Information package on the best-practice of the Regional Cooperative Westerkwartier

The information package is built on the EURADA’s canvas for best-practice transfer related to the Regional Cooperative Westerkwartier and serves to complement the information contained in it. The infopack elaborates on the canvas’ sections key partners and key activities, which are extensively described in the paragraphs A) Cooperative structure and B) Cooperative Tasks & Responsibilities.

Furthermore, the paragraph C) Cooperative work cycle shows how through the work of the Cooperative Westerkwartier the regional food value chain was developed in the region of Groningen.

To conclude, the D) Scheme of Cooperative work cycle offers a brief summary of the five work phases.

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A) Cooperative structure

- The Gebiedscoöperatie Westerkwartier is a Regional Cooperative open to all the actors of the quadruple helix in the region.
- The Cooperative’s board is formed by representatives of each of the four quadruple helix’s sector.
- The Cooperative board has:
  - **Standard board members** with voter status
    - SMEs (max. 3/4)
    - civil society organisations (max. 3/4)
  - The Standard members are either representatives of regional business clusters (e.g. hundreds of micro farms are represented by 1 standard member) or representatives of regional civil society organisations.
  - **Strategic board members** with advisory status
    - university; local cooperative banks; regional / local authorities (max. 3).
- Board design’s logic: large corporations/civil servants/politicians may undermine the decision-making process due to potential conflicts of interests this is the reason why they can have only an advisory status.
- The members of the Cooperative not represented in the board are consulted yearly to:
  - discuss and decide the Cooperative’s yearly objectives and programmes;
  - discuss and evaluate the Cooperative’s internal development;
  - vote over the year budget.
- Possible paying membership:
  - A) level membership: small-organisations contribute 500€ per year.
  - B) level membership: large-organisations contribute 1.000€ per year.
- The Cooperative also has a Research group.
B) Cooperative tasks & responsibilities

- Bottom-up and participative processes with regional actors of the quadruple helix are facilitated so as to jointly define middle-term regional development pillars (e.g. energy transition; regional food chain; social inclusion) in line with the regional Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3).
- For each pillar two pillar leaders (e.g. university researcher and leader entrepreneur) are appointed, these are regional knowledge/field experts related to the pillar.
- The work of the Regional Cooperative Westerkwartier (Cooperative) is structured as cycle with 5 phases, the involved Cooperative personnel is: Acquisition Managers; Process Managers; and internal Research Group.

1. Phase

- Pillar leaders (knowledge expert/field expert) set the priorities within their respective pillars – e.g. for the pillar “energy transition” one related priority may be the regional development of biomass.
- Following the definition of the priority the pillar leaders contact the Cooperative Acquisition Manager.

2. Phase

- Acquisition Managers serves as contact person for regional actors of the quadruple helix (SMEs; NGOs; public authorities; citizens).
- According to the set priorities s(he) organises priority related public meetings (e.g. for each pillar per year 4 meetings). The public meetings aim to reach out and mobilise the highest number of regional quadruple helix’s actors interested in the priority discussed in the meeting. The Acquisition Manager specifically invites regional core stakeholders in relation to the priorities.
- The objective of the public meetings is to simulate the regional quadruple helix’s actors so as to collect from them ideas / proposals related to the priority. The Acquisition Manager then share the priority related ideas / proposals collected to the Process Managers.

3. Phase

- Process Managers organise 1’ level - cooperative meetings with quadruple helix experts & leaders supervised by the relevant pillar leaders. During the internal meetings the collected priority related ideas / proposals are discussed.
- The outcome of the internal meeting can be either A) or B):
  A) Rejection – The idea/proposal requires further discussions in public meetings, which need to be organised by Acquisition Managers \(\rightarrow\) QUESTIONING THE QUESTION
  B) Validation – The idea/proposal is translated into an applied research question \(\rightarrow\) RESEARCH.

4. Phase

- If B) occurs, Process Managers select the relevant regional educational institution (VET; University Applied Science; Research centres).
- Process Managers then organise 2’ level - cooperative meetings between idea / proposal’s owners and students / researchers of the selected regional education institution with the aim to co-create a research plan related to the idea / proposal.
5. Phase

- The outcome of the research plan can be either A) or B):
  A) direct implementation of the idea / proposal → IMPLEMENTATION
  B) development of idea / proposal into a project to be funded with local / regional / EU funds which is implement → DEVELOPMENT and IMPLEMENTATION.

- **Cooperative Research Group:**
  A) monitors the activities of the Acquisition Manager and Process Manager;
  B) evaluates the implemented projects and disseminates knowledge outputs through involving the Acquisition Manager, who organises new public meetings so as to raise new ideas/projects, this way continuing the cycle;
  C) ensures coherence between the regional development pillars and the implemented projects.

**C) Cooperative work cycle**

This paragraph shows how through the work of the Cooperative Westerkwartier (abbreviation: CO) the regional food value chain was developed in the region of Groningen.

1. Phase

Pillar leaders: Knowledge Expert (regional value chain expert from local university and Field Expert (procurement manager from a food company) set the priority of developing a regional food value chain.

2. Phase

CO acquisition manager organised public meetings in the region focused on food production, processing and procurement as well as on different segments of food products (potatoes, meat, dairy).

3. Phase

From these meetings, interested key players (farmers, food processors, procurement managers from institutional kitchens, etc.) were selected to form working committees on the different parts of the food chain and internal meetings were organised.

The CO manager supervises the meetings and helps to focus on translating the different interests and needs to research questions. For example, is a regional beef cooperative viable? Or, What are specifications of the institutional kitchens and the implications of this?

4. Phase

CO Process manager gathered the research questions and connects to the relevant educational institutions/departments such that these departments (financial management, agricultural university, facility management, etc.) connected the questions to potential students and researchers. Potential students and researchers applied to these challenges. The selected student/researcher then co-designed with the respective actor (problem owner) the research plan. For example, research identifying the pre-conditions for procurement of possible regional products.
5. Phase
When the research was completed, the outcomes were:
A) communicated to the problem owner and this was then implemented where possible - e.g. a new beef cooperative was formed.
B) when an idea was viable but not yet directly ready for implementation but had potential for deeper analysis leading to an opportunity to develop a new project, this became the next step. For example, we had a research project that explored developing a new regional food chain with institutional kitchens.
The outcomes of this deeper analysis led to a development project that is connecting potential stakeholders (investors, experts, local governments, etc.) who are working out the regional food production and processing chain for institutional kitchens.

Cooperative Research group:
A) monitored the process followed by the CO Acquisition Manager and CO Process Manager;
B) evaluated for e.g. the regional beef cooperative and gave feedback to the CO. With this feedback, the CO Acquisition Manager organised new public meetings on the outcomes of the project. The institutional kitchen project is supported by the research group.

D) Scheme of Cooperative work cycle