



WP1 - S3 Innovation Hub Network in Blue Economy sectors and seajobs

A1.4. Activation of an Innovation Hub Network

D.1.4.2 Cross-Border Strategy





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CROSS-BORDER STRATEGY (D.1.4.2) FOR:

- **INFORMATION ACTIVITIES ON INNOVATIVE SERVICES TO SMES (WP2)**
- **THE MATCH-MAKING MECHANISMS FOR THE SEA JOBS DEMAND/SUPPLY (WP3).**

This cross-border strategy is strictly linked to the assessment report "Regional Centers of Innovation" and is a fundamental step in creating an Adriatic community for business creation. This initiative seeks to develop a robust ecosystem for fostering, launching, scaling, and supporting new businesses within the Water, Marine and Maritime resilient sectors.

1. Introduction

The establishment of a cross-border service center network between Italy and Croatia aims to enhance the competitiveness of SMEs operating in the Blue Economy. This strategy focuses on the implementation of information activities that facilitate access to innovative services, ensuring sustainable growth and digital transformation. Additionally, it strives to create a thriving Adriatic community where businesses can flourish through structured support mechanisms, collaboration, and knowledge-sharing.

2. Objectives

The strategy is designed to:

- Promote awareness of innovative services available to SMEs.
- Facilitate digital and sustainable transitions.
- Encourage collaboration between research institutions, service centers, and SMEs.



- Provide targeted support for capacity building and professional development.
- Improve access to funding opportunities for innovation and sustainability.
- Foster business creation and attract investments to sustain a resilient Water, Marine and Maritime economy.
- Implement match-making mechanisms for Sea jobs demand and supply.

3. Key Areas of Information Activities

3.1 Digitalization and Smart Technologies

- **Workshops and Webinars:** Organized sessions on Industry 4.0 and 5.0 technologies, covering IoT, AI, and big data applications in nautical sector, fisheries, aquaculture, and tourism.
- **Online Resource Hub:** A digital platform providing SMEs with access to guidelines, case studies, and best practices on digital transformation.
- **One-on-One Digital Consulting:** Personalized advisory sessions to assist SMEs in implementing digital solutions.

3.2 Sustainable Business Practices

- **Training on Circular Economy:** Courses focusing on resource and waste circularity, sustainable aquaculture, and green maritime technologies.
- **Environmental Impact Assessments:** Providing SMEs with tools and methodologies to evaluate and mitigate environmental footprints.
- **Adoption of Eco-Friendly Practices:**
 - Promoting sustainable fishing methods (e.g., ASC, MSC, Friends of the Sea, GLOBALG.A.P. Aquaculture, Naturland, EU Organic, BRCGS Food Safety, IFS Food), providing information on Collective Trademarks (e.g., Cozza romagnola), organic and IGP/DOP certification.
 - Promoting renewable energy integration, and responsible tourism.
 - Promoting best-practices for waste collection and reducing the volumes.



3.3 Innovation and Research Collaboration

- **Innovation Hubs and Labs:** Establishing co-working spaces where businesses and researchers collaborate on innovative projects.
- **Access to Funding and Grants:** Regularly updated databases of financial opportunities, along with expert-led training on proposal writing.
- **Pilot Projects:** Launching cross-border initiatives to test new technologies and business models in the Blue Economy.

3.4 SME Capacity Building and Business Creation Support

- **Customized Mentorship Programs:** Pairing SMEs with industry experts and successful entrepreneurs.
- **Skill Development Courses:** Covering business diversification, regulatory compliance, and digital marketing for SMEs.
- **Knowledge Exchange Events:** Organizing conferences and networking events to connect stakeholders across Italy and Croatia.
- **Business Model Validation & Market Access Support:** Providing structured strategies for growth, go-to-market approaches, access to funding, market validation, and testing facilities.
- **Investment and Financial Support:** Facilitating access to seed and growth funds, investment opportunities, and de-risking mechanisms through co-investment.
- **Talent Acquisition and HR Support:** Addressing the lack of innovation resources by connecting SMEs with skilled professionals and fostering a talent pool within the Adriatic region.
- **Testing and Prototyping Infrastructure Access:** Supporting SMEs in testing and refining their products/services before market entry.
- **Market Validation and Lead Generation:** Offering specialized services to evaluate market demand and help businesses connect with early customers and industry partners.
- **Portfolio Optimization and Scaling Support:** Helping companies refine their offerings, expand into new markets, and develop sustainable long-term strategies.
- **Access to Investment Opportunities:** Ensuring SMEs are connected with potential investors while implementing risk-mitigation strategies through co-investment frameworks.



- **Legal and Regulatory Assistance:** Providing expert legal support to navigate complex regulatory landscapes, intellectual property protections, and compliance requirements.

3.5 Match-Making Mechanisms for Sea Jobs Demand/Supply

- **Recruitment Days and Job Fairs:** Organizing dedicated events where maritime and marine industry employers can meet potential employees, including students, job seekers, and experienced professionals.
- **Internship and Apprenticeship Programs:** Collaborating with universities and training institutions to create structured pathways for students to gain industry experience and transition into full-time employment.
- **Networking Events and Career Workshops:** Hosting events where businesses, educational institutions, and workforce agencies can discuss industry needs, skill development, and employment opportunities.
- **Skill Certification and Training Programs:** Offering specialized training modules to ensure job seekers meet industry requirements, bridging the skills gap in maritime and marine sectors.

4. Implementation Plan

The implementation will be structured in three phases:

1. **Phase 1 – Awareness & Outreach (Starting Month May 2025):** Develop marketing materials, launch the online resource hub, and host initial workshops.
2. **Phase 2 – Training & Engagement (Starting Month September 2025):** Conduct in-depth training sessions, mentorship programs, and industry collaborations.
3. **Phase 3 – Evaluation & Sustainability (Starting Month April 2026):** Monitor SME progress, refine services based on feedback, and secure long-term funding.

5. Expected Outcomes

- Increased SME participation in digitalization and sustainability initiatives.
- Strengthened cross-border collaboration among service centers and research institutions.



- Improved access to innovation funding and support services.
- Enhanced competitiveness and resilience of SMEs in the Blue Economy.
- A fully established Adriatic community for business creation, fostering new ventures and investment opportunities.
- A structured and efficient system for matching Sea job demand and supply, increasing employment opportunities within the water, maritime and marine industries.

Each service center in the project territories will have a specific specialization, ensuring that the entire consortium operates based on the principle of added value. Not all centers will provide the same services. A potential client or beneficiary will access a service center for assistance, and if the requested service is not available at that center, they will be redirected to another center that offers the required service. This ensures an optimized and efficient support network tailored to the diverse needs of businesses within the Water, Marine and Maritime economy.

6. Services of the Regional Centers of Innovation

SERVICES OF THE REGIONAL CENTERS OF INNOVATION								
DIGITALIZATION AND SMART TECHNOLOGIES	PP1	PP2	PP3	PP4	PP5	PP6	PP7	PP8
Workshops and Webinars: Organized sessions on Industry 4.0 and 5.0 technologies, covering IoT, AI, and big data applications in nautical sector, fisheries, aquaculture, and tourism.		X					X	X
One-on-One Digital Consulting: Personalized advisory sessions to assist SMEs in implementing digital solutions.	X	X		X				X
SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS PRACTICES	PP1	PP2	PP3	PP4	PP5	PP6	PP7	PP8
Training on Circular Economy: Courses focusing on resource and waste circularity, sustainable aquaculture, and green maritime technologies.		X	X	X				X
Environmental Impact Assessments: Providing SMEs with tools and methodologies to evaluate and mitigate environmental footprints.		X		X				X



Italy – Croatia



Adoption of Eco-Friendly Practices: Promoting sustainable fishing methods, organic and IGP/DOP certification; renewable energy integration, responsible tourism and sustainable waste collection.	X	X		X			X	X
INNOVATION AND RESEARCH COLLABORATION	PP1	PP2	PP3	PP4	PP5	PP6	PP7	PP8
Innovation Hubs and Labs: Establishing co-working spaces where businesses and researchers collaborate on innovative projects.		X					X	X
Access to Funding and Grants: Regularly updated databases of financial opportunities, along with expert-led training on proposal writing.	X	X	X	X				X
Pilot Projects: Launching cross-border initiatives to test new technologies and business models in the Blue Economy.	X	X	X					
SME CAPACITY BUILDING AND BUSINESS CREATION SUPPORT	PP1	PP2	PP3	PP4	PP5	PP6	PP7	PP8
Customized Mentorship Programs: Pairing SMEs with industry experts and successful entrepreneurs.		X		X				X
Skill Development Courses: Covering business diversification, regulatory compliance, and digital marketing for SMEs.		X	X	X			X	
Knowledge Exchange Events: Organizing conferences and networking events to connect stakeholders		X	X				X	X
Business Model Validation & Market Access Support: Providing structured strategies for growth, go-to-market approaches, access to funding, market validation, and testing facilities.		X						
Investment and Financial Support: Facilitating access to seed and growth funds, investment opportunities, and de-risking mechanisms through co-investment.		X	X	X				
Talent Acquisition and HR Support: Addressing the lack of innovation resources by connecting SMEs with skilled professionals and fostering a talent pool within the Adriatic region.	X	X						X
Testing and Prototyping Infrastructure Access: Supporting SMEs in testing and refining their products/services before market entry.								X
Market Validation and Lead Generation: Offering specialized services to evaluate market demand and help businesses connect with early customers and industry partners.		X	X					
Portfolio Optimization and Scaling Support: Helping companies refine their offerings, expand into new markets, and develop sustainable long-term strategies.		X						
Access to Investment Opportunities: Ensuring SMEs are connected with potential investors while implementing risk-mitigation strategies through co-investment frameworks.		X						



Italy – Croatia



Legal and Regulatory Assistance: Providing expert legal support to navigate complex regulatory landscapes, intellectual property protections, and compliance requirements.		X	X	X				
MATCH-MAKING MECHANISMS FOR SEA JOBS DEMAND/SUPPLY	PP1	PP2	PP3	PP4	PP5	PP6	PP7	PP8
Recruitment Days and Job Fairs: Organizing dedicated events where maritime and marine industry employers can meet potential employees, including students, job seekers, and experienced professionals.			X				X	X
Internship and Apprenticeship Programs: Collaborating with universities and training institutions to create structured pathways for students to gain industry experience and transition into full-time employment.		X	X	X				X
Networking Events and Career Workshops: Hosting events where businesses, educational institutions, and workforce agencies can discuss industry needs, skill development, and employment opportunities.		X		X				X
Skill Certification and Training Programs: Offering specialized training modules to ensure job seekers meet industry requirements, bridging the skills gap in maritime and marine sectors.		X		X				X

