



Deliverable D12 Cooperation, roll-out and engagement events

***ExcellEnt: Excellency in Entrepreneurship: Expanding European
entrepreneurship by boosting youth (self) employability and promoting a
sharing resources culture***

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Executive Summary

The **D12 Cooperation, roll-out and engagement events** are based on the achievements of Task 4.1, led by CREA and involving all consortium participants, are dedicated to enrolling entrepreneurial ecosystem builders and their members. This task aims to engage new partners in formal cooperation, focusing on identifying the best solutions and approaches to meet the needs of local entrepreneurial ecosystems through a mutual learning process.

Objectives:

- O1.** Refine and improve the methodology on **“RegionsTwinning”**.
- O2.** Consolidate collaborations between various ecosystems through formal partnerships.
- O3.** Foster cross-border cooperation to address the needs of ecosystem members.
- O4.** Support the roll-out and exploitation of the developed methodology by peer ecosystems.

Approach: The task leverages the consortium's extensive network to scout opportunities and challenges in other regions. By engaging with both emerging and leading ecosystems, the consortium aims to: **A) Enhance the visibility of entrepreneurs and start-ups. B) Facilitate the establishment of contacts and cooperation. C) Create a single market for entrepreneurs and start-ups. D) Provide locally rooted support based on homogeneous practices and access to an open network.**

Expected Outcomes:

- O1) Strengthened formal partnerships and cross-border collaborations.**
- O2) Increased visibility and opportunities for entrepreneurs and start-ups.**
- O3) Expansion of activities into new regions.**
- O4) Enhanced support for ecosystem members through access to a larger market and resources.**

About the ExcellEnt project

The ExcellEnt project aspires to explore novel ways to capture, preserve, curate, organise and communicate sets of unstructured entrepreneurial experiences, stories, narratives with an emphasis to those of younger audience that is addressing the challenge of (self)employability, so that they can constitute a shared resource that people can augment, and that individuals as well as institutions can delve into, to find inspiration for new ways of conceptualising and promoting entrepreneurship, and how these new ways can be reflected into every-day practices and policies, and foundations for visions of our common European future.

Introduction

Overall Importance of this activity , contributing to the **T4.1 and T4.2 objectives**:

Narrowing the territorial, entrepreneurial, and social disparities between more developed and less developed regions in the EU and associated countries is essential for balanced and sustainable growth. The *"RegionsTwinning" approach is particularly significant for both short-term and long-term entrepreneurial ecosystem development.*

Strategies to narrow disparities, according to several EU initiatives

- ★ **Knowledge and Best Practice Sharing:** Developed regions can share their successful strategies, policies, and practices with less developed regions, helping them to implement effective solutions more quickly .
- ★ **Capacity Building:** Providing training and resources to build the capabilities of local institutions, entrepreneurs, and ecosystem builders in less developed regions.
- ★ **Access to Funding:** Facilitating access to financial resources, including grants, loans, and investment opportunities, to support startups and innovation in less developed regions.
- ★ **Infrastructure Development:** Investing in physical and digital infrastructure to ensure that less developed regions have the necessary facilities to support entrepreneurial activities
- ★ **Policy Alignment:** Ensuring that regional and national policies are aligned to support balanced development and reduce disparities.
- ★ **Community Engagement:** Involving local communities in the development process to ensure that initiatives meet their needs and have their support.

The approach with **"RegionsTwinning"** demonstrates a crucial step **towards creating a more competitive and collaborative European entrepreneurial ecosystem, benefiting more and less developed participating regions in the ExcellEnt project in both the short and long term.**

RegionsTwinning Concept

Overview of RegionsTwinning

RegionsTwinning is a collaborative framework designed to foster cooperation between more developed and less developed entrepreneurial ecosystems. **The core idea is to pair regions with varying levels of development to share knowledge, resources, and best practices.** By doing so, **each region can leverage the strengths of the other, creating a mutually beneficial partnership.** The ultimate aim is to identify solutions that address local entrepreneurial needs, enhance innovation, and promote sustainable growth.

The concept of **RegionsTwinning** emerged from the recognition that regional disparities often hinder the overall growth of entrepreneurial ecosystems. Historically, **more developed regions** in Europe have had **greater access to resources, networks, and support systems**, while **less developed regions (in Eastern part of Europe and the Balkan countries)** *struggled with limited opportunities and support.* **To bridge this gap, the idea of twinning regions was introduced as a strategic approach to facilitate knowledge transfer, mutual learning, and collaborative problem-solving.** *RegionsTwinning builds on successful models of city twinning and international partnerships, adapting these principles to the context of entrepreneurial ecosystems.*

Goals and Aspirations:

The primary goals of RegionsTwinning are to:

- **Enhance Cooperation:** Establish formal partnerships between regions to foster collaboration and shared learning.
- **Identify Best Solutions:** Work together to identify and implement solutions tailored to the specific needs of local entrepreneurial ecosystems.
- **Promote Innovation:** Encourage the exchange of innovative ideas and practices between regions.
- **Support Entrepreneurs and Start-Ups:** Provide increased visibility, networking opportunities, and support for local entrepreneurs and start-ups.
- **Create a Single Market:** Contribute to the creation of a cohesive market for entrepreneurs and start-ups, promoting cross-border collaboration.

- **Leverage Local Strengths:** Utilize the unique strengths and resources of each region to address common challenges and opportunities.

By achieving these goals, the **RegionsTwinning** as a methodology aims to create a more interconnected and supportive environment for entrepreneurial activities, ultimately driving economic growth and development across participating regions.

Importance and Benefits

The **RegionsTwinning** model serves as a powerful catalyst for fostering collaboration, mutual learning, and innovation between more developed and less developed regions. By leveraging the unique strengths and resources of each region, this model promotes a synergistic partnership that addresses the specific needs and challenges of local entrepreneurial ecosystems.

- **Enhancing Collaboration:** The **RegionsTwinning** model fosters collaboration by pairing regions with varying levels of development. This strategic partnership enables the sharing of knowledge, resources, and best practices, creating a supportive network that drives collective growth. More developed regions provide guidance and support to their less developed counterparts, helping them to overcome challenges and unlock new opportunities.
- **Mutual Learning:** One of the key benefits of the **RegionsTwinning** model is the mutual learning process it facilitates. Participants from both more developed and less developed regions gain valuable insights and perspectives from each other. This exchange of knowledge and experiences enhances the capabilities of all participants, leading to continuous improvement and innovation within their ecosystems.
- **Innovation and Best Practices:** By sharing solutions and best practices, the **RegionsTwinning** model contributes to the development of innovative approaches to common challenges. Regions can adopt and adapt successful strategies from their partners, fostering a culture of experimentation and creativity. This collaborative environment encourages the exploration of new ideas and the implementation of cutting-edge solutions.
- **Economic and Social Impact:** The economic and social benefits of the **RegionsTwinning** model are substantial. Enhanced collaboration and mutual learning lead to increased entrepreneurial activity, job creation, and economic growth in participating regions. The model also promotes social

cohesion and inclusivity by addressing disparities between more developed and less developed regions. Ultimately, the **RegionsTwinning** model contributes to the creation of a single, interconnected market for entrepreneurs and start-ups, driving sustainable development across Europe.

Participating Regions:

The **RegionsTwinning** initiative brings together regions with varying levels of development to foster collaboration, mutual learning, and innovation. By pairing more developed regions with widening countries, we aim to create a dynamic network that addresses the unique challenges and opportunities of each entrepreneurial ecosystem. This section provides **an overview of the participating regions, highlighting their key characteristics, entrepreneurial landscapes, and roles in the RegionsTwinning initiative.**

Profiles of More Developed Regions:

The more developed regions participating in the RegionsTwinning initiative are known for their **well-established entrepreneurial ecosystems, strong economies, and advanced infrastructure**. These regions serve as **models for innovation and best practices, offering valuable insights and resources to their less developed counterparts**. The following profiles provide a detailed look at the key characteristics, entrepreneurial landscapes, and roles of these regions in the initiative:

France: Ile-de-France: Key characteristics, entrepreneurial landscape, and role in RegionsTwinning

Key Characteristics

The **Ile-de-France region is a dynamic and innovative territory in France**, known for its economic strength and vibrant entrepreneurial landscape. The key characteristics are:

- **Economic Powerhouse:** *Ile-de-France* is the leading economic region in France, contributing significantly to the national GDP, **one of the most developed regions** in Europe by NUTS.
- **Talent Hub:** The region is home to numerous universities and research institutions, attracting a large number of students and professionals.

- **Innovation Leader:** Ile-de-France invests heavily in research and development, making it a hub for innovation and technological advancements.

Entrepreneurial Landscape

The entrepreneurial landscape in Ile-de-France is characterized by a strong support system for startups and businesses. The region offers various programs and initiatives to foster entrepreneurship:

- **Entrepreneur #Leader:** This program provides comprehensive support to entrepreneurs at all stages of their projects, from creation to growth.
- **Funding Opportunities:** Ile-de-France offers various funding mechanisms, including microcredits, bank guarantees, and zero-interest loans for innovative and technological projects.
- **Networking and Mentorship:** Entrepreneurs can benefit from a network of experts and mentors to guide them through their business journey.

Role in RegionsTwinning

In the **RegionsTwinning** initiative, Creative Cluster in the Ile-de-France plays a crucial role in fostering cross-regional collaboration and knowledge exchange:

- **Innovation Hubs:** The region serves as a model for establishing innovation hubs that drive technological advancements and economic growth.
- **Policy Alignment:** Creative Cluster in Ile-de-France works on aligning policies with other regions to create a cohesive and supportive environment for businesses.
- **Joint Projects:** Creative Cluster actively participates in joint projects with other regions, promoting shared goals and collaborative efforts.

Through these efforts, Ile-de-France aims to strengthen its position as a leading region in innovation and entrepreneurship, while contributing to the overall success of the RegionsTwinning initiative.

Planned activities:



Activity 1. Enhance Collaboration: Establish formal partnerships with less developed regions to foster collaboration and shared learning, mainly with CEE regions

Activity 2. Promote Innovation: Encourage the exchange of innovative ideas and practices between regions, focusing on deeptech and immersive technologies.

Activity 3. Support Entrepreneurs and Start-Ups: Provide increased visibility, networking opportunities, and support for local entrepreneurs and start-ups, via the **Booster program** for startups

Activity 4. Create a Single Market: Contribute to the creation of a cohesive market for entrepreneurs and start-ups, promoting cross-border collaboration.

By leveraging its strengths and resources, Creative Cluster helps to bridge the gap between more developed and less developed regions, driving economic growth and development across participating regions through its intermediary role and as an innovation ecosystem builder.

Ireland/Dublin: Key characteristics, entrepreneurial landscape, and role in RegionsTwinning

Key characteristics:

Dublin is Ireland's capital and leading innovation hub, recognized globally for its dynamic startup ecosystem and as a European base for multinational tech companies. The city boasts a highly educated workforce, strong public and private sector support for innovation, and a growing number of incubators, accelerators, and venture capital funds. Dublin's strategic location within the EU, English-speaking environment, and favorable corporate tax regime make it a prime destination for both entrepreneurs and investors.

- **Global Tech Presence:** Hosts European HQs of Google, Meta, Microsoft, Amazon, LinkedIn, and others.
- **Highly Skilled Talent Pool:** Home to top universities and research centers including Trinity College, University College Dublin (UCD), and Dublin City University (DCU).
- **Strong Innovation Infrastructure:** Supported by Enterprise Ireland and Knowledge Transfer Ireland (KTI), with a robust pipeline of university spinouts and R&D projects.

- **Policy and Tax Incentives:** Ireland offers a competitive tax regime and strong government backing for startups and innovation-driven enterprises.

Entrepreneurial Landscape:

Dublin's startup ecosystem is ranked among the most vibrant in Europe. The city features a well-integrated network of accelerators (e.g., NDRC, Dogpatch Labs), incubators (e.g., NovaUCD, DCU Alpha), and funding bodies. Its innovation environment is enriched by strong university-industry linkages, a growing angel investor and VC community, and access to international markets.

- **Startups:** Active sectors include fintech, medtech, AI, cybersecurity, and deeptech.
- **Funding Ecosystem:** Local VCs like Frontline Ventures, Atlantic Bridge, and Further VC drive early-stage and scale-up investment.
- **Ecosystem Support:** Coordinated support is provided through Enterprise Ireland, Local Enterprise Offices, and TechIreland.
- **Innovation Hubs:** NovaUCD and DCU Alpha support spinouts and provide facilities for high-growth tech ventures.

Role in RegionsTwinning:

Dublin plays the role of a **mentoring and capacity-building region** within the RegionsTwinning framework. As a mature ecosystem, it offers best practices, investment insights, and policy models that can support the growth of entrepreneurial ecosystems in less developed partner regions.

Dublin serves as a **knowledge-exchange bridge**, facilitating East-West peer collaboration through structured engagement with accelerators, TTOs, and innovation intermediaries.

Through its role in **RegionsTwinning**, Dublin contributes:

- Access to capital markets and VC insights.
- Exposure to national and EU-level innovation policies.
- Models for university-industry collaboration and tech transfer.
- A showcase of integrated public-private ecosystem governance.

Planned Activities:

Activity 1. Strengthen Innovation Intermediaries: Facilitate peer-learning and knowledge transfer

between Dublin-based accelerators, venture capital networks, incubators, and counterparts from less developed regions, enhancing their capacity to support emerging start-up ecosystems.

Activity 2. Facilitate Tech Transfer Collaboration: Promote cross-regional cooperation on technology commercialization by connecting university TTOs and research-driven incubators, encouraging joint initiatives around knowledge transfer and spin-out support.

Activity 3. Expand Investment Readiness and Access to Capital: Share Dublin's experience in structuring early-stage investment frameworks, angel investor networks, and public-private funding schemes, helping partner regions improve access to finance for their entrepreneurs.

Activity 4. Build Sustainable Ecosystem Bridges: Establish formal links between ecosystem builders across regions to support long-term collaboration, including joint capacity-building programs, exchange visits, and the development of shared support infrastructures.

By leveraging its mature ecosystem and strong institutional support structures, Dublin plays a pivotal role in empowering innovation intermediaries across Europe and fostering an integrated entrepreneurial space through ExcellEnt.

Profiles of Less Developed Regions:

The widening countries participating in the **RegionsTwinning** initiative are characterized **by their emerging entrepreneurial ecosystems and potential for growth**. These regions face unique challenges but also offer significant opportunities for development. The following profiles provide a detailed look at the key characteristics, challenges, and expected benefits for these regions in the initiative:

Greece/Thessaly: Key characteristics, challenges, and expected benefits from participation

Key characteristics:

The Region of Thessaly is situated in the heart of mainland Greece and includes a geographically diverse mix of mountainous terrain, fertile plains, coastal zones, and the Sporades islands in the Aegean Sea. With approximately 735,700 inhabitants, it is the third most populous region in Greece, representing 6.5% of the national population.

Despite its demographic significance, Thessaly faces economic disparities. Its GDP per capita (€17,000 in 2009) places it ninth among Greek regions, at just 72% of the EU27 average. The effects of the economic crisis have been pronounced, with regional unemployment rising to 16.8% by 2011.

Thessaly's economy is structured across three sectors: the **tertiary sector** (68.4% of GDP), driven by tourism, retail, and transportation; **industry and construction** (22.8%), with activity centred along the Volos–Larissa axis; and a still-important **primary sector** (8.75%), reflecting Thessaly's traditional strength in agriculture, especially in wheat, cotton, and livestock production.

The region shows some industrial specialization, particularly in the manufacture of metal products, cement, and the maintenance of office and computing machinery. However, Thessaly has historically underperformed in research and development (R&D). GERD accounted for only 0.3% of regional GDP in 2005, well below national and EU levels. Business investment in R&D is particularly low, with the majority of research activity carried out by the higher education sector.

Educational attainment is gradually improving (24.4% of adults held a tertiary qualification in 2011), but lifelong learning participation remains limited. The region has a small but growing base of research personnel, and scientific output—especially from the University of Thessaly—has been steadily increasing, with strengths in medical and natural sciences.

Entrepreneurial landscape:

The entrepreneurial landscape in Thessaly is evolving through the combined efforts of regional institutions, public-private collaborations, and EU-funded initiatives. While the region's economy has traditionally relied on agriculture and manufacturing, recent years have seen increased momentum toward innovation, digitalization, and start-up support.

The **University of Thessaly** plays a pivotal role in the local ecosystem. With strong research output in medical, natural, and agricultural sciences, the university supports technology transfer, academic spin-offs, and applied research. Despite the overall low business investment in R&D, the university's growing collaborations with local firms have helped to bridge gaps between research and market application.

The city of **Trikala** is widely recognized as a pioneer in smart city innovation in Greece. It serves as a national reference point for digital transformation, pilot technologies, and citizen-centric service design—showcasing how public sector-led innovation can drive broader regional change.

Other key ecosystem actors include:

- The **Association of Thessalian Enterprises and Industries** (STHEV), which supports the competitiveness and modernization of regional businesses.
- The **JOIST Innovation Park** in Larissa, a newly established hub that provides infrastructure, training, and collaborative space for start-ups, SMEs, and research actors. It also fosters cross-border cooperation through EU projects and innovation bootcamps.
- The **Health Hub**, a designated European Digital Innovation Hub (EDIH) specializing in digital health. As a one-stop-shop, the Health Hub provides advanced digital transformation services to SMEs and public sector organizations in the health and pharma industries. Positioned at the intersection of technology and healthcare, it helps regional actors enhance innovation, precision, outreach, and cross-border networking.

Thessaly's Smart Specialisation Strategy (RIS3) prioritizes sectors with strong local relevance, including **agri-food, health and life sciences, sustainable tourism, circular economy, and energy efficiency**. However, many regional SMEs remain focused on local or national markets, with limited export activity and a need for stronger innovation capacity.

While the ecosystem still faces challenges—such as fragmented support services and underdeveloped access to finance—Thessaly is steadily improving its innovation environment. Participation in initiatives like RegionsTwinning provides critical pathways to integrate with more advanced ecosystems, enhance knowledge flows, and increase the visibility and internationalisation of local entrepreneurs.

Role in “RegionsTwinning”:

iED brings a strong practical focus to the RegionsTwinning process, fostering structured peer learning and cooperation between more and less developed ecosystems.

Through its participation, iED contributes by:

- **Sharing Best Practices:** Drawing from a wide portfolio of European projects and regional initiatives, iED facilitates the transfer of effective methodologies for start-up support, digital skills development, and SME resilience.
- **Enhancing Skills and Capacity:** iED delivers targeted training and educational programs for ecosystem stakeholders—entrepreneurs, incubators, public authorities—helping to raise the region’s innovation-readiness and human capital base.
- **Fostering Strategic Partnerships:** iED actively supports the creation of interregional partnerships, building trust and cooperation among ecosystem actors across borders. This includes facilitating joint initiatives, mentoring exchanges, and innovation pilots.
- **Supporting SMEs:** By offering access to tools, expertise, and networks, iED plays a direct role in improving the competitiveness of Thessalian SMEs and aligning them with EU innovation and sustainability objectives.

Beyond iED, Thessaly also contributes to the **RegionsTwinning** initiative through the leadership of the University of Thessaly, the operational innovation environment of JOIST Innovation Park, and the sectoral specialization of the Health Hub EDIH. Together, these actors position Thessaly as an emerging regional innovation hub capable of piloting new models of collaboration and absorbing advanced practices from more developed regions.

Participation in **RegionsTwinning** offers Thessaly an opportunity to align more closely with EU innovation ecosystems, enhance the integration of its institutional and business support structures, and develop a more outward-facing, sustainable entrepreneurial culture.

Planned activities:

Activity 1. Cross-Regional Mentoring and Peer Learning: Facilitate structured mentoring schemes between Thessalian stakeholders (start-ups, incubators, public officials) and peers from more developed regions. These exchanges focus on ecosystem building, policy design, and innovation management, and include one-on-one mentoring, group coaching, and reverse peer-review sessions.

Activity 2. Exploring Collaborative Funding Opportunities: Organize joint workshops and matchmaking sessions with partner regions to identify co-funding opportunities under EU programmes (e.g. Horizon Europe, Interreg, Digital Europe). iED supports Thessalian stakeholders in

navigating funding mechanisms and co-developing competitive project proposals with cross-border partners.

Activity 3. Networking and International Visibility for SMEs: Support Thessalian SMEs and start-ups in participating in European networking events, demo days, and B2B matchmaking sessions. These activities are aimed at expanding business linkages, sharing success stories, and promoting Thessaly's emerging innovation strengths (e.g. agri-food, healthtech, circular economy).

Activity 4. Joint EU Project Development and Pilots: Engage in co-creation and knowledge-sharing around the design of EU-funded innovation projects. iED acts as a facilitator for Thessalian stakeholders to initiate or join transnational consortia and implement pilot projects in digital transformation, green innovation, and inclusive entrepreneurship.

Activity 5. Digital Transformation Support for SMEs and Public Sector: Leverage the expertise of the Health Hub EDIH to provide hands-on support for digital adoption, technology testing, and capacity-building among local SMEs and public authorities. This includes access to AI, data analytics, and digital health tools as well as awareness-raising sessions and tailored diagnostics.

Activity 6. Regional Capacity Building and Skills Development: Deliver targeted training programs and workshops focused on entrepreneurship, innovation management, EU project writing, and digital skills. These activities aim to empower ecosystem actors and enhance the readiness of Thessaly's institutions to support entrepreneurs in a fast-evolving landscape.

Bulgaria/Iugozapaden - including Sofia province: Key characteristics, challenges, and expected benefits from participation

Key characteristics:

Strategic Location: Sofia's position in Southeastern Europe makes it a gateway for cross-border trade and collaboration.

Economic Contribution: Iugozapaden is the most economically advanced region in Bulgaria, contributing over 40% of the country's GDP. Its GDP per capita is approximately 1.3 times the national average (Eurostat, 2023). The region leads in high-value-added sectors, including ICT, financial services, and advanced manufacturing.

Talent Pool: Sofia boasts a highly educated workforce, particularly in technology and engineering

fields. The presence of top universities and international research centers further strengthens the region's capacity for innovation.

Sectors Important for Boosting Innovation and Competitiveness:

- Information and Communication Technologies (ICT): Sofia is one of the leading tech hubs in Central and Eastern Europe, with significant activity in software development, artificial intelligence (AI), cloud services, and fintech.
- Advanced Manufacturing: Key industries include pharmaceuticals, automotive components, and optics, supported by increasing automation and digital integration.
- Business Process Outsourcing (BPO): Sofia's multilingual workforce and cost efficiency make it a preferred location for shared services, customer support, and knowledge-intensive outsourcing.

Entrepreneurial landscape:

Sofia hosts one of the most dynamic and rapidly growing startup ecosystems in Southeast Europe, characterized by a blend of high-skilled human capital, competitive operational costs, and a maturing investment environment. The ecosystem is underpinned by a growing network of accelerators, incubators, venture capital funds, and innovation hubs, many of which are aligned with national and EU-level innovation priorities.

Key actors include:

- Eleven Ventures and LAUNCHub Ventures, two leading early-stage VCs that provide funding and mentorship for tech-driven startups across the region.
- Sofia Tech Park, Bulgaria's first science and technology park, which serves as a nucleus for R&D, innovation collaboration, and business development.
- BESCO – The Bulgarian Startup Association, which advocates for policy improvements and promotes regulatory reforms to support entrepreneurial growth.
- Incubators such as Innovation Starter Accelerator, Start It Smart, and Founder Institute Sofia, which offer structured support, mentoring, and access to networks for early-stage startups.

The region's innovation ecosystem is further strengthened by the Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialization (IS3) 2021–2027, which identifies priority areas such as:

- ICT and mechatronics;

- Health and bioeconomy;
- Creative and cultural industries;
- Circular economy and clean technologies.

The IS3 aligns research, entrepreneurship, and regional investment strategies with EU cohesion policy goals, ensuring that local innovation meets both market demand and societal needs. Notably, the strategy supports entrepreneurial discovery processes (EDP) that bring together academia, business, and government to identify niche opportunities for smart specialization.

Role in “RegionsTwinning”:

The GATE Centre of Excellence at Sofia University plays a strategic role in the RegionsTwinning initiative by serving as a key enabler of cross-regional innovation, knowledge exchange, and digital capacity building. Its mission is to foster collaborative ecosystems across European regions through the deployment of cutting-edge digital and ICT technologies, with a particular emphasis on big data, artificial intelligence, and smart governance.

GATE facilitates the transfer of best practices in digital transformation, supporting less-developed regions in enhancing their innovation potential and aligning with the EU's Digital Decade objectives. The Centre also acts as a catalyst for entrepreneurial ecosystem development, promoting sustainable innovation models that integrate digital technologies with environmental and societal goals.

By connecting scientific excellence with market needs and regional development strategies, GATE contributes to building resilient, interconnected, and inclusive innovation ecosystems across Europe. Its activities directly support the goals of RegionsTwinning by enhancing interregional cooperation, reducing innovation disparities, and accelerating smart specialization across participating territories.

Planned activities:

Activity 1. Promoting entrepreneurial knowledge sharing: UNISOFIA organizes workshops to foster knowledge exchange between stakeholders in entrepreneurial ecosystems. These workshops highlight EU diversity by promoting success stories and engaging underrepresented groups such as women entrepreneurs.

Activity 2. Integrating academic and practical approaches: The university works on bridging academic curricula with real-world entrepreneurial practices by collaborating with incubators and innovation

practitioners. This includes involving students in tandem business-academia entrepreneurship schemes to enhance their employability.

Activity 4. Community building: Through its leadership roles, UNISOFIA contributes to building a vibrant entrepreneurial community that connects local hubs with broader European networks. This effort supports cross-border collaborations and strengthens local ecosystems.

Turkey/Istanbul - North-West Marmara Region: Key characteristics, challenges, and expected benefits from participation

Key characteristics:

Straddling both Europe and Asia, **Istanbul is Türkiye's most populous city**, home to around 16 million people. It stands as the country's leading **economic and financial hub**, accounting for 30.4% of the national GDP in 2023, and dominating most sectors except agriculture and certain services (TUIK, 2023). With a GDP per capita of EUR 19,643 in 2023, it ranks second after Kocaeli. In 2023, Istanbul held the largest share of GDP at current prices and led in nearly all economic sectors, with the exception of agriculture, forestry and fishing, and other service activities. The city accounted for 64.8% of the information and communication sector, 62.5% of finance and insurance, 45.9% of professional, administrative, and support services, 40.4% of the overall services sector, and 28.9% of the construction industry.

Istanbul boasts three major ports, four free trade zones, and two international airports. As the eighth most visited city globally, Istanbul continues to expand its **role in international trade**, driven by its strategic location, vibrant environment, and diverse, cosmopolitan character. The city hosts two international airports which together handled 121 passengers in 2024. Istanbul Airport, which alone handled about 80 million passengers in 2024, is the largest and second-busiest international airport in Europe.

By 2023, the rate of tertiary graduates in Türkiye was 24.6% within the population aged 25 and over. The mean years of schooling for Istanbul residents was 10.7 years for male and 9.7 years for female. For the same period, the number of persons in the labour force was realized as 35, 2 million nationally, with a labour force participation rate of 53.5%. This rate was 71.1% for men, and 36.3% for women. The national unemployment rate was 8.8%; 7.1% for men and 12 for women. The youth

unemployment rate (aged 15-24) on the hand, was realized as 15.5%; 11.5% for men and 22.8% for women.

Entrepreneurial landscape:

Unlike Türkiye's traditionally dominant economic sectors, many of the country's rapidly growing startups are emerging in technology-driven and knowledge-intensive fields such as **gaming, e-commerce, information technology, fintech, health tech, edtech, biotechnology, and nanotechnology**. These entrepreneurs are motivated by both market demand and their own technological innovations, while also being guided by national entrepreneurship support systems toward high-value and strategically significant business areas.

Türkiye's **large domestic market, tech-oriented companies, and digitally literate population** offer a strong foundation for startups to test their products and grow revenue—even without significant investment. However, in capital-heavy high-tech sectors, successful Turkish startups often struggle to compete with global players who have access to much greater funding during their scale-up phase.

Istanbul is home to 57 universities, including top-tier institutions like Boğaziçi University, Sabancı University, Koç University, Istanbul Technical University, and Yıldız Technical University, all of which play a vital role in supporting the startup and innovation ecosystem. The city also hosts numerous business incubators, coworking spaces, venture capital firms, technoparks, and technology transfer offices. Some notable actors are Istanbul Technopark, YTU Technopark, ITU ARI Technopark, KWorks entrepreneurship research and support center, SuCool incubation center.

Role in “RegionsTwinning”:

Sabancı University plays a pivotal role in the regional and national entrepreneurship ecosystem. With strong research output in computer science, materials science, and nanotechnology, the university supports technology transfer, academic spin-offs, and both basic and applied research. Being a foundation university founded by one of the largest conglomerates in Türkiye, Sabancı University has strong ties to the industry, which serves as a base for applied research and commercialization of scientific outputs. With many success stories in technology commercialization, as well as high numbers of patents and spin-offs, the university has been selected as the most entrepreneurial foundation university for consecutive years by the national authority. With its business school offering

many courses on entrepreneurship as well as a minor degree in entrepreneurship and its startup incubation center, the university further boosts the startup formation and support activities both locally and nationally. The university not only focuses on entrepreneurial research and training, but also directly invests in startups through its Innovent company, as well as intermediating to national and international investments through its collaborations. With a high ratio of international students, especially from the near-east and middle-east, as well as high number of exchange students from Europe, Sabancı University also acts as a bridge to blend cultures and help create cross-border entrepreneurial opportunities.

Planned activities:

Activity 1. Collaborative Research Projects: Facilitating collaborative research, both within and across borders, to address shared challenges and foster innovation across nations and regions.

Activity 2. Entrepreneurship Trainings: Organizing training sessions to enhance entrepreneurial skills and knowledge, with a special emphasis on youth and women entrepreneurship.

Activity 3. Supporting startups: Through its startup incubation center, technology transfer office, venture investment company, and the regional hub roles in Enterprise Europe Network and EIT mobility, Sabancı University offers knowledge, expertise, funding, and networks to many startups.

Activity 4. Fostering technology commercialization: With its strategic role in bridging industry and research, the university serves as a knowledge hub for technological innovation and commercialization. Its engineering faculty offers PhD and masters degrees in applied research in collaboration with local and global tech companies, while its business faculty has a dedicated chair in the field of applied research.

Activity 5. Social entrepreneurship support: Sabancı University is a pioneer institution in supporting social entrepreneurship and social investment in Türkiye by conducting research, offering courses and training, as well as giving direct support to several social ventures. With its newly launched minor degree program in sustainability, the university is aiming to further catalyse awareness and practice of social responsibility both in startups and established ventures.

Ukraine/Kyiv - North-Central Ukraine: Key characteristics, challenges, and expected benefits from participation

Key characteristics:

Kyiv is Ukraine's capital and innovation engine, serving as the country's main center for policy making, digital transformation, and technology-driven growth. As the largest urban economy, it sets the pace for national tech trends and offers a resilient, opportunity-rich environment for startups and digital entrepreneurs.

- **Economic and Digital Governance Powerhouse:** Kyiv hosts the Ministry of Digital Transformation and was the launchpad for e-governance initiatives like Diia. It anchors national policymaking, with a strong emphasis on digital services and transparency.
- **Concentration of Tech Talent:** The city benefits from a high density of universities and tech institutions, including Taras Shevchenko National University and Kyiv Polytechnic Institute, producing thousands of skilled IT graduates each year.
- **Hub for Ukraine's Innovation Resilience:** Kyiv's tech sector proved agile during wartime, with many companies maintaining global operations and even increasing export revenue, contributing to the sector's 11.5% growth in tax contributions despite a 3.1% drop in registered taxpayers

Entrepreneurial landscape:

Kyiv's entrepreneurial ecosystem is one of the most developed in Eastern Europe and leads the Ukrainian startup scene:

- **Startup Capital of Ukraine:** According to the *100 Rising Ukrainian Startups* report, over one-third of the featured startups are headquartered in Kyiv. The city specializes in AI, cybersecurity, edtech, SaaS, and healthtech, with standout companies such as ZibraAI, Respeecher, and Vymex.
- **Growing Deeptech Sector:** Kyiv is central to Ukraine's emerging deeptech scene, supported by accelerators and R&D infrastructure.
- **Support Infrastructure:** With hubs like UNIT.City, Kyiv offers acceleration programs, access to funding, and innovation spaces for founders. The city also boasts a dense network of venture capital firms and international corporate partners.

The city is home to innovative sectors like *defense, fintech, health tech, and e-commerce*, which are driving its economic growth. Initiatives like "Entrepreneurship Without Barriers" aim to empower SMEs and foster resilience in the entrepreneurial community.

Role in "RegionsTwinning":

TechUkraine plays a pivotal role in the "**RegionsTwinning**" model by fostering collaboration between *Ukrainian and international tech ecosystems*. It focuses on knowledge sharing, resource exchange, and creating opportunities for Ukrainian startups to integrate into global markets.

Intermediary Region: Kyiv's role is to bridge the innovation gap between EU regions and local Ukrainian tech communities, promoting shared practices and co-created pilot programs.

Planned activities:

Activity 1: Enhance Cooperation & Create a Single Market - Cross-Border Networking Events: Virtual Cross-Border Networking Series

Kyiv will co-host a series of **curated virtual networking sessions** with twinned regions to build trust, exchange ecosystem insights, and spark early-stage partnerships among startups, accelerators, and city stakeholders.

Activity 2. Promote Innovation & Identify Best Solutions - Innovation Skills Workshops for Startups:

Offer practical **online training workshops** for early-stage startups from Kyiv and twinned regions, focused on product scaling, digital compliance, and working with government or regulated sectors.

Activity 3. Support Entrepreneurs and Start-Ups & Leverage Local Strengths - Kyiv Innovation Spotlight (Sector-Focused Showcase): Launch a **digital showcase series** for Kyiv-based startups in defense tech, AI, or greentech, connecting them to international investors, corporates, and city-level adopters from twinned regions.

Activity 4. Identify Best Solutions & Leverage Local Strengths - Cross-Regional Digital Solutions Lab:

Establish a **Digital Solutions Lab** led by Kyiv-based startups and experts to co-design, adapt, and share **ready-to-use digital tools and platforms** with twinned regions across Ukraine and Europe. The Lab will focus on practical digital transformation needs for startups and SMEs — such as tools for remote business operations, data management, customer engagement, and market access — especially in disrupted or under-resourced environments.



Engagement and Cooperation Strategy

Methodology for Engaging New Partners

Effectively engaging new partners is a cornerstone of the **RegionsTwinning** initiative. By developing a comprehensive and strategic approach to partner engagement, we can ensure meaningful collaboration and mutual benefits. This section introduces our methodology for identifying and **engaging potential partners, leveraging existing networks, and fostering strong relationships**. Through targeted outreach, stakeholder involvement, and a structured onboarding process, we aim to create a robust and supportive network that enhances the capacity and potential of entrepreneurial ecosystems across diverse European regions (developed and widening).

- **Partner Identification:** The first step in *engaging new partners involves developing a set of criteria to identify potential partners*. This criteria include a) *the level of development of the region*, b) *the existing entrepreneurial ecosystem*, c) *the willingness to collaborate*, and d) *the potential for mutual benefits*. The goal is to find regions that can complement each other and create a symbiotic relationship.
- **Initial Outreach:** *Utilize the consortium's extensive network to initiate contact with potential partners*. This would be done through emails, meetings, and conferences. Existing relationships can be leveraged to introduce the **RegionsTwinning** concept. It's important to clearly communicate the benefits of the partnership and the objectives of the initiative.
- **Stakeholder Involvement:** Engage key stakeholders from local entrepreneurial ecosystems. These stakeholders include government agencies, business associations, incubators, and accelerators. Their involvement is crucial for the success of the partnership as they can provide valuable insights, resources, and support.
- **Collaboration Opportunities:** Highlight the benefits and opportunities of formal cooperation. This can be done through case studies of successful partnerships, potential impact assessments, and presentations. The goal is to showcase how the partnership can address the needs of the local entrepreneurial ecosystem and create value for all parties involved.
- **Onboarding Process:** Develop a structured onboarding process to integrate new partners into the **RegionsTwinning framework**. This process can include orientation sessions, resource

sharing, and the establishment of communication channels. It's important to ensure that new partners feel welcomed and supported throughout the onboarding process.

Formal Cooperation Framework

Establishing a formal cooperation framework is essential for fostering effective collaboration and achieving the objectives of the **RegionsTwinning** initiative. This framework involves creating structured agreements and governance mechanisms that define the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of all partners. By leveraging the expertise and resources of diverse organizations such as **Creative Cluster**, **Booster Labs**, **IDI**, **IED**, **GATE**, **Tech Ukraine** and **Sabanci University**, we aim to build a **sustainable network that supports the growth and development of entrepreneurial ecosystems**. This section introduces our approach to formalizing partnerships and ensuring seamless cooperation across all participating regions.

- **Partnership Agreements:** Establish clear and mutually beneficial agreements outlining the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of each partner. These agreements should be legally binding and ensure that all parties are committed to the objectives of the partnership.
- **Governance Structure:** Implement a governance structure to oversee the cooperation. This can include the formation of a steering committee and working groups focused on specific areas. The governance structure should ensure that there is clear leadership and accountability within the partnership.
- **Communication Channels:** Set up effective communication channels to facilitate regular updates, feedback, and information sharing among partners. This can include emails, meetings, and collaboration platforms. It's important to ensure that all partners are kept informed and engaged throughout the cooperation.
- **Resource Allocation:** Define the resources, both financial and non-financial, to be contributed by each partner. This can include funding, expertise, and access to networks. The resource allocation should be fair and equitable, ensuring that all partners are contributing to the success of the partnership.
- **Performance Metrics:** Develop performance metrics to assess the progress and impact of the cooperation. This can include key performance indicators (KPIs) and regular evaluations. The

performance metrics should ensure that the partnership is on track to achieve its objectives and provide value to all parties involved.

Identifying Solutions for Local Ecosystems

Identifying solutions tailored to the unique needs of local entrepreneurial ecosystems is a critical component of the **RegionsTwinning** initiative. This process involves conducting thorough a) needs assessments, b) leveraging best practices from more developed regions, and c) fostering collaborative problem-solving. By understanding the specific challenges and opportunities within each ecosystem, we can co-create effective solutions that drive innovation, growth, and sustainability. This section introduces our approach to identifying and implementing these solutions, ensuring they are adaptable and scalable to meet the diverse needs of local ecosystems.

- **Needs Assessment:** Conduct comprehensive needs assessments to identify the specific challenges and opportunities within local entrepreneurial ecosystems. This can involve surveys, interviews, and focus groups with key stakeholders. The needs assessment should provide a clear understanding of the issues that need to be addressed.
- **Best Practices:** Compile and share best practices from more developed regions that can be adapted and implemented in less developed regions. This can include case studies, toolkits, and guidelines. The goal is to leverage the experience and knowledge of more developed regions to help less developed regions overcome their challenges.
- **Solution Workshops:** Organize workshops and brainstorming sessions to co-create solutions. These workshops can involve stakeholders from both regions and provide a platform for collaborative problem-solving. The goal is to develop solutions that are tailored to the specific needs and context of the local entrepreneurial ecosystem.
- **Pilot Projects:** Implement pilot projects to test and validate proposed solutions. These projects can provide valuable data and feedback, allowing for the refinement and improvement of the solutions. The goal is to ensure that the solutions are effective and can be scaled up for broader implementation.
- **Scalability and Adaptability:** Ensure that the solutions are scalable and adaptable to different contexts and regions. This can involve developing guidelines and toolkits that can be easily

customized and implemented in various settings. The goal is to create solutions that can have a broad and lasting impact.

Mutual Learning Process

The mutual learning process is a fundamental aspect of the **RegionsTwinning** initiative, fostering a **culture of continuous improvement and shared knowledge**. By facilitating regular exchanges of insights, experiences, and best practices among participating regions, we can enhance the capabilities and resilience of entrepreneurial ecosystems. This section introduces our approach **to creating an effective mutual learning environment, emphasizing the importance of collaboration, knowledge sharing, and capacity building**. Through structured learning sessions, peer groups, and feedback mechanisms, we aim to ensure that all partners benefit from the collective wisdom and expertise of the network, ultimately driving innovation and sustainable growth.

- **Knowledge Exchange:** Facilitate regular knowledge exchange sessions where partners can share insights, experiences, and lessons learned. This can involve webinars, workshops, and online forums. The goal is to create a culture of continuous learning and improvement.
- **Peer Learning Groups:** Establish peer learning groups to foster collaboration and mutual support among ecosystem builders and members. These groups can provide a platform for sharing best practices, discussing challenges, and providing feedback. The goal is to create a supportive and collaborative community.
- **Training and Capacity Building:** Provide training and capacity-building opportunities to enhance the skills and capabilities of partners and stakeholders. This can include workshops, online courses, and mentoring programs. The goal is to ensure that all partners have the knowledge and skills needed to contribute to the success of the partnership.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Continuously monitor and evaluate the learning process, identifying areas for improvement and adjustment. This can involve regular feedback sessions, surveys, and performance evaluations. The goal is to ensure that the learning process is effective and provides value to all partners.
- **Sustainability and Continuity:** Develop strategies to ensure the sustainability and continuity of the mutual learning process. This can involve embedding the learning process into the organizational culture of the partners, creating long-term plans, and securing funding. The

goal is to ensure that the learning process continues to provide value and support the partnership's objectives over the long term.



Methodology Refinement and Improvement

The continuous refinement and improvement of our methodology are essential to ensuring the success and sustainability of the **RegionsTwinning** initiative. By learning from our experiences and incorporating feedback, we can enhance our approach and better address the needs of the entrepreneurial ecosystems we support. This chapter outlines our efforts to systematically analyze and refine our methodology based on the lessons learned from the **RegionsTwinning** process, aiming to create a more effective and adaptable framework for future collaborations.

Lessons Learned from “RegionsTwinning”

The **RegionsTwinning** initiative has provided **valuable insights into the dynamics of cross-regional collaboration and the challenges and opportunities faced by entrepreneurial ecosystems**. In this section, we will explore the key lessons learned from our experiences, focusing on partnership dynamics, effective practices, and areas for improvement. By understanding these lessons, we can develop strategies to overcome obstacles and enhance the overall impact of the **RegionsTwinning** initiative.

Description of the RegionsTwinning model through a concrete example of “Booster - Pre-accelerator program” initiated between the Emilia Romagna region (Italy), coordinated by Creative Cluster (Paris) and DPIXL (Bologna)

- **Pre-Acceleration Program:** the goal is to select 15 Italian startups in the fields of space economy, green energy, and digitalization (with a focus on AI and Big Data). This is not an incubation or standard acceleration program but rather a pre-acceleration aimed at offering open innovation opportunities and potential collaborations with corporates and investors.
- **CREA Role and French Partners:** Italian partner would like to involve CREA in the startup selection process and the design of activities in France. The CREA support will be key in connecting the startups with French investors and companies, helping them navigate international opportunities. They are also exploring the possibility of having French or other EU incubators and accelerators as official partners of the project.

- **Roadshow in France:** The planned roadshow duration is approximately one week, focusing on meetings with investors, corporates, and other relevant stakeholders. Additionally, we could organize a mentoring session in Bologna prior to the roadshow to give you a chance to meet the startups in person.

Next Steps

- **Presentation:** a brief presentation outlined the role of CREA and the involved French partners. This will help us promote the program during the startup onboarding phase.
- **Activity Proposal:** It outlined the activities to plan to offer the startups during the roadshow in France, in order to finalize the program and allocate resources based on the available budget.
- **Involvement in Selection:** As discussed, CREA is included in the startup selection process, with all the information through the F6S platform, allowing CREA to evaluate the startups and suggest any necessary adjustments.
- **Timeline:** The call for startups has been launched in October 2024. DPIXEL aimed to start the program in December, with the roadshow planned for June 2025.

Link: <https://www.boosteraccelerator.it/en>

Methodology improvement of RegionsTwinning

The continuous enhancement of our **RegionsTwinning** methodology is vital for adapting to the evolving needs of entrepreneurial ecosystems. By systematically analyzing our experiences and incorporating feedback from all stakeholders, we can refine our approach to ensure greater effectiveness and impact. This section **introduces our commitment to methodology improvement, focusing on identifying successful practices, addressing challenges, and leveraging new insights to optimize our collaboration framework.** Our goal is to create a dynamic and adaptable methodology that **fosters innovation, mutual learning, and sustainable growth across all participating regions.** *Through this ongoing process of refinement, we aim to strengthen our partnerships, enhance cross-border cooperation, and better support the entrepreneurial ecosystems we engage with.*

The following sections will delve into the key areas of improvement, including lessons learned from **RegionsTwinning**, strategies for enhancing our approach, and mechanisms for feedback and adjustment. By continuously evolving our methodology, we strive to create a resilient framework that drives positive change and development for all regions involved.

- **Partnership Dynamics:** Identify the key factors that contribute to successful partnerships. Understand the dynamics between more developed and less developed regions, and how these dynamics influence collaboration and knowledge sharing.
- **Challenges and Obstacles:** Analyze the challenges and obstacles faced during the **RegionsTwinning** process. This can include cultural differences, resource limitations, and communication barriers. Understanding these challenges helps to develop strategies to overcome them in future initiatives.
- **Effective Practices:** Highlight the practices and strategies that proved to be effective in fostering cooperation and achieving the desired outcomes. This can include specific approaches to knowledge transfer, resource allocation, and stakeholder engagement.
- **Impact Assessment:** Conduct a thorough assessment of the impact of the RegionsTwinning initiative on the participating regions. This includes both qualitative and quantitative measures, such as improvements in entrepreneurial activity, increased visibility of start-ups, and enhanced cross-border cooperation.

Enhancing our approach

To ensure the ongoing success and impact of the RegionsTwinning initiative, it is essential to continually refine and enhance our approach. By building on the lessons learned and incorporating feedback from all stakeholders, **ExcellEnt** project partners have created an effective and adaptive framework for collaboration. This section introduces the commitment to enhancing the methodology, focusing on **developing innovative solutions, incorporating best practices, and ensuring scalability and sustainability**. The main goal is **to create a dynamic approach** that not only addresses the current needs of entrepreneurial ecosystems but also anticipates future challenges and opportunities. By fostering a culture of continuous improvement, we aim to strengthen our partnerships, enhance cross-border cooperation, and better support entrepreneurs and start-ups across all participating regions.

The following sections will explore the specific strategies and actions we will undertake **to enhance our approach, ensuring that our methodology remains relevant, impactful, and responsive** to the evolving landscape of entrepreneurial ecosystems.

- **Incorporating Feedback:** Use the lessons learned and feedback from partners to refine and improve the methodology. This involves making adjustments to the engagement strategy, communication channels, and resource allocation to better meet the needs of all partners.
- **Innovative Solutions:** Develop and implement innovative solutions to address the challenges identified. This can include new tools and platforms for collaboration, enhanced training programs, and customized support for different regions.
- **Scalability:** Ensure that the refined methodology is scalable and can be applied to a broader range of regions and contexts. This involves creating flexible guidelines and tools that can be adapted to different situations.
- **Sustainability:** Develop strategies to ensure the long-term sustainability of the RegionsTwinning initiative. This includes securing funding, building strong relationships with partners, and embedding the methodology into the organizational culture of the consortium.

Feedback and Adjustments

The continuous improvement of the **RegionsTwinning** methodology relies on a robust system for gathering feedback and making necessary adjustments. By establishing regular feedback mechanisms and being responsive to the **insights and suggestions from all stakeholders, we can ensure that our approach remains effective and relevant.** This section introduces our commitment to **incorporating feedback and making data-driven adjustments to enhance the overall impact of the RegionsTwinning initiative.** Through this iterative process, we aim to create a dynamic and adaptable framework that supports the growth and sustainability of entrepreneurial ecosystems across participating regions.

What TO DO:

- **Continuous Feedback Loop:** Establish a continuous feedback loop with all partners to gather insights and suggestions for improvement. This can include regular surveys, feedback sessions, and collaborative workshops.

- **Responsive Adjustments:** Be responsive to the feedback received and make necessary adjustments to the methodology. This can involve updating processes, revising strategies, and implementing new practices based on the feedback.
- **Evaluation and Monitoring:** Implement a robust evaluation and monitoring system to track the progress and effectiveness of the methodology. This includes setting up key performance indicators (KPIs) and conducting regular evaluations to identify areas for improvement.
- **Sharing Success Stories:** Share success stories and best practices with all partners to showcase the positive impact of the **RegionsTwinning** initiative. This helps to build confidence and trust among partners and encourages them to actively participate in the refinement and improvement process.

Consolidating Partnerships

The **RegionsTwinning** Model is an innovative approach aimed at enhancing entrepreneurial ecosystems by fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange between regions. This model leverages the strengths of ecosystem builders—such as policymakers, entrepreneurs, investors, and support organizations—to address challenges and create synergies for sustainable growth. Here's how it works:

Key Features of the **RegionsTwinning** Model:

- 1. Partnerships Between Regions:** - Regions with complementary strengths are paired to share best practices, resources, and expertise. *For example*, a Paris region with strong innovation hubs might partner with Saarland focusing on deep tech on cybersecurity to create balanced growth.
- 2. Knowledge Exchange:** - Ecosystem builders collaborate to exchange insights on policies, funding mechanisms, and support structures. Workshops, conferences are promoted on the virtual platform of the **European Entrepreneurial Academy**, and used to facilitate *continuous learning*.
- 3. Capacity Building:** Training programs are designed to empower local stakeholders, such as entrepreneurs and small businesses, to thrive in their ecosystems. Focus areas include access to **entrepreneurship skills development in finance, market expansion, and digital transformation**.
- 4. Joint Initiatives:** - Regions work together **on joint projects, such as startup accelerators, innovation clusters, or cross-border trade initiatives**. These initiatives aim to create a unified entrepreneurial environment that benefits all participants.
- 5. Policy Alignment:** - Harmonizing policies across regions to reduce barriers to entrepreneurship, such as regulatory hurdles or access to funding. This alignment ensures a smoother flow of resources and opportunities.

Establishing Formal Partnerships with various ecosystem builders

In the pursuit of fostering robust and sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystems, the consolidation of partnerships plays a pivotal role. This chapter outlines **the strategic efforts made to establish formal partnerships, enhance cross-border collaboration, and address the needs of ecosystem members**.

By leveraging the strengths of diverse partners, including **clusters, university innovation ecosystems, incubators, accelerators, technoparks, governmental organizations** to **boost the creation of formal and informal peer-partnerships between Eastern and Western Europe**, we aim to create a cohesive and supportive network that promotes innovation, growth, and mutual learning.

The following sections detail the approaches employed to achieve these objectives:

France / Creative Cluster

Partnership Formation:

CREA initiated formal partnerships with SMEs incubators, innovation ecosystems at HEIs, regional innovation centres in France and beyond, for example in **Saarland region (Saarbrücken) in Germany , Emilia Romagna region (Bologna), and Campania region (Napoli) in Italy**, and in **Asia (Singapore, South Korea) and North of Africa (Algeria, Senegal)**. (Table 1).

Shared Objectives:

CREA outlines common goals, such as fostering innovation, enhancing the key cutting-edge technologies in multi-sectors: CCI, deep tech , ArTech, cybersecurity, gaming in cross-vertical domains, and supporting start-ups by practical tailored-made personal entrepreneurial training.

Role Definition:

CREA clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of each partner, ensuring equitable resource distribution and collaboration.

Formal Agreements:

CREA draft and sign formal partnership agreements to solidify commitments and outline the terms of cooperation, with the stakeholders within Europe and beyond.

Ireland | IDI

IDI has built formal partnerships with key innovation stakeholders and ecosystems across Europe, Turkey, and the Gulf region. In Dublin, IDI actively collaborates among others with:

- **Further VC** – a leading venture capital fund supporting high-potential Irish startups.
- **Dublin City University (DCU)** – through DCU Alpha incubator and technology transfer initiatives.
- **Enterprise Ireland** – Ireland’s government agency responsible for enterprise development and internationalization.
- **NovaUCD** – the hub of innovation and commercialization activities at University College Dublin.

Beyond Ireland, IDI has initiated strategic partnerships with:

- **TÜBİTAK (Turkey)** – under Turkey in Horizon 2020 and HE projects to boost Turkey’s participation in Horizon Europe.
- **Teknopark İzmir (Turkey)** – under the İzmir NIC project aimed at commercialization and international networking of the Izmir Technopark and accelerator.
- **ODTU/GUNAM (Türkiye), NOVA University Lisbon (Portugal), CERTH/CPERI (Greece)** – through joint participation in Horizon Europe projects such as Horizon SolarHub and ECHO.
- Multiple GCC entities including ministries and investment agencies in Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, Oman, and Saudi Arabia, where IDI has implemented large-scale development, FDI, and innovation advisory projects.

Shared Objectives:

Across all collaborations, IDI focuses on:

- Enhancing innovation ecosystems by empowering intermediaries (accelerators, incubators, TTOs).
- Supporting start-ups and SMEs in accessing funding, mentoring, and international markets.
- Promoting technology transfer, commercialization, and university-industry collaboration.

- Strengthening cross-border knowledge exchange, particularly in areas such as deeptech, AI, energy innovation, and sustainable entrepreneurship.
- Facilitating the uptake of EU research funding and alignment with Green Deal goals via Horizon Europe projects.

Role Definition:

IDI typically acts as:

- Innovation ecosystem facilitator, connecting public agencies, academia, and private sector actors across borders.
- Capacity builder, delivering training, advisory services, and operational support to institutions aiming to scale their innovation support services.
- Knowledge broker, translating EU policy and funding mechanisms into actionable plans for local partners.
- Local implementation leader in countries such as Turkey and GCC states, providing on-the-ground expertise to build institutional capacity and entrepreneurship infrastructures.

IDI with Governmental Organizations

- **Engagement Strategy:** Develop a strategy to engage with governmental organizations, emphasizing the mutual benefits of collaboration.
- **Policy Alignment:** Ensure that the partnership aligns with local and national policies, promoting entrepreneurship and innovation.
- **Support Mechanisms:** Establish support mechanisms, such as grants, subsidies, and regulatory support, to facilitate the growth of entrepreneurial ecosystems.
- **Formal Agreements:** Sign agreements with governmental organizations to ensure long-term commitment and support.

Greece / Institute of Entrepreneurship Development (iED)

In the context of the **RegionsTwinning** initiative, the Institute of Entrepreneurship Development (iED) actively advances the creation of formal and informal partnerships that strengthen

entrepreneurial ecosystems across Europe. Based in Thessaly, Greece, iED contributes through its extensive involvement in **48 international networks and platforms**, enhancing its capacity to forge meaningful interregional cooperation and align local innovation strategies with broader European goals.

Partnership Formation

iED collaborates with a diverse set of partners across Europe and beyond, including:

- **Clusters and Innovation Hubs:** DIH², Alliance for Internet of Things Innovation (AIOTI), Hellenic Emerging Technologies Industry Association (HETiA)
- **Digital Innovation Ecosystems:** EIT Digital, Europe's Network of Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHNET), Health Hub EDIH (Greece)
- **Entrepreneurial & Start-up Networks:** Startup Europe Regions Network, European Women Association (EWA)
- **Social Innovation and Inclusion Platforms:** European Network of Innovation for Inclusion
- **Health & Data Cooperatives:** ECHalliance

These partnerships are built through shared missions, co-funded initiatives, and joint participation in EU programs such as Horizon Europe, Interreg, Digital Europe, and COSME.

Interregional Partnership

As a bridge between *Eastern and Western Europe*, iED is particularly active in fostering cross-border synergies between:

- **Widening countries** (Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Western Balkans)
- **More developed regions** (France, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland, Belgium)

By participating in twinning activities, joint pilot actions, and innovation policy dialogues, iED strengthens regional ecosystems and ensures representation of less developed regions in pan-European innovation efforts.

Shared Objectives

Partnerships facilitated by iED are built around the following shared objectives:

- Enhancing **innovation capacity** of SMEs and start-ups
- Improving **access to funding** through joint EU project collaboration and investor matchmaking
- Promoting **digital transformation**, particularly in health, agri-tech, and manufacturing sectors
- Supporting **inclusive entrepreneurship** with attention to gender equity, rural participation, and skills gaps
- Strengthening **capacity building** through peer learning, training, and mentoring exchanges
- Scaling **collaboration models** to replicate success across multiple regions

Role Definition:

Within the framework of formal partnerships, iED assumes several key roles:

- **Facilitator of Knowledge Exchange:** Organizing workshops, webinars, and study visits
- **Capacity Builder:** Designing training programs and mentoring schemes for stakeholders
- **EU Project Partner/Leader:** Initiating or joining collaborative projects with aligned missions
- **Network Integrator:** Bridging local actors with European networks and initiatives
- **Digital Transformation Enabler:** Supporting SMEs and public sector entities in adopting innovative technologies through EDIH resources

Formal Agreements

iED formalizes cooperation through:

- **Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs)** with clusters, DIHs, and universities
- **Letters of Intent (LoIs)** for project-based collaboration
- **Partnership Agreements** within EU consortia and multi-region projects
- **Strategic Partnership Declarations** for coordinated action in thematic areas (e.g., digital health, sustainable entrepreneurship, smart specialization)

These agreements serve as a foundation for sustainable and mission-driven cooperation, ensuring alignment between partners and accountability in delivery.

Bulgaria / GATE

Partnership Formation:

GATE participated in the EIT InfraBooster program, a modular training initiative developed for representatives of scientific organizations that manage publicly-funded research infrastructures. The partnership was formed through our commitment to improving the commercial potential of research infrastructure in Bulgaria. GATE established a strategic partnership with BEX, a non-profit organization and accelerator supporting Bulgarian startups expanding into international markets, especially the UK. The collaboration emerged from shared interest in strengthening Bulgaria's innovation ecosystem through international outreach. GATE has partnered with The Spinoff Conference, one of Bulgaria's flagship events focused on technology transfer, university spinouts, and science-based entrepreneurship. This year, GATE will serve as the host organization for the event.

Shared Objectives:

Across all three partnerships, GATE shares a common goal of strengthening the connection between research, innovation, and industry by enabling more effective use of scientific infrastructure and fostering cross-border collaboration. Through EIT InfraBooster, the objective is to support the commercialization of publicly-funded research infrastructures by promoting collaboration between academia and industry, particularly in sectors such as agri-food. With BEX, the shared mission is to empower Bulgarian startups to scale internationally by combining market access with GATE's technological expertise. The Spinoff Conference partnership furthers these aims by promoting science-based innovation and technology transfer, creating a platform for researchers, entrepreneurs, and investors to turn breakthrough ideas into successful ventures. Collectively, these collaborations contribute to the growth of a knowledge-based economy and the international positioning of Bulgaria's innovation ecosystem.

Role Definition:

In these international collaborations, GATE plays a proactive role as both a contributor of expertise and a facilitator of innovation. Within the EIT InfraBooster program, GATE participated in study

projects to explore commercialization pathways for research infrastructure, sharing best practices and applying insights to enhance our own facilities. In the partnership with BEX, GATE supports Bulgarian startups expanding to the UK by providing access to its advanced AI and big data infrastructure, as well as research-driven insights that strengthen their competitive edge. As host of The Spinoff Conference, GATE leads the organization of the event, curates expert content, and facilitates connections between researchers, entrepreneurs, and investors, all while showcasing its capacity to drive science-based entrepreneurship. Through each role, GATE reinforces its position as a key enabler of smart, data-driven innovation.

Formal Agreements:

Each of these partnerships has been structured through formal agreements that define roles, responsibilities, and long-term collaboration frameworks. GATE's participation in the EIT InfraBooster program was governed by structured collaboration agreements aligned with EIT's standards, ensuring a focused approach to capacity building and commercialization strategy development. The partnership with BEX was formalized through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), outlining joint activities, knowledge exchange, and support for Bulgarian founders entering the UK market. For The Spinoff Conference, a co-hosting agreement was established, designating GATE as the lead organizer and detailing commitments related to event programming, logistics, and stakeholder engagement. These agreements ensure that each collaboration is grounded in clear expectations and aligned with GATE's strategic goals.

Turkiye / Sabanci University

Partnership Formation:

Sabanci University has established a large research network for more than a decade. Almost half of the research portfolio of Sabanci University has EU funded projects which have ignited intense collaboration with European partners. Sabanci University has run and completed international collaborative projects focusing on innovation and entrepreneurship with universities, research institutes, innovation hubs across Europe from advanced as well as emerging entrepreneurship ecosystems. Sabanci University is an ambassador of ***EIT Urban Mobility*** and operates under the

umbrella EIT Knowledge Innovation Community (KICs) Hubs. (<https://www.eiturbanmobility.eu/eit-urban-mobility-welcomes-10-country-representatives/>). As a country representative, Sabanci University participated in the EIT Jumpstarter program. The Jumpstarter program aims to boost business capabilities of European scientists and researchers to bring their works on cutting-edge solutions to market. Sabanci University is also a partner of **EEN** (European Enterprise Network) which is the world's largest support network for SMEs with international ambitions (<https://een.ec.europa.eu/local-contact-points/tr/sabanci-universitesi>). Sabanci University participated in the EIT Higher Education Initiative supported **SMART4FUTURE** project which includes the collaborative efforts of 6 universities, one accelerator and supportive firms from Croatia, Serbia, Ukraine, Italy, Ireland, Portugal and Turkiye. (<https://eit-hei.eu/projects/smart4future>). Recently (in 2024), a new project proposal was submitted for EIT HEI Cohort 4 in collaboration with universities and firms from Algeria, Greece, Sweden and Turkiye. Another collaboration between Sabanci University and other universities/ innovation hubs has been built through the design and preparation of a project proposal ***"Innochamps: Connected European Academia and Industry Ecosystems Through Innovation Champions"*** for the call of HORIZON-EIE-2024-CONNECT-02. The proposal was prepared in collaboration with SMEs and innovation hubs from Malta, Spain, the Netherlands, and the UK. These efforts are valuable to improve the knowledge exchange between various types of entities and leverage resources for future collaborations and projects.

Shared Objectives:

Sabanci University is committed to strengthening its position as a key player in the global research and innovation ecosystem by fostering international collaboration and leveraging its extensive research network. Over the past decade, the university has built a strong portfolio of EU-funded projects, enhancing partnerships with leading universities, research institutes, innovation hubs, and SMEs across Europe. These initiatives have significantly contributed to knowledge exchange, entrepreneurship, and technology commercialization.

Collaborations with various entities across Europe support Sabanci University to play an important role in empowering scientists and researchers to transform their cutting-edge solutions into market-ready innovations, providing support to SMEs to reinforce their commitment to fostering an innovation-driven economy. Sabanci University aims to expand its global outreach through new initiatives, projects and collaborations aiming to enhance connectivity between academia and industry.

Role Definition:

Sabanci University plays an enabler role in innovation, entrepreneurship, and international collaboration by actively engaging in European research and development initiatives that foster knowledge exchange, support technology commercialization, and build bridges between academia, industry, and policy-makers. Through its participation in EIT Urban Mobility as a representative for RIS and its Jumpstarter program, the university enhances the business capabilities of researchers and scientists, helps them to develop their products / services emerging from their cutting-edge research and commercialize these research outcomes. Sabanci University fosters cross-border partnerships with universities, research institutes, SMEs, and innovation hubs in Europe and beyond through EIT HEI supported projects and facilitates the exchange of experience and knowledge in innovation and entrepreneurship training and support. By initiating collaboration to develop project proposals, Sabanci University plays a facilitator role to bring different entities from various ecosystems to enhance academia-industry linkages and the commercialization of research findings.

Formal Agreements:

Each of these partnerships has been structured through formal agreements that define roles, responsibilities, and long-term collaboration frameworks. EIT Urban Mobility RIS Hub, Jumpstarter Program, other EIT supported projects are based on formal agreements and MOUs. These agreements ensure that each collaboration is grounded in clear expectations and aligned with Sabanci University's strategic objectives.

Ukraine / TechUkraine

Partnership Formation:

TechUkraine collaborates with a diverse range of entities from emerging regions, including the the Ukraine's innovation ecosystem, and international partnerships that extend both regionally and across the EU:

National-Level Collaborations in Ukraine

1. Government Institutions:

- The **Ministry of Digital Transformation** leads digital innovation and transformation.
- **Diia City United** creates a legal and financial framework supporting IT companies.

2. Industry and Cluster Organizations:

- **IT Clusters** in Kyiv, Lviv, and Kharkiv unite businesses, academic institutions, and public organizations to drive regional IT sector growth.
- Organizations like the **IT Ukraine Association** and **Ukrainian Venture Capital Association (UVCA)** foster innovation through networking, advocacy, and investment.

3. Innovation Hubs and Accelerators:

- **UNIT.City**, **Synchroprostir**, and **Radar Tech Accelerator** provide startups with resources, networking, and mentorship.
- **YEP!**, a startup incubator for student entrepreneurs, focuses on developing youth-driven ventures.

4. Sustainability and Tech for Good:

- **Greencubator** promotes green technologies and sustainable energy solutions.
- **Brave 1** supports tech-driven solutions with a focus on resilience.

5. FinTech and Investment:

- The **Ukrainian Association of FinTech and Innovation Companies** and **Ukraine Invest** facilitate the growth of the FinTech sector and attract foreign investments.

6. Academic Partnerships:

- Institutions like **Lviv and Kyiv Politechnics** collaborate with startups and industries to integrate innovation into education.

International Collaboration

1. Cross-Border Partnerships:

- Neighboring countries' initiatives, such as **Startup Wise Guys** (Baltics/Spain), **Founders Academy** (Estonia), and **Startup Moldova** (Moldova), enhance regional innovation synergies.
- **Civitta Hungary** supports Ukrainian ventures through advisory services.

2. East-West Regional Cooperation:

- Regional collaborations, such as **Cro Startup** (Croatia), **Vitosha Venture Capital** (Bulgaria), and **Startup Latvia**, focus on bridging economic and innovation disparities.

3. Pan-European Collaboration:

- Partnerships with EU organizations, including **France Digitale**, **BAE (Business Angels Europe)**, and **TNW (The Next Web, Netherlands)**, create opportunities for Ukrainian startups to integrate into larger ecosystems.
- Events like the **Valencia Digital Summit** showcase innovation, while organizations like **Dutchbasecamp** and **NRW Global (Germany)** assist in scaling and entering international markets.

4. Bilateral Relations:

- Partnerships with the **British-Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce** and **NUCC (Norwegian-Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce)**, among others, strengthen economic ties.

Through these collaborations, Ukraine's innovation ecosystem leverages both local talent and global opportunities.

Shared Objectives:

Strengthening the Tech Ecosystem: Promoting innovation and entrepreneurship across Ukraine and its partner regions.

Global Integration: Facilitating the integration of Ukrainian startups into international markets.

Knowledge Exchange: Sharing expertise and best practices to enhance competitiveness.

Economic Growth: Supporting the development of sustainable and scalable tech businesses.

Role Definition:

Facilitator: TechUkraine acts as a bridge between Ukrainian tech entities and international partners.

Promoter: It highlights the achievements and potential of Ukraine's tech sector on a global stage.

Supporter: Provides visibility, resources, training, and networking opportunities to startups and SMEs.

Innovator: Drives initiatives that address challenges and create opportunities within the tech ecosystem.

Formal Agreements:

TechUkraine in most cases formalizes its collaborations through Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) and partnership agreements. These agreements outline the roles, responsibilities, and contributions of each partner, ensuring transparency and alignment with shared goals.

Cross-Border Collaboration to improve the “TwinningRegions” peer-networks

Cross-border collaboration plays a crucial role in enhancing the capacity and potential of European regional entrepreneurial ecosystems. **By bridging the gap between more developed and less developed regions, we aim to foster innovation, knowledge transfer, and mutual growth.** The “TwinningRegions” initiative is designed to create a robust peer-network that facilitates cooperation and shared learning among participating regions.

This introduction outlines our approach to cross-border collaboration, highlighting the importance of increasing the capacity and potential of regional entrepreneurial ecosystems. By engaging diverse partners and promoting collaborative efforts, we aim to create a cohesive and supportive network that drives economic development and sustainability across Europe.

At same time we build to complete the related **KPI 4.2 Number of additional EU Regions enrolled as partners (advanced & emerging) 10 | 10)** . The EU reference for the list of developed (innovation

leaders) and widening regions in Europe: the detailed information about the developed and widening regions in Europe can be found through the [RIS interactive publications](#)¹.

These resources provide comprehensive data and visualizations on various regional indicators, including economic activities, population, and more. Here are a couple of useful references:

- Regional Innovation Scoreboard – 2024 interactive edition²
- Regions in Europe – 2023 edition by Eurostat³

These publications offer insights into the disparities and characteristics of different regions across the EU, helping to identify developed and widening regions.

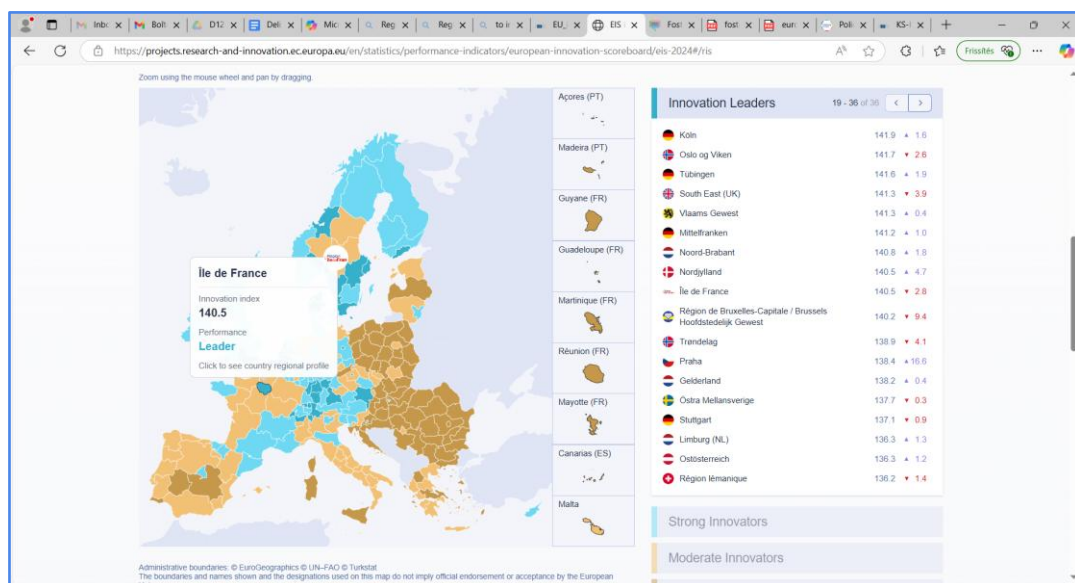


Fig 1. Regional Innovation leaders (Ile-de-France, France)

¹ [EIS interactive tool 2024 | Research and Innovation](#)

² <https://projects.research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/en/statistics/performance-indicators/european-innovation-scoreboard/eis-2024#/ris>

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/interactive-publications/regions-2024>



Fig 2. **Strong regional innovators in Europe (Southern, Northern and Western of Ireland)**

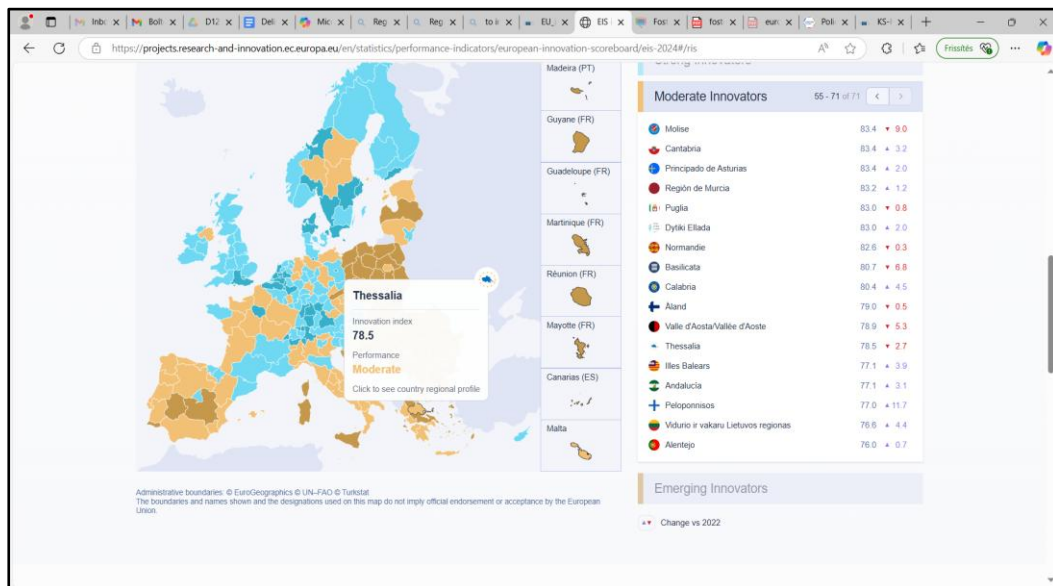


Fig 3. **Moderate regional innovators in Europe (Thessalia, Greece)**



Fig 4. **Emerging innovators in Europe (Iugozapaden, including Sofia province, Bulgaria)**

The following table (Table 1) focuses on fostering cross-border collaboration among European regional entrepreneurial ecosystems in the ExcellEnt project, **connecting more developed and less developed regions, that includes 2 associated countries (Ukraine and Turkiye) as well.**

Established Cross-Border Connections:

ExcellEnt project consortium involves partnerships from **cross-border connections in and around Greece (GR), France (FR), Ireland (IE), Turkey (TR), Bulgaria (BG), and Ukraine (UA) :**

- **Strengthen Innovation Hubs:** Establishing hubs among innovation ecosystem builders to drive regional innovation.
- **Develop Funding Mechanisms:** Leveraging EU programs like Horizon Europe and Interreg to support entrepreneurial activities.
- **Align Policies:** Ensuring the adaptation of the regional and national entrepreneurial strategies are cohesive and supportive of innovation.
- **Implement Joint Projects:** Collaborating on initiatives that address shared challenges and opportunities to build new networks and new partnerships

East-South-West Peer Regional Connections

The initiative connects 6 project regions from emerging and widening areas to another European regions, focusing on:

- **Innovation Hubs:** Creating platforms for knowledge exchange and technological advancement among the main regional ecosystem builders
- **Policy Alignment:** Harmonizing regulations and strategies to foster entrepreneurship among the peer- regions.
- **Joint Projects:** Launching collaborative efforts to enhance regional competitiveness.
- **Capacity building to boost the innovation performances in the “ Learning regions”:** Organising 6 x 2 online entrepreneurial skills development courses in each country: “**Start your Business**” and “**Pitching deck**” training with 6 soft-landing missions to 6 partner countries. (Details are on the EEA- European Entrepreneurship Academy platform).

Cross-border collaboration among the I.European regional entrepreneurial ecosystems (more developed and less developed regions)	Established cross-border connection(s)	Key words: “innovation hubs”, “funding mechanisms”, “policy alignment”, and “joint projects”
1.Greece/Thessalia (Larissa)	Cyprus	joint projects
1.Greece/Thessalia (Larissa)	Andalusia, Spain	joint projects
1.Greece/Thessalia (Larissa)	Valencia, Spain	joint projects
1.Greece/Thessalia (Larissa)	Styria, Austria	Joint Projects
1.Greece/Thessalia (Larissa)	Leinster, Ireland	Joint Projects
1.Greece/Thessalia (Larissa)	Campania, Italy	Joint Projects
1.Greece/Thessalia (Larissa)	Sicily, Italy	Joint Projects
1.Greece/Thessalia (Larissa)	Trentino, Italy	Joint Projects
1.Greece/Thessalia (Larissa)	Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, France	Joint Projects
1.Greece/Thessalia (Larissa)	Ille-et-Vilaine, France	Joint Projects

1.Greece/Thessalia (Larissa)	Western Moldavia, Romania	Joint Projects
1.Greece/Thessalia (Larissa)	Lisboa, Portugal	Joint Projects
2.Bulgaria/Iugozapaden (Sofia)	Greece (which region)	joint projects, innovation hubs
2.Bulgaria/Iugozapaden (Sofia)	Romania (which region)	Joint Projects
2.Bulgaria/Iugozapaden (Sofia)	Serbia	Joint Projects
3.Turkiye/Marmara (Istanbul)	Croatia	Joint Projects
3.Turkiye/Marmara (Istanbul)	Serbia	Joint Projects
3.Turkiye/Marmara (Istanbul)	Ukraine	Joint Projects
3.Turkiye/Marmara (Istanbul)	Ireland (Dublin)	Joint Projects
3.Turkiye/Marmara (Istanbul)	Italy (Napoli)	Joint Projects
3.Turkiye/Marmara (Istanbul)	Sweden (Gothenburg)	Joint Projects
3.Turkiye/Marmara (Istanbul)	Algeria	Joint Projects
3.Turkiye/Marmara (Istanbul)	Greece (Thessaly)	Joint Projects
3.Turkiye/Marmara (Istanbul)	Malta	Joint Projects
3.Turkiye/Marmara (Istanbul)	Spain (Barcelona)	Joint Projects
3.Turkiye/Marmara (Istanbul)	The Netherlands (Enschede)	Joint Projects
3.Turkiye/Marmara (Istanbul)	The UK (England)	Joint Projects
4. France - Ile-de-France region (Paris)	Saarland- Saarbrücken, Germany	Joint projects
4. France - Ile-de-France region (Paris)	Emilia-Romagna- Bologna ,Italy.	Innovation hub, Joint projects
4. France - Ile-de-France region (Paris)	Campagnia- Napoli, Italy	Innovation hub, Joint Projects
5. Ireland (Eastern and Midland -Dublin)	Thessaloniki, Central Macedonia, GR	Innovation Hub, Joint Projects
5. Ireland (Eastern and Midland -Dublin)	Ankara- Central Anatolia, TR	Innovation Hub, Joint Projects
5. Ireland (Eastern and Midland -Dublin)	Izmir- Western Anatolia, TR	Innovation Hub, Joint Projects
5. Ireland (Eastern and Midland -Dublin)	Athens -Attica , GR	Innovation Hub, Joint Projects

5. Ireland (Eastern and Midland -Dublin)	Lisbon Region, PT	Innovation Hub, Joint Projects	
6. Ukraine (Kyiv)	Estonia	Innovation Hub, Joint projects	
6. Ukraine (Kyiv)	Moldova	Joint projects	
6. Ukraine (Kyiv)	Georgia	Joint projects	
II. East – South- West Peer regional connections (emerging & widening regions)	Organisation - contacts	Key words: “innovation hubs”, “funding mechanisms”, “policy alignment”, and “joint projects”	Status: Under progress or DONE
1. Serbia /Belgrade - Ile de France (CREA)	Innovation Attitude Center	policy alignment	DONE
2. Spain /Castilla la Mancha - Ile de France (CREA)	ITECAM	Innovation hub	DONE
3. Romania / Ile de France (BoosterLabs)	Techcelerator	Joint projects	DONE
4. Cyprus & Ireland (IDI)	TRUENIQUE	Joint Projects	DONE
5. Cyprus & Ireland (IDI)	CMMI	Joint Projects	Under Progress
6. Baltic states /Tartu /Estonia & (Ile de France (CREA)	University of Tartu	Joint project	DONE
7. Montenegro /Podgorica - Ile de France (CREA)	Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation	Funding mechanism	Under progress
8. Romania & Thessaly, Greece (IED)	Transilvania IT Cluster	Joint Projects	In progress

9. Poland & Thessaly, Greece (iED)	Agrego	Joint Projects	In progress
10. Slovenia Thessaly, Greece (iED)	FOS - Faculty of Organisation Studies in Novo Mesto	Joint Projects	In progress
11. Croatia & Thessaly, Greece (iED)	PORA Regional Development Agency of Koprivnica Križevci County	Joint Projects	In progress
12. Hungary -Ile de France- (CREA et BoosterLabs)	Design Terminal - Civitta	Innovation hub	under progress
13. NRW Germany/Kyiv Region, Ukraine (TechUkraine)	NRW Global	Joint Projects	In progress
14. Oslo region, Norway & Kyiv region, Ukraine (TechUkraine)	NUCC (Norwegian-Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce)	Joint Projects	In progress
15. Amsterdam, Noord Holland, The Netherlands & Kyiv region, Ukraine (TechUkraine)	Dutchbasecamp	Joint Projects	Done
16. Andalusia and Navarre, Spain/Brussels, Belgium/London, UK/Estonia & Kyiv Region, Ukraine (TechUkraine)	Sploro/BAE/Startupwise Guys	Joint Projects	In progress

Table 1. Regional partnerships a) cross-border and b) East-West peer connections (existing and future) initiated by ExcellEnt project partners

The high number of established and under progress networks and partnerships at **cross-border**, at **neighbourhood level as well as at East- West collaboration level** demonstrate the *strong synergies and rich content and engagements* of the **ExcellEnt partner** organisations and the ecosystem builders.

Addressing Ecosystem Members' Needs through Capacity building workshop(s)

To effectively address the needs of ecosystem members, capacity-building workshops play a critical role. These workshops are designed to equip entrepreneurs, start-ups, and ecosystem builders with the necessary skills, knowledge, and resources to thrive in a competitive environment. By focusing on capacity-building initiatives, we aim to foster an environment of continuous learning and development, ensuring that all members can benefit from shared knowledge and best practices.

In the context of the Balkan countries, the **IDI (International Development Initiative)** will lead a **targeted capacity-building workshop** to address the unique challenges and opportunities in this region. This workshop will provide a platform **for knowledge exchange, skills development, and networking, ultimately contributing to the growth and sustainability of the entrepreneurial ecosystems in the Balkan countries.**

The main goals are :

A) Network Expansion and Scouting Opportunities

- ★ Utilizing the Consortium's Partner Network
- ★ Identifying New Regions for Expansion
- ★ Challenges and Opportunities

B) Supporting Local Entrepreneurs and Start-Ups

- ★ Increasing Visibility
- ★ Establishing Contacts
- ★ Opportunities for Cooperation

C) Simultaneous Engagement with Ecosystems

- ★ Emerging Ecosystems Needing Support
- ★ Leading Ecosystems with Mutual Interests

- ★ Creating a Single Market for Entrepreneurs and Start-Ups

D) Locally Rooted Support and Homogeneous Practices

- ★ Benefits of a Locally Rooted Approach
- ★ Access to Open Network and Extended Opportunities
- ★ Market Expansion and Resource Pool

Methodology Roll-Out and Exploitation

The successful implementation of the **RegionsTwinning** initiative relies heavily on the effective roll-out and exploitation of the developed methodology. By systematically supporting the adoption of this methodology across various regions, we can ensure that its benefits are maximized and its impact is far-reaching. This section introduces our commitment **to facilitating the roll-out and exploitation of the developed methodology, focusing on supporting regions in the adoption process, enabling peer ecosystems** to leverage the methodology, and reinforcing collaborations to sustain its impact.

Supporting the Roll-Out of the Developed Methodology

Supporting the roll-out of the developed methodology involves providing **comprehensive guidance and resources to regions adopting the approach**. This includes offering **training sessions, creating detailed manuals, and setting up support networks** to assist in the implementation process. By ensuring that all regions have **the tools and knowledge needed to effectively roll out the methodology**, we aim to create a consistent and impactful application across diverse entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Benefits of the Model:

- ★ **Enhanced Innovation:** By combining diverse strengths, regions can foster groundbreaking ideas and solutions.
- ★ **Economic Growth:** Collaboration leads to job creation, investment opportunities, and increased competitiveness.
- ★ **Resilience:** Sharing resources and strategies helps regions adapt to economic or environmental challenges. This model has been successfully implemented in various contexts, such as the European Union's initiatives to strengthen regional innovation ecosystems.

Exploitation by Peer Ecosystems

The exploitation of the methodology by peer ecosystems is crucial for its widespread adoption and long-term success. This involves encouraging peer ecosystems to integrate the methodology into their existing practices and frameworks. By promoting **best practices** and demonstrating the tangible benefits of the methodology, ***we aim to inspire peer ecosystems to adopt and adapt the approach to their specific contexts, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and innovation.***

The “RegionsTwinning” Model Diagram Description:

1. **Central Node:** - A central hub representing the “RegionsTwinning” model through a ***Coordination Body of the ExcellEnt project consortium*** that facilitates collaboration.
2. **Western Europe Regions:** - On the left side, clusters of developed regions (e.g. France, Ireland) are shown, symbolizing innovation hubs and resource-rich areas.
3. **Eastern Europe Regions:** - On the right side, clusters of widening regions (e.g., Greece, Bulgaria, Ukraine and Turkiye) are depicted, representing areas with growth potential.
4. **Cross-Border Connections:** - Arrows between neighboring regions (e.g., France-Germany, Ireland - UK) to highlight cross-border collaboration.
5. **East-West Peer Connections:** - Dotted or dashed lines connecting Western and Eastern regions to symbolize ***knowledge exchange, capacity building, and joint initiatives.***
6. **Key Elements:** - Icons or symbols for ***“innovation hubs”, “funding mechanisms”, “policy alignment”, and “joint projects”.***

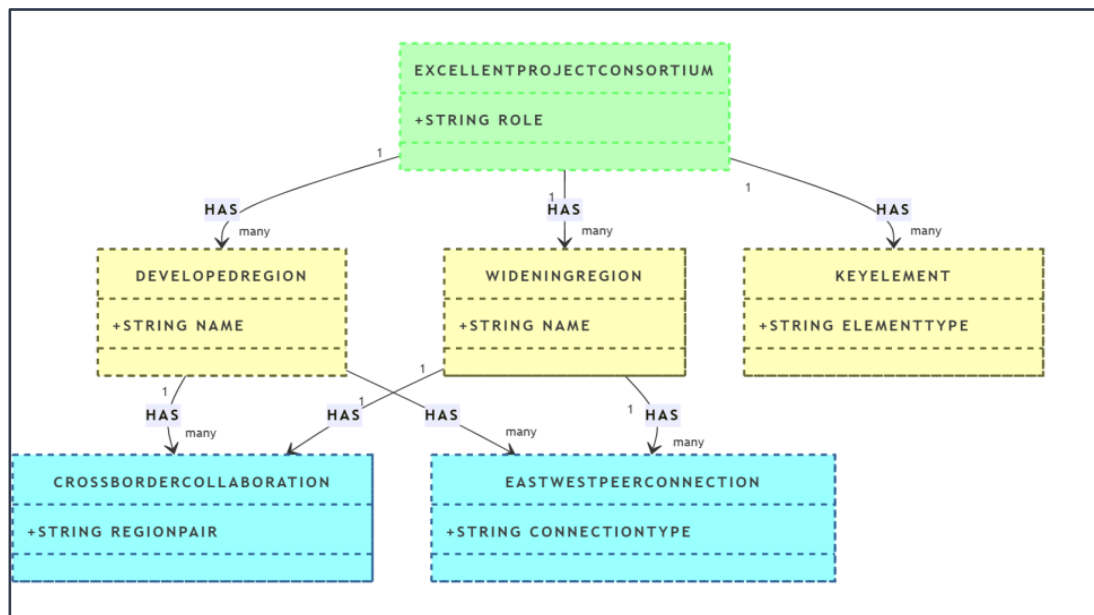


Fig 5. Class Diagram: The “RegionsTwinning” model describes the features of the cross-border collaboration and East-West peer-regions connections connecting to the Central Hub of ExcellEnt (source: authors)

This model is used as a showcase to underline the necessity of the strong entrepreneurial ecosystems in the regional innovation performances.

Reinforcing Collaborations

Reinforcing collaborations is essential to sustaining the impact of the methodology and ensuring its ongoing relevance. This involves **strengthening existing partnerships and fostering new ones**, creating a cross-border network of support and collaboration. By continuously engaging with partners and stakeholders, we can ensure that the methodology remains dynamic, adaptable, and responsive to the evolving needs of entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Engagement events

Engagement events foster collaboration, knowledge exchange, and capacity building through joint initiatives. The key elements include **innovation hubs**, **funding mechanisms**, **policy alignment**, and **joint projects**.

Cross-border and East-West Peer Connection events

Cross-border events facilitate collaboration between neighboring regions, promoting the sharing of ideas, resources, and expertise. These events often focus on addressing common challenges and developing innovative solutions through joint events. They help build **stronger regional networks and enhance capacity building efforts**.

East-West Peer Connection events bring together *entrepreneurial ecosystem builders* from different geographical areas (more developed and widening regions) *to exchange knowledge and best practices*. These events aim to bridge gaps between regions by fostering understanding and cooperation.

Participants engage in joint initiatives and policy alignment to address shared goals and challenges, ultimately strengthening the overall innovation ecosystem.

Country/ region name	Event date	Short description (main characteristics : key elements and addressed challenges)
France	13 June 2025 (just after the SLM in Paris)	The event explores the evolving roles of innovation intermediaries, focusing on how they can better support innovation processes for startups, mid-caps and self-entrepreneurs. It highlights the challenges faced by intermediaries in connecting stakeholders, facilitating knowledge transfer, and enabling collaboration . Participants discuss current shortcomings in innovation support services and propose actionable solutions to enhance their effectiveness.
Ireland	26-27 May, Soft Landing Mission to Dublin	Deep dive into Ireland's innovation ecosystem, connecting participants with VCs, angel networks, and tech transfer experts . Key elements include site visits to DCU Alpha, Enterprise Ireland, and UCD Nova, showcasing support structures for start-ups and research commercialization. The mission addresses challenges such as early-stage investment access, tech transfer efficiency, and ecosystem integration for innovation intermediaries.
Greece	14-15 February 2025.	The event in Greece aimed to foster ecosystem discovery and stimulate the mobility of entrepreneurs within the vibrant and growing ecosystems of

		Greece. This initiative seeks to empower entrepreneurs and ecosystem representatives by offering tailored support services to explore development opportunities and connect with the resources needed for their growth.
Bulgaria	19-20 June 2025	The hybrid event in Sofia, Bulgaria, will focus on identifying gaps in innovation support services tailored to the local ecosystem. It aims to strengthen regional and international collaboration, enabling Bulgarian intermediaries to exchange knowledge and best practices. The event will emphasize support for emerging sectors like ICT, green and AgriTech, and healthcare.
Türkiye	5-6 May 2025	The event in Istanbul will aim to address gaps in innovation support services. The event will emphasize supporting emerging sectors such as advanced materials , manufacturing . Participants will explore strategies to align Türkiye's innovation ecosystem with global trends, enhancing competitiveness and adaptability for the future.
Ukraine	26 April 2025	The biggest spring event in Kyiv , is a regional one, dedicated to the community shaping the new era of Ukrainian defense technology. Defense tech innovators and experts will come together. The event will celebrate the impressive achievements of Ukrainian Defence tech industry, create space to share knowledge and ideas about further sector development between business, innovators, policy-makers, investors and government officials. Despite its regional character, the event will be interesting to all stakeholders from the EU as a chance to meet practitioners and dive deeper into the practical use of defence technologies.

Table 2. Cross-border and East-West interregional events to improve the engagements

Together, these engagement events (**Cross-border and East-West Peer connection**), symbolize the power of collaboration in driving progress and innovation across borders and regions to develop showcases for the **RegionsTwinning** model.

Conclusion

Summary of Key Points

Task 4.1 aims to bring significant added value to entrepreneurs, start-ups, and incubators by fostering collaboration and leveraging a network of formal partnerships. **The RegionsTwinning** approach will ultimately contribute to creating a single market for entrepreneurial activities, promoting growth and sustainability within the ecosystem.

Future Directions

As we move forward, our focus will be on scaling the RegionsTwinning initiative to include more regions and further refining our methodology based on the lessons learned and feedback received. We aim to strengthen the **new partnerships, enhance cross-border collaborations, and provide even more targeted support to entrepreneurial ecosystems**. By continuously evolving and adapting our approach, we will ensure that **the RegionsTwinning** initiative remains relevant and impactful, fostering innovation, growth, and sustainability across all participating regions.

In addition, **we plan to explore new opportunities for collaboration and expansion, leveraging emerging technologies and trends to support the development of entrepreneurial ecosystems**. Our future directions will also include a **stronger emphasis on inclusivity and diversity**, ensuring that all ecosystem members have equal access to resources and opportunities for growth.

Final Remarks

Despite the progress in innovation, the EU's innovation divide persists and is predominantly shaped by geographic concentrations. While **Innovation Leaders** and most **Strong innovators** are predominantly located in Northern and Western Europe, many of the **Moderate** and **Emerging** innovators are in Southern and Eastern Europe. This divide emphasises the need for targeted efforts to bridge the innovation gap and foster equitable growth across the EU, which is one of the goals of the ExcellEnt project, which is fully aligned with the main goals of the **New European Innovation Agenda**, adopted in July 2022. **The RegionsTwinning** model in the **ExcellEnt project** demonstrates

the power of collaboration and mutual learning in addressing the unique challenges faced by entrepreneurial ecosystems.

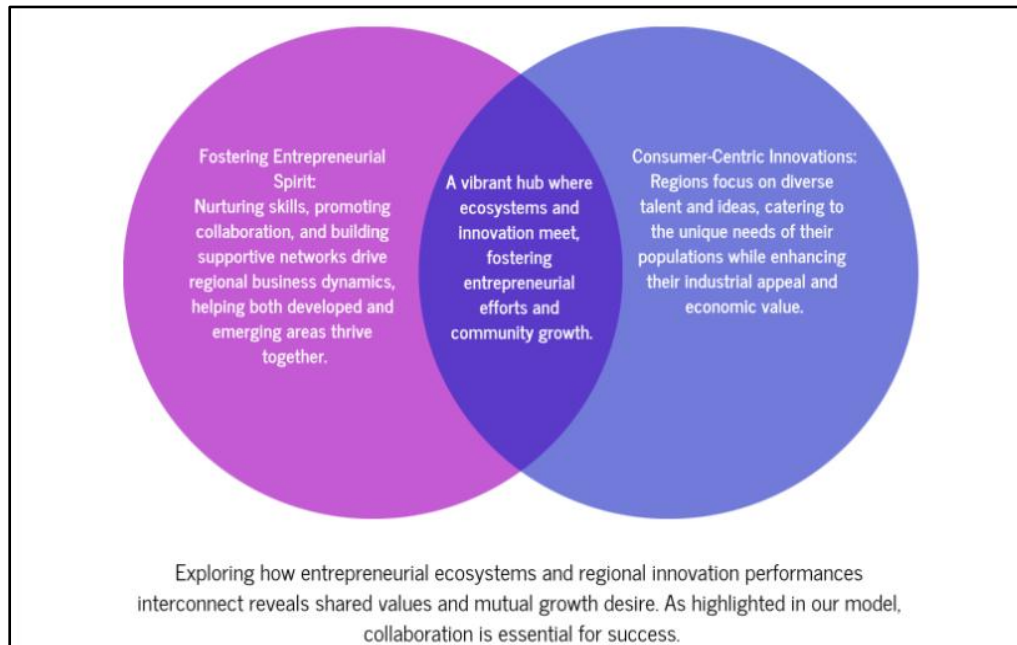


Fig 6. Synergies between entrepreneurial ecosystems and innovation performances in and within the regions (Source: authors)

Through our collective efforts, we think that we have been able **to create a dynamic and supportive network that fosters innovation, growth, and sustainability and better innovation performances in the entrepreneurial ecosystems and in the European regions itself.** (Fig 6) As we continue to build on this foundation, we remain committed **to refining our methodology, strengthening our partnerships, and expanding our reach.**

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