

Modelling the Innovation platform for Female Entrepreneurs in the Northern Periphery and Arctic

W-POWER project

2021



W-Power

Modelling the Innovation Platform for Female Entrepreneurs in the Northern Periphery and Arctic

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W-POWER Project 2021



Northern Periphery and
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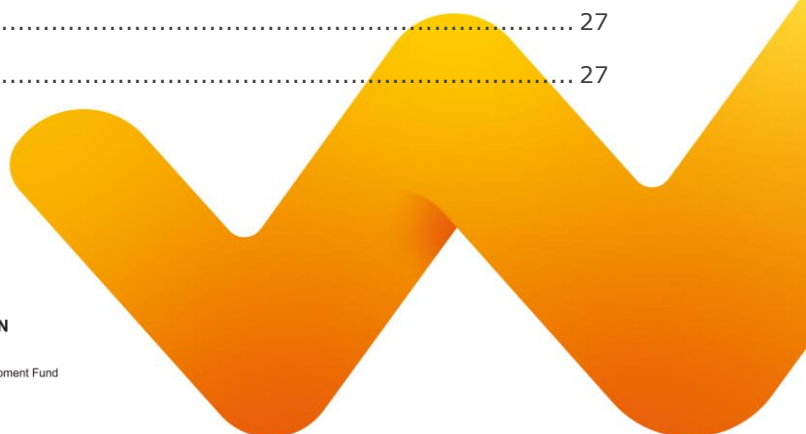


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Foreword

This publication is targeted especially for business advisors and developers and includes a detailed description of the process for arranging innovation platform for new pre-startups which is done via a business idea competition. Such competitions are aimed to stimulate increased interest from skilled women of all ages to start their own business in sparsely populated communities.

W-Power project (Empowering women entrepreneurs in sparsely populated communities), co-funded by the Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme 2014-2020, supports the implementation of key EU and national policies related to empowerment of women entrepreneurs. The project also considers the Arctic Dimension and horizontal principles.

Project implementation is divided into four work packages:

T1: Improvement of regional business environment

T2: Transnational learning

T3: Gender-sensitive coaching concept

T4: Innovation platform for new pre-startups.

This report provides an overview of the work package T4 outputs. In addition, it describes the process for organising a business idea competition.

For a more comprehensive look on regional aspects and answers, please consult the different regional analysis reports that are accessible via helena.puhakka-tarvainen@karelia.fi.



" In the current economic climate, start-ups and existing SMEs face particular operational challenges, such as obtaining finance. In remote and sparsely populated areas these challenges are amplified by long distances to support systems, other start-ups and existing SMEs.

In addition, as companies in the periphery, they face the challenges, such as a small local customer base, long distances to market, and generally, a poor business environment, which threaten the survival and growth of start-up and existing SMEs."

NPA 2019. Programme Manual Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme 2014-2020 Version 8.1- November 2019, 19.



1 Background

Maintaining the vitality of sparsely populated areas is a common challenge in the Northern regions of Europe. The challenge is apparent, as work-related migration has been increasing from rural areas to cities. This is especially prevalent among young women, whereby education and work opportunities are often seen as more alluring in bigger cities. This results in the lack of young workforce and increasingly ageing population, especially in the northern European regions. Due to the limited employment options in rural areas, creating opportunities for self-employment such as starting one's own business can be a crucial incentive to stay in a sparsely populated area. Consequently, entrepreneurship can provide means for employment outside of centres of population.

Women-led entrepreneurship can be promoted in multiple ways. W-Power project (Empowering women entrepreneurs in sparsely populated communities) addresses this challenge by encouraging women in sparsely populated areas to become entrepreneurs and welcoming them to come forward with their creative, new business ideas or plans to widen the business globally. This has been done by helping women to identify possible business potential of their ideas, be it very early-stage ideas; and by providing them with further support in business planning and networking. The project has helped new and existing women entrepreneurs develop their skills and provide national and international networking opportunities for business development.

The work package 4 (WPT 4) of the W-Power project concentrated specifically on the encouragement of self-employment in sparsely populated communities. The purpose was to increase innovation potential and entrepreneurial mind-set of skilled women to start a new business or, alternatively, develop existing women-led companies. The project aimed to create low-threshold concepts and a platform designed especially for women-led pre-start-ups, innovations and new business ideas and thus pave the way for considering entrepreneurship as a career option and stay in the sparsely populated regions.



This report describes the steps taken from inventory of existing innovation platforms in the project region to platform design and modelling, a transnational innovation platform (Pilot 1), as well as national and regional platforms (Pilot 2).

1.1 Inventory of existing regional innovation platforms- study

In order to develop and model a well-functioning innovation platform, an inventory of the already existing innovation platforms was carried out in the project regions. In addition to North-Karelia (Finland), the project partners from Lapland (Finland), Norrbotten (Sweden), Scotland, and an associate partner from New Brunswick (Canada) mapped out and provided information relating to existing programmes that were already supporting pre-startups or supporting new business ideas in general.

The information was gathered to identify such innovation platforms, programmes, innovation workshops, possible business idea competitions, incubators, hackathons or other available tools which were considered to promote startup of new businesses in the partner regions. The gathered information was used to select best practices and benchmark suitable methods to design and implement a platform that would be specially designed for women and would also engage business advisory services.

W-Power baseline study “Mapping the Challenges for Female Entrepreneurship in the Northern Periphery and Arctic” (Scott 2019) pointed out that the concept of entrepreneurship is often gendered as women are less likely than men to be entrepreneurs. Women are also more likely to work part time and work in the service sector which affects their earning potential. The report also pinpoints three key challenges that women entrepreneurs face: (1) Access to the finance and business support that meets the specific needs of women; (2) Need for engagement with relevant role models, networks and mentors; and (3) Impact of cultural assumptions and gender stereotyping (Scott 2019).



On the basis of the inventory (Appendix 1), it could be stated that while many of the programmes are or were either aimed at supporting students and staff members of universities or universities of applied sciences, or alternatively individuals or organisations in general, none of the platforms were targeted at women per se or mentioned a low-threshold paths for seeking out funding for women's innovations and business ideas, or ideas that would contribute to supporting women-led businesses in sparsely populated areas.

1.2 Choosing the platform

The inventory of existing innovation platforms served as a basis for mapping alternatives, formulating and finally piloting a joint innovation platform for new pre-startups across the NPA region. The platform was test-ran in two pilots during the years 2019 and 2020 (Pilot 1 and Pilot 2). As a result, a formulated and tested model for engaging aspiring women entrepreneurs was created.

The innovation platform that was chosen for the project purposes was Draft Program® (www.draftprogram.com). The initial role of Draft, developed at Karelia UAS in 2012, has been to support business ideas of the students, staff members and alumni through micro funding. While the program had been developed and used for years and had proven to be a low-threshold stepping stone for many new businesses, it seemed appropriate to test how the Draft-platform could be adapted to specifically increase the interest of women to apply and come forward with their business ideas.

Therefore, in the spring 2019, it was mutually agreed to start the development of Draft Program and tailor it to be the first joint pilot as a transnational business idea competition for women who are either students, aspiring or current entrepreneurs.

To ensure equal participation from all project regions, it was decided that the competition would be carried out online. The timing of the competition was matched with the project's Thematic Seminar week which allowed the project partners and stakeholders to meet face-to-face and act as the jury

of the competition. It was also agreed that the second round (Pilot 2) would be carried out regionally and the best practices of Pilot 1 would be utilised in each region as seen appropriate.

2 Modelling W-Power business idea competition format

W-Power Innovation Platform, a specific business idea competition model, can be used to create new start-ups, help to take the next step of maturity from start-up, and support the growing phase of existing SMEs. We have gathered here the steps you can follow when organising a competition. After providing an outlook of the overall process, the W-Power project partners who organised a business idea competition locally (Pilot 2), share their experiences and best regional practices.

The following paragraphs describe the process of organising a business idea competition. To view the process in a more compact and visualised format, you may visit the W-Power web page for [the animated process description](#).

2.1 Where to start?

Consider carefully what **the focus/objective** for the competition is. Which target groups do you wish to reach with the funding call? Who are you looking forward to receiving applications from? For example, the call may be targeted at students, or only at representatives of a certain region or gender, immigrants or specialists in a certain area. Alternatively, the aim of the competition could be simply defined, such as to find new ideas to promote entrepreneurship in general. Decide whether there will be one or more categories in the call. Then come up with **a descriptive name** for the competition.

The next step is to **set a budget**. It is worth noting that the whole process of organising a business idea competition takes time and requires plenty of human working hours. At least one person should be involved in the process from the very beginning till the end at 100%. In addition to salary expenses, it is important to ensure that you have funds to cover possible marketing costs and, for example possible rent costs for the competition.



venue (plus serving costs, such as coffee and other refreshments). Most importantly, you need to make sure that you have **a prize fund** large enough to ensure that the competition is attractive to the applicants and take into account the VAT rules for payment.

Third, it is important to **create profound rules** and include them in your **contest terms and conditions**. The rules should be as clear as possible to avoid any misinterpretations.

Fourth, **set the criteria for applications**. State clearly how the application is to be submitted and what the deadline for submitting is. Should there be any limitations regarding who can participate in the competition, make sure to express them clearly. Bring out the information of **confidentiality** throughout the process. Preliminary business ideas are considered to be sensitive information. Make sure that you will follow the non-disclosure-agreement policies and rules throughout the process. Do not take any risks to lose your credibility as a competition organiser.

It is also important to create **commonly agreed judging criteria** and fair judgement mechanics. Introduce them to the jury and offer possibilities for asking questions or clarifications regarding the criteria beforehand. Prepare an online evaluation template for the jury which they can fill in during the actual pitching competition.

2.2 Define a time to run contest

Plan a schedule and limit time carefully, keeping in mind that each step of the process has enough time.

The example below describes a time period of four (4) months: starting from opening of the application period and ending with payment and paperwork. This time frame excludes all background work such as defining rules of the competition, choosing venue, selecting jury, etc. The example below explains how to proceed by setting first the important dates for the competition:



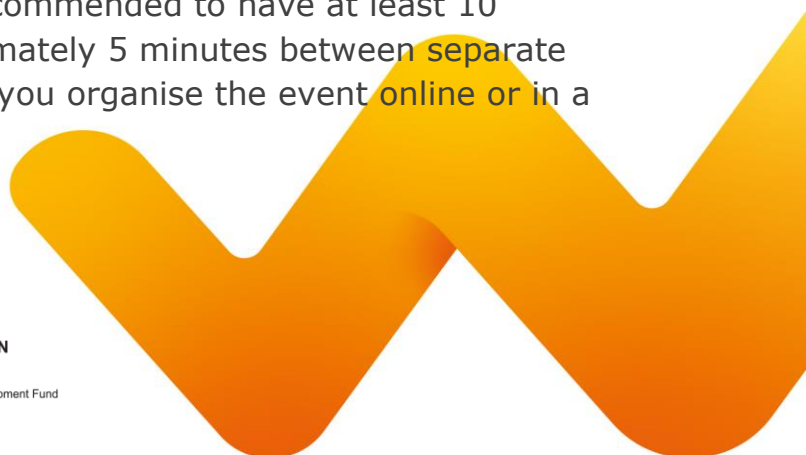
- ✓ APPLICATION OPENS: 1st September (or earlier)
- ✓ APPLICATION CLOSES: 31st October
- ✓ TOP TEAMS PRE-SELECTED FOR PITCHING: 7th November
- ✓ ONLINE INFORMATION SESSION /PITCHING GUIDANCE: 10th November
- ✓ ONLINE PITCHING CONTEST: 30th November
- ✓ SUCCESSFUL IDEAS NOTIFIED OF AWARDS: 10th December
- ✓ PILOTING AND IDEA IMPLEMENTATIONS BY THE WINNING TEAMS IN ORDER TO RECEIVE VOUCHERS
- ✓ PAPERWORK FOR PAYMENTS DONE BY: 31st December

As mentioned above, before the actual application process starts, quite a lot of background work and preparations must be carried out. A suggested estimate is to reserve at least one month for the preparatory measures, preferably even more, if possible.

2.3 Important things to be kept in mind

Both W-Power innovation platform rounds were based on pre-selections, where the most suitable ideas were selected for the final competitions. It is worth deciding beforehand on how many pre-selected ideas will be invited to pitch their idea to the jury. The number of finalists will depend on the time that is available for the pitching competition. Is it going to take 6 hours, 8 hours or maybe even several days?

On the basis of the organised competitions (Pilot 1 and Pilot 2), it can be concluded that reserving a minimum of 20-minute slot per finalist should suffice. The actual time to pitch one's idea was allowed to endure only **five minutes** in both pilots. In addition, it was considered important to allow the jury to ask additional questions or even give some short comments or tips to the finalists. Therefore, it is recommended to have at least 10 minutes for that purpose and approximately 5 minutes between separate pitching slots. Depending on whether you organise the event online or in a



physical venue will determine whether or not to schedule breaks between the slots.

Based on the innovation platform design, there are some important points that were discovered during the competition process. Firstly, it is recommended to select members for a possible first-stage selection panel and to the final competition. Make sure that you have a wide range of representatives from different business sectors and organisations in your jury. Contact the selected persons during the application period to ensure that they are available for at least one online guidance meeting before the pitching competition, and that they are available on the actual competition day.

2.4 Create a marketing plan

Marketing is an essential part of making your competition a success. Offer all the important information on your website or establish an official event website – the easier it is to reach it, the higher quality entries you will get.

Create a marketing plan to support **the communications** and to **ensure the visibility** throughout the process. We recommend being active in your selected social media channels and promoting the competition early enough before the application period starts. In case you don't have a marketing specialist in your team, you may want to utilise free marketing plan templates on the internet. Press releases can be sent before the application period starts to make the media aware of the upcoming competition. Another press release could be sent when publicising the winner(s).



2.5 Pitching contest - choose venue or online platform

The W-Power Innovation Platform business idea competitions were organised online by using Microsoft TEAMS environment. The list below suggests some points that are worth taking into consideration when using Microsoft Teams as a platform for pitching online:

- Practice makes perfect! Make sure that all the competitors i.e. finalists who have been selected to pitch online, have had at least one online training session with you. This is to ensure that they will be able to join the meeting smoothly when it's their turn. At the same time, they also get to test the needed equipment for their pitch (it is recommended to use an external headset with a microphone). It is a good opportunity to test how to share a slide show or a video during one's pitch. This gives confidence to the contestants and allows them to concentrate more on the actual performance instead of being worried about how to use the technology. Either a built-in or an external web camera is a must: Pitching without a camera is not recommended.
- Choose a moderator or two and a host for the contest. Decide on their roles and responsibilities. The role of the host is highly important as s/he is the one who is responsible to keep up with the schedule and make short introductions when the finalists enter the platform. The host is the one who will be allowing the jury to ask questions one at a time during the predefined time after pitching. It is important that the host have his/her camera on.
- Timer is one of the most important tools during the competition. You need to make sure that all competitors are treated equally; a good, reliable timer is needed. Do not allow your contestants to exceed the time limit and let them know beforehand that their pitch will be interrupted if they exceed the allowed time. Therefore, it is recommended to encourage the finalists to practise and time their pitches to make sure they will be able to make their point precisely and quickly. One moderator can make sure that the finalists are



entering the competition platform on time (online competition) and can be in direct contact with the finalists via phone if needed.

- Encourage the jury to keep their cameras on when asking questions. It's recommended that the jurors quickly introduce themselves when asking the finalists a question and it is important for the contestants to see the jury.
- Make sure each member of the jury has the link to the evaluation template and that they can make notes during/after each pitch. These notes, recommendations and feedback are valuable to the finalists, and it would be a good practice to share them with the contestants after the competition.

2.6 What happens after the contest?

After the contest, there are several ways to support the winners. For example, it could be very beneficial to offer a possibility for peer-learning and networking with the other winners of the competition. Depending on the role of the organising body it could be useful or even essential to signpost the winners to a coaching programme or provide other individual business support. In addition, offering some visibility on the competition/organisers' websites and social media channels and making introductions to relevant networks is also highly recommended. In W-Power project, the innovation platform winners have been representing their ideas e.g. in project videos, podcasts and panel discussions.

3 Experiences from Pilot 1

3.1 The key information of Pilot 1

The call for Pilot 1 business idea competition was launched in June 2019. The Pilot was carried out by the W-Power partners:

Karelia University of Applied Sciences, North Karelia, Finland
Business Joensuu, North Karelia, Finland



Lapland University of Applied Sciences, Lapland, Finland
 Strukturm Business Support Organisation, Sweden
 Highlands and Island Enterprises (HIE), Scotland
 Pure Energy Centre, Shetland
 WestBIC Business and Innovation Centre, Ireland
 Innovation Center Iceland, Iceland

The call was open throughout the summer and closed in October. Information on the competition was widely shared in the partners' social media channels and newsletters. As an example, see Appendix 2 Pilot 1 Leaflet that was distributed by HIE in Scotland.

Pre-startups and women entrepreneurs were the focus target group of the call. The total development fund was EUR 10,000 which was to be shared in variable amounts to a maximum of 5 winners in a form of vouchers.

The first joint online pitching competition for women had three different themes which all aimed at supporting women entrepreneurs:

- 1) New business ideas**
- 2) Expanding business globally**
- 3) Ideas to support existing businesses**

3.2 Criteria for applications

The criteria for the business idea competition were drafted by the project partners. As this was a joint effort, it was necessary to set out that the applicants were required to be based within one of the W-Power Project Partner Regions of North Karelia and Lapland in Finland, Norrbotten in Sweden, Argyll and the Islands, Dumfries and Galloway, Shetland and Orkney in Scotland, Western Region of Ireland (Counties Galway, Mayo, Sligo, Donegal, Leitrim) and Iceland.



Other requirements of the call were as follows:

- Teams must consist of up to five people. Individual, one person teams are also allowed. Teams can be made up of any individuals with a joint business idea, located in the regions listed above.
- Idea submission should consist of a short description, using the provided online template and also include a possibility to submit any relevant supporting information such as pictures.
- Only novel ideas will be accepted and should not breach any existing intellectual property rights.
- Successful ideas must add value compared to existing products or services.
- Teams must agree to be interviewed by the selection panel during the online pitching event.
- Successful teams must be willing to have W-Power publicise their participation in this funding call.
- Any proprietary information will remain confidential.
- The monetary award will be allocated for the expenses directly related to the piloting costs of the winning idea and paid based on invoicing as a voucher.
- In addition to the monetary award, the successful teams will benefit from informal support and guidance from the W-Power Project Partners.
- Selected teams will sign a contract with W-Power / Karelia University of Applied Sciences, Finland.
- The decision of the selection panel will be final.
- Team members have to be competent in communicating in English as the official language of the competition is English.

While the language of the competition was English, the partners had provided access to application forms and guiding materials in the native languages which lowered the threshold to apply and gain more information.



3.3 Pitching competition online in November

Altogether, there were 24 applications that were submitted successfully by the deadline in October. In this funding call, a maximum number of 15 ideas were pre-selected by a panel consisting of the project members.

The selected finalists then took part in the second stage of the funding call, which consisted of the online pitching event in November 2019. While the contestants pitched online, the jury was able to be present in one location as the competition was organised at the time of the Thematic Seminar in Sweden.

Before the actual pitching contest, the finalists were provided with an information session where the requirements were jointly explained, and the contestants had the opportunity to ask questions regarding practicalities. The Draft Program offered a ready-made, clear structured template for pitching which was modified and introduced to the participants. While each participant could edit the visual outlook, the template ensured consistency in the information provided by each team.

For most of the contestants, this was their first pitch and for many, their first pitch in English. The participants were also given a chance to practise the MS Teams environment with a test call before the actual competition day.

The winning teams from the Pilot 1 were from Scotland, Shetland, Sweden and Finland. The winners were notified of their awarded share of the prize fund and they were asked to test their proposed ideas by the end of March 2020. The fund was granted in the form of a voucher and each winner was required to produce a test report against the voucher.



3.4 The awarded ideas

The following five business ideas were selected as winners based on the highest amounts of points given by the jury:

- Sour Power (Finland): Sanna Jeskanen and Päivi Hentilä
- AKTAN (Sweden): Tone Staffansson and Lova Lundberg
- Wilder Ways LLP (Scotland): Cara and Nikki Dayton-Gelati
- Skirr Skin (Scotland): Moira Newiss
- Glansin Glass (Shetland): Cheryl Jamieson and Megan Burns

3.5 Test reports

Each winning team was required to write a report (Appendix 3) where they explained how their participation in the innovation platform supported their business idea. The purpose of the report was to explain what kind of development actions were planned to be delivered (such as online based market research, potential customer interviews, prototyping, service demo).

Once they had completed the activities detailed in their report, the teams were asked to write a short update where they described how their idea evolved during the process, what kind of development activities they chose to engage in with the support of the W-Power Innovation Platform and briefly explain the results of their activities and benefit to the business. The winning teams were also asked to describe their future business plans.

3.6 Collected feedback

The follow-up discussions and feedback collected from the winners was important and informative and helped to design the next, regional competitions.

The application process and training materials and templates were considered easy and light, even for those who did not operate in their native language. Additionally, many of the participants mentioned that they

gained experience to pitch and formulate the essence of their business idea which was important and increased their overall confidence.

"The fact that I tried this and was successful has given me confidence to push myself and will help me take risks and try new things in the future too."

**Skirr Skin, Scotland,
one of the W-Power Innovation Platform Winners**

The winners brought up some valuable development suggestions which were considered in Pilot 2. These ideas included peer networking opportunities with other winners and being able to see the faces of the jury during the pitch and question time. The applicants also wished for a possibility to participate in a pitching training session before the competition. These aspects were considered and adopted in the next edition of the competition, i.e. Pilot 2 during the following year.

4 Experiences from Pilot 2 from the project regions

The purpose of the Pilot 1 pitching competition was to increase innovation potential and entrepreneurial mind-set of women to start new business or, alternatively, develop already existing women-led companies.

While the Pilot 1 was implemented as a one, international, co-operated pitching competition throughout the whole project region, the second attempt comprised of regional efforts.

The following chapter describes the Pilot 2 experiences in North Karelia and Finnish Lapland in Finland, in Norrbotten region in Sweden and in New Brunswick in Canada.



4.1 Eastern Finland

4.1.1 Preparation phase

The preparatory work around the competition started in early spring 2020, by going through feedback collected from Pilot 1, scheduling and defining the details of the second pilot with the partners who decided to be involved and organise pitching competitions in their regions.

The important dates for the competitions were set in the beginning of August. The second call for innovation platform for new start-ups in North Karelia was published on 19th August 2020. The actual funding call opened on 28th August 2020 and closed on 28th October 2020. The date of the pitching competition was decided to be the same for Lapland University of Applied Sciences and Strukturm in Sweden.

While the competition day was the same in all three regions, the criteria were slightly modified by each partner. In North Karelia the criteria and online application instructions followed those created for the Pilot 1. The detailed information of the second funding call is available at: <https://w-power.interreg-npa.eu/news/show/second-funding-call-for-innovation-platform-for-new-start-ups-in-north-karelia/> both in English and in Finnish.

Contact information of the person/team representative alongside the team size and title of the business idea were required to be filled in the online form. In addition, each applicant and team were asked to choose the correct category which were:

- 1) **New business ideas**
- 2) **Expanding business globally**
- 3) **An idea or operating model that supports female entrepreneurship**



One of the key requirements for the business ideas was that they were to be linked with the municipality of North Karelia, Finland. Therefore, the applicants needed to explain their connection, either living, studying, working or other relation between their business idea and North Karelia.

The idea submission was required to consist of a short, written description. Any relevant supporting information was to be included as attachments (such as pictures, slide presentations) not exceeding the maximum size of 40 Mb.

4.1.2 Marketing the competition

The competition was promoted on the W-Power project website and on the internal and external websites of Karelia UAS. The premarketing was carried out via the project's social media channels, Facebook and LinkedIn. These channels were updated regularly during the application period. One Facebook marketing campaign was purchased from a marketing agency to support visibility among the core target audience. The competition was marketed in the W-Power monthly newsletter and the Karelia UAS student newsletter. An e-brochure was distributed as attachment in direct email messages to stakeholders and interest group representatives. A press release was sent to the local media. The competition was promoted in a local event organised by Luotsi which is a pilot project promoting employment in the city of Joensuu.

4.1.3. Upskilling the local entrepreneurs during the application period

In September, a pitching training day for women was organised to celebrate the annual Entrepreneurs' Day. This training offered tips for business marketing and effective sales pitches.

Following the training day in October, as part of W-Power project's transnational learning and capacity building events for women entrepreneurs, an Innovation Weekend was organised in North Karelia. The weekend included product development and important information about how to market and sell products.



Both events gained positive response among women, and it was concluded that providing entrepreneurs with a chance to network and training sessions for marketing, sales pitches, and product development are crucial elements of upskilling and empowering women entrepreneurs in the region. The business idea competition was promoted to the participants to encourage them to apply to the competition and it raised initial interest among the participants, resulting in a couple of submitted applications.

4.1.4 Top 15 teams pre-selected and announced

By the end of the application period, a total of 24 applications were received. The pre-selection panel selected 15 finalists to pitch their idea in the pitching competition.

The pre-selection panel was a combination of the project member representatives from Strukturm Sweden, Karelia and Lapland UAS. The judging criteria for the pre-selection panel were the same as for the actual pitching competition jury. These criteria were demand, doability and profitability of the business idea.

Most of the received applications belonged to the first category. These applications were represented by individual applicants or teams with ideas for a new product or service. It was not surprising that many of the ideas were built around supporting well-being and including nature in one way or another. Based on the applications it could be concluded that business ideas coming from women do indeed have a “softer approach”. There were only few ideas around technology or manufacturing in general.

Interestingly, the second category of expanding business to the global markets did not receive many applications. However, there was one team in this category that raised the jury’s attention. The presented idea was considered to have potential and worth testing and, therefore it was not a big surprise that eventually after the actual pitching competition, this team was among the awarded winners.



With the third theme, the project was hoping to map out new ideas on how to help and support women to both start new businesses and grow women-run businesses in the European Northern Peripheral and Arctic regions. The region has a significant need for new businesses and ideas which would support women-led businesses to succeed and bring much-needed jobs to keep the women in these sparsely populated northern regions.

Unfortunately, this category received the least number of applications. None of them reached second stage.

4.1.5 Preparing the finalists for the pitching competition

The online info-session for the finalists was organised in the beginning of November. The main focus was on sharing the pitching competition practicalities; the schedule and procedures when presenting ideas to the jury, preparing for their questions etc. The criteria for evaluation were explained.

The finalists were provided with tips and advice for preparing a presentation. A template for a Power Point slide show was emailed to the finalists with the meeting link and time slot to their individual pitching.

The contestants were also provided with an opportunity to test the online platform in advance and become comfortable with all the practicalities. This allowed each team to concentrate on their pitches while knowing they were competent with their web cameras, microphones and sharing their presentations.

4.1.6 Preparing the jury for their important task

The selection and contacting the jury members for the competition started early before the application period ended. The jury represented different organisations focussing on entrepreneurship, such as business development organisations, education institutions, financiers etc. The NDA-agreements were duly signed well in advance before the pitching competition.



Two parallel online info-sessions were organised for the jury approximately two weeks before the pitching competition. There the judging criteria and schedule for the pitching competition day were introduced. The jury were informed of the practicalities, i.e. when and how to ask questions as well as good online meeting practices. They were encouraged to make notes for each competitor to provide feedback and development ideas to the finalists.

4.1.7 Pitching competition online

The North Karelian competition included the pitching of 13 out of 15 pre-selected finalists as two teams withdrew before the competition took place. This second stage of the competition consisted of an online pitching competition in front of 20 members of the jury in November 2020. The overall experience of the day was positive. A link to a feedback survey was sent via email to all competitors and to the jury after the pitching contest.

The jury was instructed to provide their final evaluation via online form. The form consisted of a numerical evaluation grid but also allowed each member of the jury to give written feedback to the participants.

The evaluation form was created in a way that the amount of judging persons didn't affect the results as the average scores were considered. Once the numerical evaluation had been checked, the participants who were not rewarded were contacted via email. They were sent a Certificate of Participating in the W-Power Business Idea Competition and given feedback gathered from the jury regarding their business idea.

The winning teams were contacted via email to congratulate and announce their reward voucher. An online meeting with the winners was organised on 9th of December. In this meeting the winning teams had the opportunity to meet each other and to receive information on the next phase: testing their idea and reporting the test results to the competition organiser.

4.1.8 The awarded ideas

The following four business ideas were selected as winners based on the highest amounts of points given by the jury:



- Relax for a Moment and Before I Break Down - nature experiences /Marjut Rätty, Tytti Alastalo, Satu Ketonen and Susanna Manninen (Picture 1, the top right corner).
- Natural Based Cosmetics Home Kit-concept / Oiteli and Ilmeini Lasarov (Picture 1, Oiteli Lasarov at the top left corner, Ilmeini Lasarov in the middle).
- Wisdom of the Kalevala Women for Modern Times/ Riitta Ward (Picture 1, the bottom left corner) and Raija Kivimetsä
- Solving the Issues of Office Premises and Increasing Well-being/ Minna Nirkko (Picture 1, the bottom right corner).



Picture 1. Winning teams of the North Karelian Business Idea Pitching Competition.

The total amount of vouchers was some 7,000 euros + VAT. The value of the given voucher varied between 1,000 and 3,000 euros among the four winners depending on their idea and development plans. The vouchers were to be used for testing and developing the business ideas, which were to be reported to the organiser.

4.1.9 Tailored coaching programme

In addition to the financial support, the winning teams of both North Karelia and Lapland were offered the possibility to participate in some tailored business support during the early 2021. As one of the work packages of the project was "Gender-sensitive coaching concept" (WPT3), it was natural to pilot the gender sensitivity model and tools for business coaching at the same time. In the W-Power coaching programme, the winners were able to establish new connections to enlarge their existing networks and benefit from peer-learning. In addition to group coaching, they were offered one-to-one meetings with a specialist for individual business support. The coaching programme included templates, such as tailored W-Power Business Model Canvas, which provided visualised guidance for business planning, budgeting and marketing.

All the winning teams gained visibility on W-Power website and on social media channels. The winning teams were invited to be interviewed in a local event promoting entrepreneurship organised by Luotsi Joensuu-project. The local newspaper "Karjalainen" published an interview and the photo of the team No1. (FoResting Ltd) appeared on the front page.

4.1.10 Test reports

Each winning team was required to compile a report where they explained how their participation in the innovation platform supported their business idea. In addition, the purpose of the report was to explain what kind of development actions were planned to be delivered (such as online based market research, potential customer interviews, prototyping, service demo) and reflect on the future plans. The instructions and content requirements followed the tested report framework of Pilot 1 which had proven to be a good practice.



4.2 Finnish Lapland

4.2.1 Preparation phase

Lapland University of Applied Sciences (Lapland UAS) started preparatory work for the competition alongside with Karelia University of Applied Sciences and Strukturm, Sweden in the early spring of 2020, utilising feedback from Pilot 1. This joint planning enabled efficient use of resources and helped to achieve greater visibility in communication.

The key dates of the competition and marketing followed the jointly agreed schedule. The theme of the competition was business, product and service ideas that have a positive impact on women's lives. The detailed information of the second funding call is available in Finnish at: <https://w-power.interreg-npa.eu/news/show/mahtava-innovaatiokilpailu-lapissa/>.

In Lapland, the theme was in line with other partners' parallel pilots, including criteria for those in the Lapland region who already were or wanted to become entrepreneurs.

In Lapland, prospective applicants had to choose between two competition categories:

1. VÄLÄHYS (Flash)

Category for competitors who are planning entrepreneurship and want to test their idea. In this category it was possible to present ideas at an early stage and no entrepreneurial experience was required.

2. OIVALLUS (Insight)

Category for competitors who already have a business. They have started up and pursued their idea and they have some initial feedback from customers with an idea of the market potential.

The business ideas were naturally required to be linked with the Lapland region. Therefore, the applicants needed to explain briefly the connection between their business idea and Lapland.

In the application, the participants provided a brief overview of their idea and they could also include other relevant materials as attachments (e.g. pictures, slide presentations) not exceeding the maximum size of 40 Mb.

4.2.2 Marketing the competition

The MAHTAVA- competition was promoted on the W-Power project website and on Lapland UAS internal and external websites and social media. The pre-marketing was carried out and updated regularly via the project's social media channels, Facebook and LinkedIn and on Lapland UAS Facebook. One paid Facebook marketing campaign was purchased from project/Lapland UAS to support visibility among the core target audience.

The competition was marketed in the Lappish newsletter. An e-brochure was distributed as attachment in direct email messages to stakeholders and interest group representatives. The competition was also marketed in a local newspaper (Uusi Rovaniemi) and an Event webpage administrated by the City of Rovaniemi.

4.2.3 Top 15 teams pre-selected and announced

Within the application period, Lapland regional piloting received 22 applications. The pre-selection panel selected 15 finalists for the final event of the pitching competition based on the same criteria as for the actual pitching competition. The criteria were the same for all the parallel pilots. The pre-selection panel had members from the project partners who carried out parallel piloting, Strukturm Sweden and in Karelia UAS and Lapland UAS.

The applications were evenly distributed in both competition categories: VÄLÄHYS (Flash) category for beginners and OIVALLUS (Insight) for advanced ideas both received 11 applications each. The participants consisted of both individual applicants and collaborative teams with ideas for a new product or service.

Similar to Karelia UAS, there was a strong trend in the number of service ideas related to well-being and nature in Lapland. The service ideas were strongly associated with holistic well-being. Most of the product ideas also had a strong connection to nature, natural materials and utilising local culture, traditions and craftsmanship.



4.2.4 Preparing the finalists for the pitching competition

An online info-session for the finalists was organised on 11th of November together with Karelia UAS. This included the competition practicalities, schedule for the final and criteria for evaluation. The contestants were provided with an opportunity to test the online platform beforehand to make sure the technology (camera, microphone, sound and screen sharing) was working. Many of the participants took advantage of this opportunity and practised their presentation. This was helpful in terms of the competition itself as everything went smoothly and participants were more confident about the technical aspects. The participants were also offered a few webinars for how to prepare oneself and give a good pitch.

4.2.5 Preparing the jury for their important task

The search for jury members was carried out during the early autumn, while the competition application period was still ongoing. Experts in financing, business support and development, education and regional development were invited to the jury. The members of the jury did not receive any remuneration. The selection also considered the geographical balance, and efforts were made to select representatives from all over the Lapland region.

The implementation of the pitching competition as an online event allowed the jury to participate despite the long distances. The NDA agreements were signed well in advance the final event.

In a sparsely populated area, the overall entrepreneurship ecosystem is relatively narrow and actors are often familiar with each other. Therefore, a conscious decision was made that the jury and the finalists had not been introduced to each other prior to the final day to avoid any influencing on the decisions or to gain any competitive advantage. In addition, as in all W-Power business idea competitions, a recusal was required from a jury member, if there was any appearance of bias.

The jury members received pre-information about the final event via email, and they attended an online info-session a week and a half before the pitching competition. The pre-selection criteria of the competition and the support measures offered to the winners for further development of their

business ideas were presented to the jury. In addition, the evaluation criteria were presented to the jury and were discussed in details. Many practical issues related to the pitching day were described, such as time management during pitches, Q&A, breaks during the day, and recording of the evaluations via an online form.

The jury were tasked with an important role as to provide constructive and encouraging feedback to all finalists; this was repeatedly pointed out to the jury during the process. This worked well and the competition participants gave praise for this aspect as they'd found feedback useful.

4.2.6 Pitching competition online

All the 15 pre-selected finalists attended the pitching final event. The jury board consisted of 10 jury members, who were also mostly all present throughout the day, with some exceptions. Again, the evaluation form was created in a way that the number of judging persons didn't affect the results, but the average scores were considered. The day went according to plan, on schedule and without any technical problems. A feedback survey was sent via email to all competitors and the jury after the event. Right after the pitching, the jury stayed online for a brief discussion and then went off to complete their individual assessments to be submitted via online form.

Lapland UAS project staff then calculated scores based on jury estimates and, after a check count, contacted the winners. Also, the finalists who did not win were contacted via email. They all received Certificate of Participation in the W-Power Business Idea Competition alongside feedback from the jury regarding their business idea.

The winners from Lapland participated in an online meeting on the 9th of September together with the Karelian winners. In this meeting the winners received information about the follow-up process, how the idea should be tested, and report the test results to the competition organiser.



4.2.7 The awarded ideas

The following three business ideas were selected as winners in Lapland based on the jury's points

- Coal box for outdoor cooking / Elina Stoor
- Artisan craft / Laura Knuuti
- Probiotic clean / Tuuli and Veera Kinnunen



Picture 2. "Coal box for outdoor cooking" winner Elina Stoor.





Picture 3. "Artisan craft" winner Laura Knuuti.



Picture 4. "Probiotic clean" winners Tuuli and Veera Kinnunen.

The total value of the vouchers was 4,000 euros + VAT. The value of each given voucher varied depending on team idea and development plans. In the beginners' series, the scores of the winner and runner-up were so close that the organiser decided to reward both. The vouchers were to be used for testing and developing the business ideas as described earlier.

4.2.8 Tailored coaching programme

The winning teams of Lapland joined the mutual business coaching programme with the winners of North Karelia region. The process has been described in detail earlier in this report.

4.3 Sweden

4.3.1 Preparation phase

As mentioned above, planning for the Innovation Platform business idea competition was implemented in co-operation between Karelia UAS, Lapland UAS and Strukturm in Norrbotten. All information and instructions for the competition were translated into Swedish and modified to suit the circumstances and lower the threshold in Norrbotten.

The competition call was published in Swedish on the W-Power and Strukturm websites well before the application period opened in August. The entire competition schedule followed the one of Karelia UAS and Lapland UAS. Registration for the competition was done via electronic form, with the same required information fields as for the regions in Finland.

The detailed information of the second funding call in Swedish is available at: <https://w-power.interreg-npa.eu/news/show/innovationstaevlingen-foer-kvinnor-i-norrbotten-startar-28-augusti-2020/>

As the business ideas were required to be linked with Norrbotten, the applicants were asked to briefly describe their connection to the region.



4.3.2 Marketing the competition

Marketing of the competition in Norrbotten started at the beginning of July via “Save the Date” announcement in the regional W-Power summer newsletter. The marketing campaign took off at full speed in August and the competition was promoted on the W-Power project website and on Strukturm websites as well as on social media.

Information about the competition was actively distributed to female entrepreneurs and business advisors on several occasions via e-mail. It was particularly satisfying to notice the positive interest from the regional business advisors towards the competition and their effort to spread the information throughout Norrbotten. A press release was also prepared, and it was published in two regional web business publications. In September the regional newspaper Norrländska Socialdemokraten, NSD also published an interview with the project manager which brought nice visibility for the competition.

4.3.3 Top 15 teams pre-selected and announced

Within the application period 22 applications were received from Norrbotten. The geographical coverage was successful as applications were received from eight different municipalities out of a total of 14 in Norrbotten. From the 22 submitted ideas, some 15 were pre-selected by the business advisors of Strukturm.

The applicants also had a possibility to choose between three different categories which were the same as in Karelia UAS. The majority of the applicants chose to present a new business idea (16 applications). The two other categories both got three applications each. On the contrary to Finland, the ideas in Norrbotten varied strongly representing all kind of business sectors. There were ideas connected to education, high technical solutions for communication or payment services, industrial production, activities within tourism, and health care for animals. Some of the applicants were very experienced entrepreneurs but the competition attracted some new start-ups as well.



After the pre-selection of the finalists, all applicants were notified of the decision by email and the finalists were invited to an online meeting to receive further instructions about the pitching competition.

4.3.4 Upskilling the local entrepreneurs during the application period

During the autumn and the application period, women entrepreneurs were offered a workshop about business plan and product idea development and another workshop that focused on pitching. During the first workshop, a business model canvas was introduced as a tool to structure a business plan. The second, two-day workshop in presentation techniques was based on both theory and practice and it also offered the participants a possibility to train their presentations online. The business idea competition was promoted during both coaching events.

In addition, a useful co-operation was established with Almi Invest, a national organisation for business development that is owned by the Swedish state. The local actors of Almi Invest marketed these workshops and the competition to their wide network of female entrepreneurs, and especially among female entrepreneurs with foreign background.

4.3.5 Preparing the finalists for the pitching competition

The online information session for the finalists was organised in Norrbotten on 11th of November. During this session all practical matters concerning the schedule, presentation and jury criteria were explained. The finalists were offered the same support with preparation as in Finland. It is worth noting that testing of the technology and sending the presentation file to the organisers in advance is strongly recommended or could even be considered to be mandatory.

4.3.6 Pitching competition online

The pitching competition was organised simultaneously with project partners in Finland on the 30th of November and it was implemented without any major difficulties. Both the finalists and the jury were in the right place at the right time.



The jury's evaluation, awarding process for the winning teams, and collection of feedback were identical with those in Finland.

Each winning team received a voucher for 15,000 Swedish crowns and a possibility for personal business coaching. The vouchers were to be used for developing and testing the presented business ideas as per the instructions that have been explained earlier in this report in paragraph 4.1.10

4.3.7 The awarded ideas

The following three business ideas were selected as winners

- Snowflake - Unique Is the Perfect Way to Be / Veronica Bedinger, Vera/Nova, Luleå
- Development of Sami Knowledge Transfer / Anna Kuhmunen, Silba Siida, Jokkmokk
- Containing Greens – Hydroponic Cultivation on Data Centre Heating / Moa Johansson and Ellinor Emilsson, Containing Greens Ab, Luleå



Picture 5. "Snowflake - Unique Is the Perfect Way to Be" winner
Veronica Bedinger, Vera/Nova, Luleå.



Picture 6. "Development of Sami Knowledge Transfer" winner Anna Kuhmunen, Silba Siida, Jokkmokk.



Picture 7. "Containing Greens – Hydroponic Cultivation on Data Centre Heating" winners Moa Johansson and Ellinor Emilsson, Containing Greens Ab, Luleå.



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The winners were announced in a press release which was published in both regional newspapers. The results were also announced on W-Power and Strukturm websites as well as on social media channels.

4.3.8 Tailored coaching programme

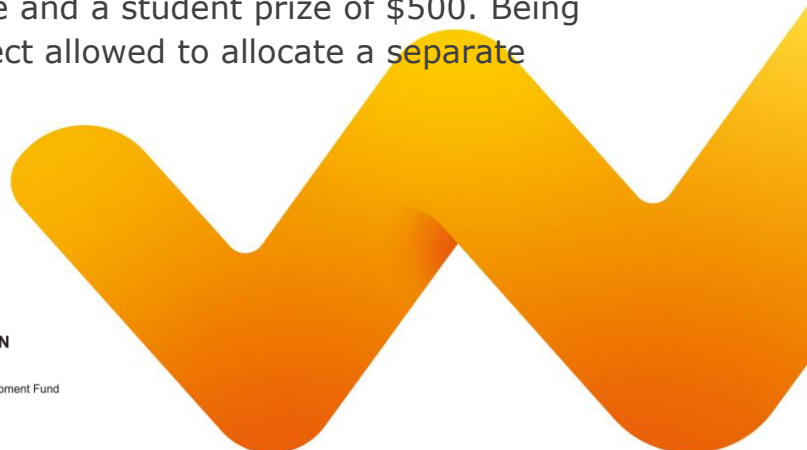
The Swedish winners were offered business coaching which started in the beginning of the year 2021. In Norrbotten, this group also included the finalist of the innovation competition. The content of this coaching was carefully planned and in particular, the findings of “Gender sensitive coaching concept” (WPT3) were considered. Eight finalists took part in this tailored coaching programme, and according to their feedback this opportunity was highly appreciated. They highlighted that the coaching programme itself was a good reason to enter the competition.

4.4 Canada – an associate partner in W-Power project

4.4.1 W-Power Start Up Competition

Women in Business New Brunswick held its first online Start Up Competition on 30th November 2020 in partnership with The Collège Communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick (CCNB) as part of the International W-Power project. The competition focused on developing an entrepreneurial mindset while providing group training workshops. Students, aspiring or current women entrepreneurs and teams comprised of a majority of women who had a new business idea or were considering expanding their current business into new markets were invited to submit their applications.

In addition to having the opportunity to gain more knowledge and guidance, the competition offered participants the opportunity to win \$2,000 plus a 12-hour one-on-one virtual training with a consultant firm for first place, \$1,000 for second place and a student prize of \$500. Being an associate partner in W-Power project allowed to allocate a separate budget and methods for awarding.



With recruitment beginning in September, a target number of 15 applications was set (individuals or teams up to 5 people). However, due to the overwhelming interest in the competition, having received 34 applications, the number was modified and the opportunity was provided for two cohorts to participate with a total of 28 participants.

Beginning in October, group training sessions were delivered over a seven-week period in following subjects; Pricing, Buyer Persona and Making the Perfect Pitch. During this time, the participants also benefited from personalized guidance from WBNB's Development Officer for Start-up as well as a one-hour consultation with a consultant.

Given the increased number of participants than originally planned, an Elevator Pitch event was held in November 2020 which allowed individuals and teams to pitch their idea within two minutes, in the language of their choice (English or French). The final fifteen participants were chosen from the Elevator Pitch to proceed and present their final pitch within five minutes on 30th November.

A panel of five judges, including New Brunswick women entrepreneurs chose the following winners:

- Taking home the first-place prize of \$2,000 plus a 12-hour one-on-one virtual training with the consultant firm DirecSys Inc. is Elena Andreea Conicescu of Tib's Cosmetics in Saint Quentin.
<https://tibscosmetics.com/>
- The second-place prize of \$1,000 was awarded to the team of Amy Andrews, Bridget McCloskey and David Itoafa of Life Track Safety Systems Ltd. in Fredericton <https://lifetracksafety.com/>
- The student prize of \$500 sponsored by Club BizNess went to the team of Ornella Ntchalle, Kodjo Martin Aziakpor and Natasha Comeau of Crew Labs from Bathurst.





Picture 8. Presenting a \$2,000 cheque to the 1st Place winner Elena Andreea Conicescu of Tib's Cosmetics is Jana Allain Boudreau, Development Officer for Start Up.



Picture 9. Presenting a \$1,000 cheque to the 2nd Place winner Amy Andrews of Life Track Safety Systems Ltd. is Natasha Martin-Mitchell, Development Officer for Indigenous Women Entrepreneurs.





Picture 10. Presenting a \$500 cheque to the Student winners from CCNB – Campus de Bathurst; Ornella Ntchalle, Kodjo Martin Aziakpor and Natasha Comeau with the project Crew Labs is Katherine Lanteigne, Director of WBNB.

4.4.2 Takeaways from the first startup competition

Feedback from the competition was overwhelmingly positive, and the proposed new ideas and improvements are to be incorporated in next offering.

A second edition of the Start Up Competition will be organised in 2021. While some aspects need to be fine-tuned before launching the second edition, the plan is to proceed with the following in the second edition of the Start Up competition:

- Two cohorts; 1 English and 1 French
- Same training workshop themes as the first edition; Buyer Persona, Pricing and Making the Perfect Pitch, offered in both languages
- Possible addition of workshop themes; ex. business plan development, digital marketing, branding, etc.

5 Conclusions

5.1. Benefits gained from participation

Based on the feedback received from the high amount of participants, it is clear that there is a specific need for a targeted business idea competition initiative for women. The project partners in Sweden, Lapland, North Karelia and Canada collected feedback from the participants, and according to the results **nearly half** of the Pilot 2 respondents stated that they considered their participation in the competition to be an important push towards becoming an entrepreneur, or alternatively, it supported those who had already started their businesses. Even though not all project regions had a possibility or interest to organize a regional pilot, but fortunately, the transnational pilot reached a wide audience.

In addition, many of the respondents stated that they may not have had the courage to participate at all without this special targeting. All participants who pitched their idea to judges received valuable expert feedback about their business idea. They were also able to network among the other competitors and build new partnerships. Participating in general was an empowering experience to these women.

Moreover, the competition was seen as a great way to give the participants the power to pursue their passion. In addition, seeing and networking with other female entrepreneurs was important. The competition pushed the participants out of their comfort zone was reflected as “one of the best experiences”. In the future, even more attention could be paid to introducing the jury so that the participants would know to whom to tailor their pitch to. On the other hand, it is important to maintain impartiality and avoid bias and advise the jury to recuse themselves if there is too close a connection with the contestant.

5.2 Tailored business idea competitions needed

Feedback from each regional jury was mainly very positive as well. Especially the practicalities and communication of the pitching competition were mentioned to be well organised. It was pointed out that the pitched ideas were generally good, but some of them were at very early stages whereas some of them were already more mature concepts. This deviation in the maturity of the ideas naturally made the evaluation more demanding. Interestingly, even though the pitching competition organised by Lapland UAS had two separate categories, one for beginners and the other one for more advanced ideas, the local jury pointed out the same issue.

The majority of the responses from the regional jury members, especially the Swedish and North Karelian juries, expressed that they supported the idea of organising an individual business idea competition targeted only for women. It is a widely known fact that women do not tend to apply to start-up competitions as eagerly as men and that when considering the entire European population, women represent only a third of the entrepreneurs in Europe.

Through the gained experience and collected feedback, it can be stated that the initial aim of the project, i.e. to raise awareness of support mechanisms from innovations to business incubation for women, was reached.

With the help of transnational cooperation, the best regional practices were mapped, benchmarked, and gathered together into an existing innovation platform that was then adapted to meet the needs of the target group of women of all ages to start their own business in sparsely populated communities. The Innovation Platform model has a clearly defined structure and it is modelled in such a way that it can be easily applied to different frameworks and improve entrepreneurial climate.



5.3 Mapping the afterlife

The outputs generated during the W-Power project are positive. For example, Lapland University of Applied Sciences in Finnish Lapland has started to build their own concept for encouraging students and other stakeholders towards entrepreneurship, inspired by their experiences of the W-Power project. Lapland UAS will have actual premises on campus, called "Rohkea" (Brave), which will be launched in the autumn 2021. It can be used e.g. for joint workshops, students' projects, business coaching etc. Lapland UAS has offered its local entrepreneurs a possibility to participate in the planning and preparation phase of "Rohkea" by organising workshops to collect and identify the needs of the local SMEs.

The Associate Partner of the W-Power, Women In Business New Brunswick in Canada has confirmed that the second edition of the Start Up Competition will be organised in 2021 in their region.

In Sweden, Strukturm, Business Support Organisation has plans to organise one Innovation weekend for local SMEs before the project ends. Karelia University of Applied sciences shall probably organise another Innovation weeked in the autumn 2021, if the pandemic situation allows live gatherings. In addition, the modelling of the Innovation Platform will be introduced to the local business support organisations. Moreover, a win-win situation has been created with the local Draft Program® in North Karelia, as due to the close cooperation and disucssions, it has adopted some of the best practices developed by W-Power pilots.

In this project, it has been successfully proven that transnational cooperation can truly contribute to an improved entrepreneurial climate by facilitating the transfer and development of business support strategies and solutions to overcome the challenges faced by start-ups and existing SMEs in remote and peripheral regions.



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[Inventory of existing regional innovation platforms](#)



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Pilot 1 Leaflet: W-Power Innovation Platform for Women-Led Businesses



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Report template

1. Entrepreneur /team introduction, who are you? (Photos of you?)
2. What kind of business idea are you developing? (Any relevant image?)
3. Background story – what led you in to developing this idea?
4. How did you hear about the W-Power Innovation Platform – how was the application process as an experience?
5. How did it feel to pitch your idea to the jury – were there any benefits in terms of idea development? How would you improve the application process and the pitching event?
6. How did your idea evolve during the application process?
7. What is/are the development activity/activities you have chosen to engage in with the support of the Innovation Platform? (as per Supplier Agreement 2., bullet point 2)
8. What will you do to implement the development activities? (as per Supplier Agreement 2., bullet point 3)

Once you have completed the activities detailed in your Report, we kindly ask that you write a short update report / send additional video materials with the following information:

9. What were the results of the development activities, and how beneficial they were to your business?
10. Did anything unexpected or dramatic happen during the development process? (Report this part separately for each of the development goals; include photos if possible)
11. What are your plans for the future from now on? Will you continue taking the business idea forward? Why/why not?

