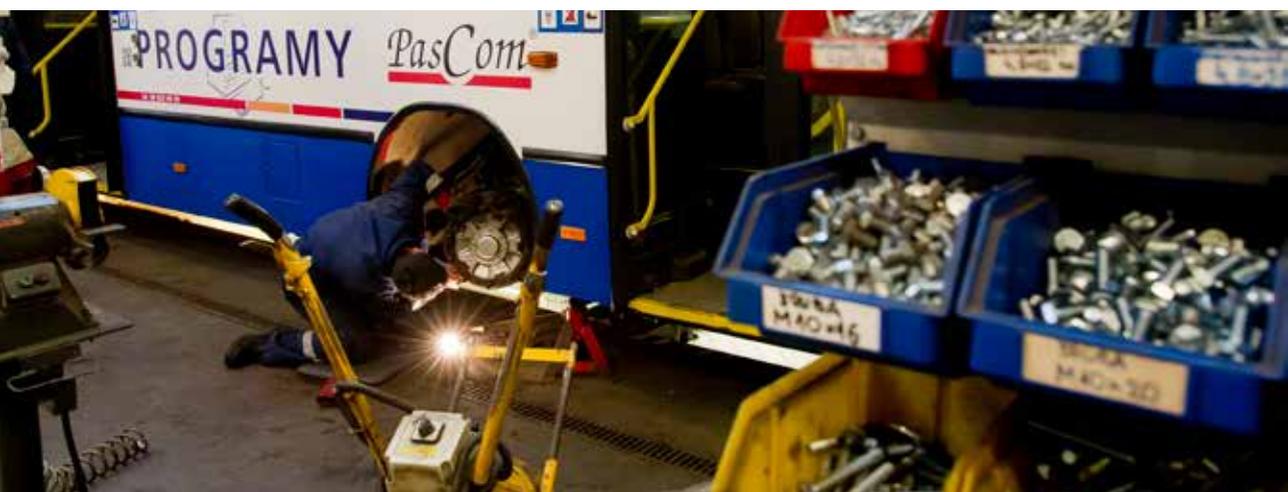
The project invested in 28 modern, low-floor trolleybuses with air conditioning and backup battery power (allowing for emergency off-wire routes) for Gdynia. Improving traffic flow while providing quieter transport solutions, the new fleet has cut energy consumption by 20% and, consequently, resulted in less air pollution. This has improved the quality of life of citizens even further while simultaneously contributing to climate change mitigation and energy efficiency objectives.

Hybrid future

The RegioStars Award has given credibility to the importance of efficient and sustainable transport solutions, allowing us to continue to confidently build upon the successful results of our project.

In 2015, the company purchased two more trolley hybrids with a more sophisticated alternative drive, allowing for regular off-wire routes, co-financed by the EU CIVITAS DYN@MO project. On top of this, we joined another project funded by the EU's Horizon 2020 programme that year, which aimed to further enhance the electric public transport infrastructure and identify areas that could be better served by new battery-powered trolleybuses.

These sustainable solutions and improvements have built upon the original project's results. Such progress would not have been possible without the project's initial success – as recognised by the RegioStars Award – which we are still very proud of today.





Tomasz, a local student, calls himself a Gdynia public transport enthusiast.

Tomasz Adamkiewicz
Trolleybus user

“As a resident of Gdynia, I frequently use the trolley buses. They make travel fast, simple and comfortable, depart frequently and have convenient routes. With good connections to the city centre and beyond, I can easily get wherever I want. Like many young people, I also appreciate the sustainability aspect. It feels good to know that I’m not contributing to pollution when I travel by trolleybus. I can’t imagine Gdynia without its trolleybuses.”



Michał Podgórnjak
Trolleybus driver



“Driving these modern trolleybuses is a real pleasure. I have driven many trolleybus types in the past, and the difference is enormous. There is air conditioning in the passenger space and driver’s cabin, and drivers feel much safer with the integrated surveillance systems.”

Michał is a driver for the Trolleybus Transport Company (PKT), Gdynia.



Pablo Manuel Rivera Búa

Executive manager, European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation Eurocity of Chaves-Verín

“ Our project has demonstrated that the institutional, economic, social, cultural and environmental integration of two border towns is perfectly doable and comes with major benefits for the communities concerned. ”



Cross-border communities

The Eurocity of Chaves-Verín initiative links the neighbouring cities of Chaves in northern Portugal and Verín across the border in Spain through a series of joint programmes in areas such as culture, tourism, trade, education, research and social policy. This gives the local communities access to shared facilities and services while fostering deeper territorial cooperation and social cohesion. Executive Manager Pablo Manuel Rivera Búa describes how winning the 2015 RegioStars Award in the ‘CityStars: transforming cities for future challenges’ category was extremely motivating and has elevated the project’s international profile.

The RegioStars Award has meant prestigious recognition for our work aimed at building a better Europe across borders. For me personally, as a passionate Europhile and dedicated public servant, taking part in this project and seeing it succeed has been very gratifying.

The Award has given us greater visibility and influence, as well as a stronger voice in Europe. It has enabled us to establish some important new partnerships and become members of international networks in a move we see as key to spreading the word about our efforts and sharing best practices with others. The recognition of our work has also boosted our motivation and determination to become the European Union’s leading cross-border cooperation body.

New initiatives

Since winning the Award, we have set the 'Eurocity 2020' strategy in motion with the goal of making Chaves-Verín more inclusive, sustainable and intelligent. With the help of the Spain-Portugal 2014-2020 Interreg programme, financed by the European Regional Development Fund, we are implementing a series of initiatives focusing on employment, training, mobility, tourism, the environment and innovation – to name just a few.

In short, our work is constantly evolving as we strive to achieve full economic and social cohesion within our cross-border region.

Benefits on both sides

Our project has demonstrated that the institutional, economic, social, cultural and environmental integration of two border towns is perfectly doable and comes with major benefits for the communities concerned.

In our case in particular, thanks to joint planning and management, those interested can sign up for a 'Eurocitizen' card that gives access to amenities and services on both sides of the border. People can also consult a monthly agenda of events and take part in a wide range of joint cultural, sports and training activities.

The creation of a green corridor connecting the two towns and the promotion of Chaves-Verín as a unique tourist destination are further examples of how our initiative has improved both the quality of life within our communities and the competitiveness of the area as a whole.

From a logistical point of view, the creation of a single legal entity known as the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation has improved our planning and is helping us manage the resources of both cities more efficiently.



Susana Boo Diéguez
Resident of the Spanish city of Verín
who has been using the Eurocitizen
card for five years



“ The Eurocitizen card symbolises European values and the feeling of belonging to one single territory, the Chaves-Verín Eurocity! A city that is larger, more attractive, more modern, more European. ”



Manuel Mateus
Resident of the Portuguese city of
Chaves who regularly uses a Eurocity
rehearsal space in Verín

“ In Chaves, there is no space like it, or that allows me to pursue my hobby and passion —music. I hope that initiatives like this will continue and that more opportunities will be created for young people in order to combat the rural exodus. ”



Ewa Pielak

Deputy Director at Gdańsk Urban Development Agency, City of Gdańsk

“ The RegioStars Award helped Gdańsk’s municipal authorities earn more public trust – and that is our greatest reward. ”



Resident-led urban renewal

The Lower Town of Gdańsk has historically been one of the most neglected neighbourhoods in the Polish city. But thanks to an EU-funded revitalisation project incorporating residents' needs and expectations, the district is developing into a more pleasant – and even fashionable – place to live. Some of its dilapidated buildings have been converted into community meeting places – one was turned into an art facility while another is now a student centre. Project coordinator Ewa Pielak, Deputy Director at Gdańsk Urban Development Agency, City of Gdańsk, says winning the 2016 RegioStars 'CityStars: innovative solutions for sustainable urban development' Award helped authorities earn the public's trust.

We saw receiving the RegioStars Award as confirmation that we carried out a successful revitalisation project. It strengthened our belief that our actions are effective and can produce concrete, positive results. The RegioStars Award helped Gdańsk's municipal authorities earn more public trust – and that is our greatest reward.

The award ceremony itself was a unique experience and welcome recognition for the entire team, which had worked on the project's implementation for five years.

Attention grabber

Thanks to the RegioStars Award, our revitalisation efforts have attracted interest from far afield. We have received countless enquiries about good practices, as well as invitations to present the project. Local government representatives and companies carrying out similar efforts have come from all over Poland to learn from us.

The project has also attracted investors. Local authorities in Gdańsk launched the project under a public-private partnership aimed at restoring historic buildings, public spaces, as well as sports and leisure facilities. As many as 10 potential investors were keen to participate, reflecting the endeavour's draw and potential. Further revitalisation work is planned, with funding already secured.

From forgotten to fashionable

Implementation of the project made Lower Town residents realise that change is possible and that they can have a say and impact. As investment and social activities were being rolled out, civic engagement and awareness of the neighbourhood's identity grew steadily. People are now more eager to take part in local events, helping to foster a sense of community.

The area has quickly become a fashionable place of live, and real-estate developers are beginning to express interest in housing projects. It is also hard to miss the springing up of local businesses and bottom-up initiatives. Prime examples include new eateries and local events such as a food court and the FETA street theatre festival.





Elżbieta Woroniecka
Resident of Lower City, Gdańsk

Elżbieta Woroniecka is secretary of the Storytellers of the History of the Lower Town of Gdańsk Association.

“Some of the most visible results of the Lower Town revitalisation project are bright lighting and benches. People have begun going out to sit on them and chat with each other. I often take a rest on one of these benches myself.”



Jacek Górski
Resident of Lower City, Gdańsk



“As a lifetime local resident, it is wonderful to see the revamped roads, new sidewalks and young trees in the Lower Town. It has also been impressive to see many local organisations and residents enthusiastically join in this revitalisation process which has enriched the space we call home and even led to new or strengthened friendships.”

Jacek Górski has lived in the Lower Town since birth and is the president of an association aimed at keeping the area's history alive. He praises the engagement of his neighbours in helping to bring about urban renewal.



Bettina Horster

Director of Business Development, VIVA! Software

“ This Award helps us to convince communities, nursing care services, health insurance companies, housing associations and – most importantly – senior citizens and their relatives that smart technology can be a big part of their solution. ”



Smart, secure living for seniors

The German cities of Dortmund, Duisburg and Arnsberg are testing new assisted-living technologies that enable the elderly to live independently at home for as long as is possible, secure in the knowledge that medical care and other assistance are never too far away. Smart Service Provider's technology platform gathers data from various sensors in a person's home, recognises health issues from the information gathered in real time, detects emergencies and provides day-to-day living assistance. Bettina Horster, Director of business development at project coordinator VIVAI Software, says winning the 2017 RegioStars Award for 'CityStars: cities in digital transition' helps to highlight an important healthcare issue for older people.

We are proud and happy to win our category. I hope we can inspire other regions. Demographic change is the biggest challenge for communities now. As people are getting older, costs are rising yet fewer care staff are available. At the same time, technology to support the elderly has been a neglected area. It is fantastic that this Award has gone to this formerly 'unloved' topic.

It helps us to convince communities, nursing care services, health insurance companies, housing associations and – most importantly – senior citizens and their relatives that smart technology can be a big part of their solution.

It allows elderly people to stay autonomous for longer in their own homes – and they welcome the support. It reassures relatives because the sensors and data tell them the state of their relative's health. Smart technology also saves costs for local authorities and provides data they can use to plan for nursing homes more effectively.

Tech-led independence

The system integrates remote-assistance functions from e-health, smart homes, ambient-assisted living technology, emergency call systems and nursing services. For example, a skin patch monitors hydration levels. A sensor on weighing scales evaluates changes and one on the ceiling detects falls.

Information from these sensors is analysed in one data pool in a single IoT platform – a major innovation. It provides monitoring to track people's health, evaluates data to predict when they need care and calls for emergency assistance if needed. It can also be connected to a drug dispenser so people do not forget their medication.

To maintain user autonomy, the system uses a natural language assistant for communication. Users can also choose which services they want and how providers access their personal data.

Business innovation

Previous ambient-assisted living technology projects have had poor success. For business models to be sustainable, they need to share costs and revenues fairly, which is why we also developed our 'fair share' model.

Our next step is to partner with communities with an ageing population to help them find solutions. We will also look for more partners to enhance our service, such as specialist caterers or medical-device manufacturers.

Internationalisation is another goal. In many countries younger people travel away to work but are still concerned about their parents' health. With our system, children can take care of their loved ones from far away and have peace of mind.



Rolf Kathagen, 71
Resident of Dortmund Hombruch



“ Sometimes I just forget to drink and particularly in summer this is dangerous. I live alone in my apartment and when I am reminded that I have to drink something, it helps me a lot. ”

Rolf has a medical condition that limits his ability to care for himself. Smart technology can help him live independently at home.



Erika and Cord Ludewig
(both over 80)

Residents of Dispen
am Teutoburger Wald

Erika and Cord still live together in their own home. The Smart Service Power platform gives them peace of mind while supporting their quality of life.

“ Fall detection is very important to us. In our circle of friends, a lady fell and was not found for hours. We are glad that we have more security in our home. It is as safe as living in a senior home but in our own place. ”



Ioannis Firmpass

General Director, National Coordination Authority for ESIF,
Greek Ministry of Economy & Development

“ Both the prize and the public’s positive response to our communication campaign showed us that striving for originality and creativity pays off. Being people-focused, friendly and light on figures and statistics resonated with our audience, as did the infusion of humour and optimism. ”



Making policy people-friendly

The ‘Do you know about ESPA?’ TV spot was conceived by the Greek Ministry of Economy and succeeded in raising the public’s awareness of how the European Union’s Cohesion Policy positively impacts lives of ordinary citizens. People-focused, light-hearted and featuring a famous Greek actor, it was shown on public channels and sparked interest and requests for more information. Project manager Ioannis Firmpas, general director of the Ministry of Economy’s National Coordination Authority for European Structural and Investment Funds, says winning the 2009 RegioStars Award in the ‘Audiovisual spot or programme highlighting the contribution of Cohesion Policy’ was a welcome acknowledgment.

We saw receiving the RegioStars Award as special recognition of our attempts to inform the public about EU-funded projects in an engaging and memorable manner, as well as an acknowledgement that we were on the right track and reaching our communication targets.

Both the prize and the public’s positive response to our communication campaign showed us that striving for originality and creativity pays off. Being people-focused, friendly and light on figures and statistics resonated with our audience, as did the infusion of humour and optimism. Due to the positive feedback, we used the same approach in follow-up campaigns.

EU in everyday life

One of the assets of the campaign was that it succeeded in making the point that EU Cohesion Policy has a tangible presence in daily life, be it through public infrastructure or opportunities for entrepreneurs, students and the unemployed.

Research that was conducted after the campaign showed high nationwide rates of recognition for ESPA – an acronym for the National Strategic Reference Framework that was largely established as a brand name due to the campaign. In fact, it took on a very clear, distinct and positive meaning for EU-funded projects.

Tell me more

Moreover, the campaign raised interest, expectations and a desire for further information on Cohesion Policy programmes, with 79% of people surveyed in its aftermath responding with ‘yes’ and ‘probably yes’ compared to 20% who claimed the opposite.

The TV campaign was boosted by several additional communications efforts including a 15-minute video, roadshows, events and the launch of a website. All played a decisive part in contributing to Cohesion Policy understanding.





Featuring popular local actor Thodoris Atheridis dashing through Greek streets on a scooter made the TV spot an attention-grabber that capitalised on face recognition to turn an abstract concept into something fun and intriguing.



Evi Panagiotakopoulou
Head of Unit C –
Communication & Information

Evi Panagiotakopoulou works in the Ministry of Economy and Development. She credits the success of the ESPA spot to its humorous approach which, at the time, was unconventional for a public sector communications campaign.

“ This campaign stood out in a people-focused, funny and friendly way, encouraging the public to get to know ESPA and its projects. Although it’s been more than eight years I still find people quoting its slogan, which is evidence of its lasting effect. ”



Kristina Aidietienė

Chief Specialist at the EU Investment Communication Division
at Lithuania's Ministry of Finance

“ We are proud that we created such a good website ... and that we were one of the first EU countries to make this kind of information available in this way. The RegioStars Award ... obliged us to improve the website's quality, reliability and availability. ”

<http://www.esparama.lt/titulinis>



Online guide to EU assistance

The ES Parama information portal ('ES Investicijos' for 2014-2020 funding) provides Lithuanian applicants and beneficiaries, public institutions, the media and the general public with a full guide to EU regional funding. It covers funding options, procedures, documents, project details, spending data and analysis of impacts. Kristina Aidietienė, Chief Specialist at the EU Investment Communication Division at Lithuania's Ministry of Finance describes how the 2010 RegioStars Award for 'Information and communication (web sites)' helped the site attract more people interested in access to EU funding.

Our website was the first major project in Lithuania to collect and process all the information related to the 2007-2013 EU funding in our country. An overview of structural assistance to Lithuania presents our operational programmes, evaluates progress and lists the various funds available, with a news section for the latest information. Facts and figures cover applications, awards of funds and payments. Visitors can then dig deeper into spending on individual funded projects, along with a description of each one and its aims.

Project managers have all the information they need – forms, guides for the application process and to manage their project's finances and links to useful websites. There is also a section showing the impact of funded projects on Lithuania's economy, jobs and quality of life, with links to EU evaluations and official agreements. We wanted to make the funding as transparent as possible!

It was a challenge to place the information on one website and make it user-friendly for beneficiaries, applicants, students, journalists and other user groups. We are proud that we created such a good website – you can see it at www.esparama.lt – and that we were one of the first EU countries to make this kind of information available in this way.

The RegioStars Award obliged us to improve the website's quality, reliability and availability. We have since upgraded it to make it even more user-friendly. There is now a new website for the 2014-2020 EU funding period in Lithuania – www.esinvesticijos.lt. This is a continuation of the previous website but now has more advanced technologies that give real-time data on project implementation. This data includes online statistics, tracks of the evaluation process and much more. Building on the popularity of ES Parama, the new portal has over 10000 views per month and around 4000 regular visitors.

These two websites have had a big impact on the EU's visibility and on our country's development. Visitors know that when they come to these, they can quickly find accurate information, news, statistics, documents and everything else they need. Basic information on both websites is in English, as well as Lithuanian, to make them as accessible as possible.

Thanks to these websites, the EU and Lithuania's public authorities are much more transparent. Everyone, including the media, can see exactly where spending goes and why we have chosen some projects over others. They help citizens understand what the EU is doing here, make it easier for people to follow through projects, and create much more trust in public institutions.





Indrė Dagilienė

Chief Officer, Research Foundation at
the Research Council of Lithuania

One of the tasks of Indrė's team
is to help researchers apply for
EU funds to develop their skills.

*“ This website helps us to encourage
our community to implement
ambitious long-term projects, develop
new topical themes and competitively
integrate into the European and
global environment. ”*



Asta Slapšienė

Head of Marketing Division, UAB
Investicijų ir verslo garantijos
(INVEGA)



*“ This website is a clear, focused,
easy-to-use guide for people who are
looking for and finding out about EU
Structural and Investment Funds.
It really helps them access vital support
for their growth. ”*

Private company INVEGA helps
small- and medium-sized
enterprises access public and
private financing. EU funds are
an important investment source
for many of their clients.



Andrea Porteiro

President of the Society for Environmental Management and Nature Conservation – Azorina, S.A.

“ The prize helped publicise the new visitors’ centre, which was built underground to help preserve the natural landscape and educates tourists about the 1957/58 eruption of the nearby Capelinhos Volcano and the formation of our archipelago. It has since attracted interest from around the world. ”



Telling a volcanic tale

The Capelinhos Volcano Interpretation Centre is located on the island of Faial in Portugal's Azores archipelago. With the support of EU funding, authorities constructed the state-of-the-art facility with the aim of creating a sustainable tourist destination at the site of the Capelinhos Lighthouse. Its focus is the 1957/58 eruption of the Capelinhos Volcano, as well as how the Azores came into being. Andrea Porteiro, president of the Society for Environmental Management and Nature Conservation – Azorina, S.A., explains how winning the 2011 RegioStars Award in the 'Information and communication theme – promotional photo of a co-funded project' category raised the initiative's profile and attracted interest from around the globe.

Winning the RegioStars Award meant recognition of all the combined efforts that made this project possible. Receiving this honour strengthened our resolve to further develop the site of the Capelinhos Lighthouse as a must-see historical and environmentally sustainable tourist attraction. The prize helped publicise the new visitors' centre, which was built underground to help preserve the surrounding natural landscape and educates tourists about the 1957/58 eruption of the nearby Capelinhos Volcano and the formation of our archipelago. It has since attracted interest from around the world - RegioStars certainly helped spread the word about this project beyond our borders.

We managed to meet an environmental challenge by constructing the Capelinhos Volcano Interpretation Centre in an area composed of volcanic ash that is young and unstable. The main environmental challenge going forward is to ensure conditions that let the landscape evolve naturally despite the existence of an underground structure.

Uptick in tourists

In terms of tourism, the revamped site has exceeded expectations, with more visitors headed our way every year. We welcomed over 35 000 in 2016 - that's more than twice the population of Faial Island, which is about 15 000! It shows how creating this type of infrastructure is extremely important for customer satisfaction and results in a more memorable and informative visit. The uptick in tourists has had a direct impact on the economic and cultural growth of the local area of Capelo, creating 16 jobs at the centre and encouraging visitors to extend their stays on the island. This has resulted in additional revenue for hotels and other area accommodations, as well as tour operators and local guides.

Educating visitors and locals alike

In planning and executing the visitors' centre project we focused on three pillars: environmental and scientific education; maintaining close contact with the local community; and promoting the Azores as a tourist destination.

As part of a regional education programme, the visitors' centre has welcomed 40% of the island's students, exposing our youngest generation to our island's rich heritage and history.



Amparo Pérez



“ The Capelinhos Volcano Interpretation Centre has given a completely new meaning to visiting this rural area, transforming the experience into something exceptional. It is a unique source of knowledge that, together with the volcanic landscape, has influenced the life and economy of this island in a very positive, direct way. ”

Amparo is a rural tourism housing manager and says the centre has made a world of difference in attracting visitors.



Lara Duarte

Lara is a local teacher who says the centre has enriched her students' educational experience.

“ The Capelinhos Volcano Interpretation Centre's exhibitions, as well as the activities and tours offered by its staff, enable students to actively participate and learn about their island and its importance in a global context while stimulating curiosity and creativity. ”



Izabela Łokić

Deputy director of the Regional Development Department at the Marshal Office
of Poland's Podlaskie region

“ We beat projects from regions with more resources, making us realise that it doesn't matter where you're from. What's important is what you're able to achieve. Where there's a will, there's a way. And receiving a RegioStars Award made us want to achieve even more. ”



Information at your fingertips

A user-friendly website developed by Poland's Podlaskie province detailing local EU-funded projects has become an effective communication tool showcasing positive EU-driven regional change and promoting transparency. With a few clicks on an interactive map at the heart of the portal, visitors can quickly locate relevant facts and figures about projects in their neighbourhoods and further afield. Replete with inviting photos and animations, the site also highlights best practices and is regularly used by local officials and journalists. Izabela Łokić, deputy director of the Regional Development Department in the Podlaskie region's Marshal Office, says winning the 2012 RegioStars Award in the 'Information and communication: presenting project data' category was a highly motivating honour.

We felt enormous pride and satisfaction receiving a RegioStars Award. The www.podlaskiedotacje.pl website was the only Polish finalist among 24 projects nominated! To do well in such a prestigious competition was great recognition – and also motivated us. We beat projects from regions with more resources, making us realise that it doesn't matter where you're from. What's important is what you're able to achieve. Where there's a will, there's a way. And receiving such an award made us want to achieve even more.

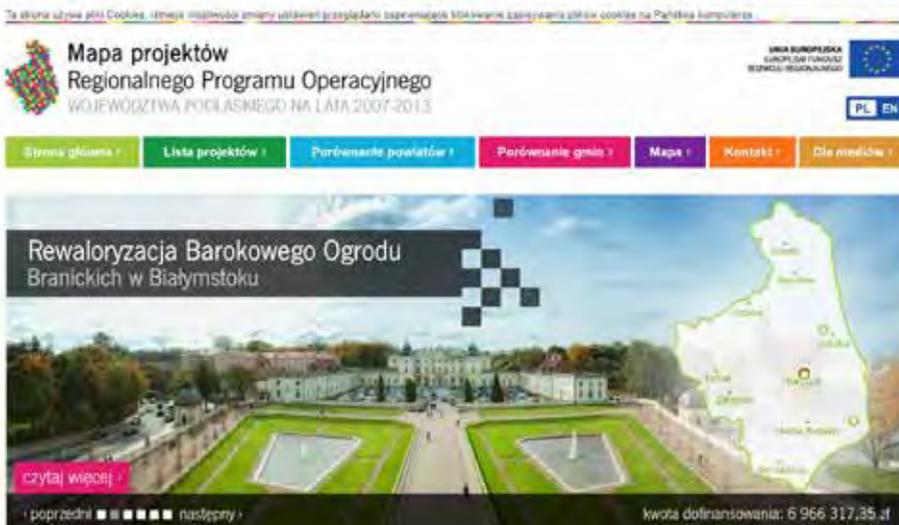
Model for others

Winning the RegioStars Award was good publicity for us and helped get the word out about our website. Major Polish media reported on the initiative after we got the prize, resulting in many new users. The project became an inspiration for others, with similar portals appearing in other regions. But ours was the first of its kind and served as a model. That really makes us happy. We continue to ensure that the site remains interactive and inviting. In addition to descriptions, users can also check out photos and multimedia presentations about the projects, with some even accompanied by short radio broadcasts.

Transparency

In coming up with the project, we wanted to find an interesting way to show local inhabitants how the region is changing thanks to EU subsidies. So that everyone can see for themselves that EU funds are disbursed in a transparent manner. I think it's fair to say that we have successfully achieved both these goals.

The site – which also contains an archive of good practices – is frequently used by reporters, local government officials and representatives of non-governmental organisations. They all commend its functionality and stress that it makes their jobs a lot easier since they have access to a wide array of information at their fingertips.





Magdalena Perkowska-Szymanowicz

Acting director of the Enterprise Centre in the town of Łapy

Magdalena often uses the portal for work to quickly look up details on projects.

“ It is very user-friendly, clear and transparent. What’s more, the descriptions of the projects are very interesting and frequently an inspiration for new investments. This is a very practical portal for anyone interested in EU projects and seeking reliable information. ”



Maryla Pawlak-Żalikowska

Reporter for Gazeta Współczesna,
Kurier Poranny and
<http://www.podlaskie.strefabiznesu.pl>



“ How and to what extent local governments and businesses are using European funds has for several years now been key for reporters such as myself covering economic issues. In this respect, the portal has become an invaluable support tool. ”

Maryla praises the portal’s ease of use and wealth of information.



Svetlana Beniušienė

Project manager

“ The award acted as a certificate of our project’s quality. It proved that our methods for increasing deaf people’s employment worked. ”



Deaf jobseekers wanted

The Lithuanian project ‘Towards Work – development of mediation services in recruiting people with hearing disabilities’ helped the hearing-impaired find work. It raised awareness in society of deaf people’s employment potential, provided specialised career counsellors in job centres and solved problems with employers. The project won the 2013 ‘Information and communication: promoting EU regional policy with short videos’ RegioStars Award for its videos promoting the employment value of deaf people. Project manager Svetlana Beniušienė explains how the prize increased the project’s impact.

The project was something we are very proud of. Out of the over 600 people with hearing impairments involved in the project, more than 400 found jobs. We also helped the Lithuanian general public understand that deaf people are part of society, just like everyone else, and that a little extra attention can go a long way in improving communication and breaking down stereotypes. We were delighted with these outcomes and happy to see how much they meant to our beneficiaries.

For us, the RegioStars Award was an important acknowledgement of all the hard work that everyone put into the project. It was a high-level recognition of our achievements and an honour to learn that we were among the best in Europe.

Raising awareness

Our videos were part of the project's wider campaign to change attitudes and solve practical problems that prevent deaf people from finding a job. The award created wider awareness in Lithuania of the problem of deaf employment and of what we were doing, and both were finally recognised at the higher levels of our public institutions.

Another important impact was that the award acted as a certificate of our project's quality. It proved that our methods for increasing deaf people's employment worked. Not only did we make employers more appreciative of the value of deaf employees, we actively supported deaf jobseekers. In job centres, specially trained recruitment agents – our 'employment mediators' – helped them identify the right opportunities. After hearing-impaired individuals found jobs, the mediators helped solve any problems that came up in their first six months in the workplace.

Wider impact

This mediation-oriented approach has had a wider impact. Today, the active employment-support methods we created are being applied by job centres across the country. They continue to be targeted at people with disabilities, and are now being used to help long-term unemployed job-seekers.

The national employment system is changing drastically in our country. We are pleased that our project's achievements contributed to this. In general, Lithuania's national labour exchange services are now oriented to active employment support that focuses far more on beneficiaries and their needs than on the job search process.

This improvement justifies the cost of our project. Others following similar approaches had a significant influence on improving employment and other services in Lithuania.

Attitudes toward deaf employees also underwent a big change. Deaf people are now more commonly seen as equal and skilled individuals, like everyone else, making it easier for them to find employment.





Kęstutis Gumbrys
Assistant sales manager, Rimi Baltic Ltd

Through this project, Kęstutis found a job ten years ago with Rimi Baltic Ltd, a supermarket and hypermarket chain operating in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

“ Participation in this project is why I am here today. It helped me show my talents and skills to this company and become employed. Today I am still in the same company, but more professional and experienced. ”



Virginija Kairienė
Director, UAB “Pakvil”



“ This project helped us discover deaf people as potential employees. Its personal job coach-sign language interpreter helped us set up a strong link with our deaf employees to address problems quickly and find the best solutions for both sides. ”

Furniture retailer Pakvil employs around 30 people, some of whom found work with the company through this project. The company’s director explains how the project supported their employment.



Sergejus Muravjovas

Executive director, Transparency International Lithuania

“ *The Award helped us get more attention to a very simple idea – that it is easy to lead by example. A decision to be transparent about how you use public funds also saves time down the road, inspires your colleagues and sends the right message to the local community.* ”

<http://jonvabaliai.lt/>



Shining a light on EU funding

The website Jonvabaliai – “fireflies” in English – shows how EU financing for projects in Lithuania was managed and spent. Projects supported by EU Structural Funds could supply the site with finance and management information, which was then published in an accessible, easy-to-understand format. It contributed to better understanding of how EU funds are allocated. Project manager Sergejus Muravjovas, executive director of Transparency International Lithuania, one of the organisations that started the initiative, describes how the 2016 RegioStars Award for ‘Effective management’ was welcome recognition for a group effort to promote openness.

It meant a lot to receive this award because it was such a collective effort. From the very beginning, Transparency Initiative Jonvabaliai was a project uniting different organisations across Lithuania to shed more light on how EU funds are spent. The fact that we succeeded in assembling a large community of people who believed in the idea was a dream come true. And then came the RegioStars Award!

The prize helped us draw more attention to a very simple idea – that it is easy to lead by example. A decision to be transparent about how you use public funds also saves time down the road, inspires your colleagues and sends the right message to the local community.

Fireflies ranking system

Our idea was simple. We published a map of Lithuania featuring all projects funded by the EU Structural Funds. Visitors could click on a dot representing a project to find out how much information they shared on how they spent the money. Data covered areas like project results, public procurement, partner companies' shareholders, anti-corruption procedures and risk management.

Project managers provided this information on a voluntary basis using an online form structured by level of detail so they could choose how much they wanted to disclose. A 'transparency fireflies' ranking system gave visitors a quick overview of a project's openness. The more detail a project provided, the more fireflies it received – the maximum was three. Visitors could quickly search our database to find out which projects were the most transparent.

Shift in public perception

The outcomes of the initiative are clear. Public interest exceeded all our expectations. When we launched the website in September 2014, we expected about 50 projects to register. Instead, over 630 projects shared information – covering EUR 655.7 million of funding in total – and 35 500 unique users visited the site. People continued to call us to inquire about our initiative for months after it ended in June 2015. It was such a success that we have kept Jonvabalai.lt online – you can still access the site today.

In many cases, it helped organisations tell the public what they do with EU funds in a simple and easy-to-understand manner.

Nowadays, it always warms my heart when I visit an organisation that proudly tells all its visitors it was a member of the transparency initiative. The Jonvabalai sign continues to serve as a reminder that transparency matters and is a good thing.

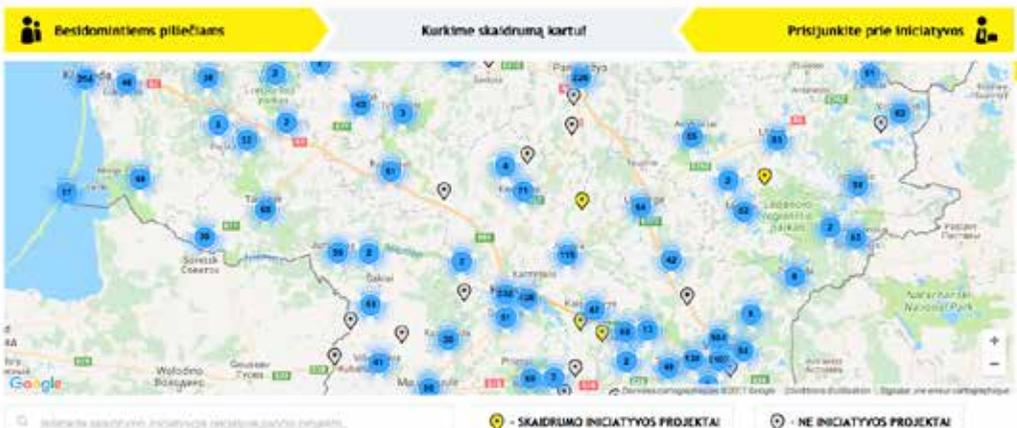


Lengvesnis biudžas sužinoti, kur nukeliauja ES pinigai!

TVARKYTI PASKIRA

KAS MES?

DALYVIAI





Irena Krivienė

Director General, VU Library Scholarly
Communication and Information
Centre and VU Central Library

Vilnius University (VU) updated its libraries to include the latest IT equipment and modern facilities. It shared detailed information on how it managed this complex EU-funded project.

“ Open partnership and transparent activities are the cornerstones of increased mutual trust, to inspire the creation of services and products for people, and shape lasting connections and perspectives. ”



Gedas Kukanauskas

Director, Aukstaitija National Park and
Labanoras Regional Park Authority



“ Joining the initiative was the best way to show openness and transparency on the project’s implementation and results, and to ensure that EU funds were invested well. ”

EU funding helped these parks update their facilities to make Lithuania’s natural heritage more accessible for water tourism. Their project has provided three fireflies’ worth of data.

Getting in touch with the EU

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RegioStars Awards identify good practices in EU regional development and highlight original and innovative projects that are inspiring to others. As the Awards mark their 10th anniversary, this publication showcases past winners who, in their own words, describe what receiving the honour meant to them and how it helped their EU-funded initiatives flourish further. First-person accounts demonstrate how these projects have improved the lives of citizens across Europe.

For more information



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