

REPORT

PARTNER: E-KLASTR

EVENT: REPORT FROM REGIONAL CASE STUDY IN
CZECH REPUBLIC

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I. GENERAL OVERVIEW

1. General content



The entrepreneurship environment and culture in the Danube macro-region is weaker and less developed comparing to other EU countries. Young innovators (YIs) in the region often fail to turn their ideas into marketable solutions for variety of reasons, including lack of experience and knowledge, inadequate business support and information, or insufficient funding.

The Danube Energy+ project's general objective is to create an enabling environment that will support Young innovators to pioneer a change in the energy efficiency area by setting up highly innovative start-ups in the Danube macro-region.

Main activities envisaged for implementation under the project

to achieve the set goal

1. ***Danube Energy+ Ecosystem package*** – development of an innovative learning system for key actors of regional ecosystems (Public administration, Universities, Business Supporting Actors, SMEs) to advance their knowledge in industry challenges, models and practices for identification, motivation and connection of YIs.
2. ***Danube Energy+ Tool*** – establishment of a pre-seed / pre-acceleration learning system for Young innovators (YIs) to support their highly innovative idea in the energy efficiency field.

3. Mutual learning process at transregional level - carrying out of 2 physical and 8 virtual workshops to increased knowledge of project partners (PPs) and indirectly support also YIs through expert knowledge-based Tool and Package.

4. Learning package for regional ecosystem actors – development for advancing their knowledge during the Pilot of Danube Energy+ Package on regional level through their participation in several regional activities aside of project partners.

5. Pilot of Danube Energy+ Package in all regions – development and implementation of Package to build capacities of ecosystem actors to create enabling environment for Young innovators + facilitate further cooperation inside ecosystem.

6. Training scheme for Young innovators – development and implementation of training scheme in which the Young innovators are taking part in the Pilot of Danube Energy+ Tool which will directly benefit from learning process within the pre-acceleration scheme.

7. Mutual learning during implementation of Pilots - Partners and ASPs will learn mutually from each other on transregional level through joint Package Pilot implementation, monitoring and impact measurement process.

Expected Results: Intensity of cooperation of key actors in the programme area in order to increase competences for business and social innovation (survey based composite indicator)

Expected Outputs: Danube Energy+ will result in establishment of enabling environment for Young innovators to further strengthen innovation ecosystem and entrepreneurial spirit, especially in area of energy efficiency. This enabling environment will be built on three key elements achieved by the project, each relevant to one specific objective: to advance knowledge of key regional stakeholders in boosting Young innovators (Specific Objective 1), to boost Young innovators towards successful ventures (Specific Objective 2) and to set-up sustainable structures in regional ecosystems to create long-term enabling environment (Specific Objective 3).

Project will intensify cooperation of stakeholders through their engagement in the Danube Energy + ecosystem Package by joint design, pilot monitoring, evaluation and by the development of Action plans. It will engage 9 regional public administrations, 90 Young innovators who were selected for Danube Energy+ Tool Pilot, 9 Regional Alliances, 9 Regional Hubs & 2 working groups (responsible for content of the learning scheme).

Young innovators will benefit from strengthened competences gained through pre-acceleration learning scheme, which will further develop their general business knowledge (business development, marketing, sales, finance) & specific industry knowledge in the energy efficiency sector.

Through improved enabling environment, participating territories will benefit from strengthened entrepreneurial spirit resulting in new business ventures oriented towards the sustainable energy in long-term period.

Project partners

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<p>Partner's Name: Asociatia Central Start-up Transilvania Address: Pitesti Street 19/2Cluj-Napoca, Romania Legal status: private Website: www.start-uptransilvania.ro</p>	<p>Partner's Name: Фондация 'Клийнтех България' Address: TsarigradskoShousse, Sofia Tech Park, Business Incubator building, ground floor 111 B, 1784, Sofia, Bulgaria Legal status: private Website: www.cleantech.bg</p>	<p>Partner's Name: ABC Accelerator, razvoj start-upov in mladih podjetij, d.o.o Address: Šmartinska cesta 152, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia Legal status: private Website: https://abc-accelerator.com/slovenia/</p>
<p>Partner's Name: Optimizacija Address: Istarska ulica 47, 10 000 Zagreb, Croatia Legal status: private</p>	<p>Partner's Name: Центр європейських ініціатив Address: Shvabskaya street, 71a, 88018 Uzhhorod, Ukraine Legal status: public Website: www.iardi.org/partners/tsentr-evropejskyh-initsiat</p>	<p>Partner's Name: Civitta Slovakia, a.s. Address: Ilkovičova 2, 842 16 Bratislava, Slovakia Legal status: private Website: www.neulogy.com</p>

Danube Energy+ Ecosystem Package (Package)

The Package including a Tool is designed with the aim to tackle the aforementioned challenges and is piloted in 9 regions. Thus, engaging Young innovators (YIs) in this region and unlocking their potential to address the energy efficiency specific challenges in the region is a top priority for innovation ecosystem actors.

The Package is developed through learning interaction among project partners and inclusive design process involving key actors of regional ecosystems - regional public authorities, universities, BSOs, SMEs and industry representatives. The Package is composed of **two main elements**:

- 1) best practices, models and experiences in identification, motivation and connection of YIs to ecosystem actors
- 2) Danube Energy+ Tool development as a pre-acceleration learning scheme for YIs boosting their competences to start successful ventures.

The Package helps create an enabling environment for innovation by guiding ecosystem actors in:

- 1) Identification of YIs in their ecosystems
- 2) Motivation of YIs to further develop their disruptive ideas to marketable solutions
- 3) Implementation of the Danube Energy+ Tool to boost knowledge of YIs to scale-up their ideas to ventures
- 4) Connection of YIs with other key stakeholders in regional ecosystems



2. Objective of this document

The primary goal of the Regional case studies is to give users opportunity to see the partner's step-by step approaches and lessons learned during the implementation of the project for creating an enabling entrepreneurship environment to unlock YIs potential in Danube macro-region.

3. Management summary

This case study shows how regional ecosystem actors gain first-hand experience and knowledge from the whole process of implementation of the Tool based on the Danube Energy+ Ecosystem Package presented in the following structure:

1. General description of the pilot in 9 partner countries (identification, motivation and connection process of Young innovators and boost regional ecosystem cooperation)
2. Outcomes:
 - a) Effectiveness of applied methods for reaching out to YIs (lessons learned, cooperation with, traps)
 - b) Lessons learned from the pilot from different perspectives
 - c) Success stories and regional impact

The imposed restrictive measures on the spread of the coronavirus pandemic in the partners' countries reflected on the implementation of the Tool based on Danube Energy+ Ecosystem Package. The degree of readiness of the individual project partners to address these challenges led to a scenario in which these Tool Pilots were taken at two 'speeds' or in two time periods as follows:

January - July 2020: Germany, Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Serbia and the Czech Republic

January - October 2020: Slovenia, Ukraine and Slovakia

The partners decided to develop the Regional case studies as an open document. The information has to be supplemented periodically according to the implementation of the Pilot's steps per each of the individual project partners.

II. General description of the pilot

“Localizing brilliant ideas regardless of situation. “

1. Innovator Identification

The Young Innovators were attracted through a mixture of online advertising, which was conducted on platforms that E-KLASTR has access to, such as Facebook and LinkedIn. We also made use of platforms that our partners used, especially if they had the target audience that we were after (young people excited to start on their project).

Another part of the Young Innovator attraction was going to fairs that were oriented towards students. Here, E-KLASTR and partners established booths where material was disseminated (especially flyers). A small portion of the innovators was identified with this approach; however it did not have the reach that was expected. The bulk of the Innovators were attracted through social media and our network. Another way that we have looked for Innovators was to reach out through schools directly. 10 visits at universities, gymnasiums and specialized high schools were undertaken to attract young innovators, around Czech Republic. These were thankfully attempted before the pandemic, which meant that the visits could have been done physically. We assume that if they were only online, they would not be as effective. A big help were teachers that promoted us in their classes. After this, a panel of expert evaluators were assembled and trained to pick the right group of innovators to participate in the pilot.



Photos from the innovator identification visits

Pilot Implementation

Pilot was implemented in two parts, one half online on the GoToMeeting platform and one half offline in Pardubice, as the Covid-19 regulations eased during the summer in Czech Republic. Attendance was essential during both formats, as the offline part of the pilot directly continued from the online part.

The first online part was held in June over two days. The mentors that attended were Jan Rakušan, Vít Baloušek and Jan Vyskočil, who each had a subject they educated the innovators on. Mr. Rakušan specialized in presentation skills, while Mr. Baloušek took on business model creation and fine tuning, and Mr. Vyskočil focused on innovation and how it affects projects.

The second physical part had the same mentors in attendance, and while their sessions were focused on the same subjects as before, they delved deeper in the things that were very important to succeeding with one's project. It also was split over two consecutive days, in part to have each day to focus on a different topic.

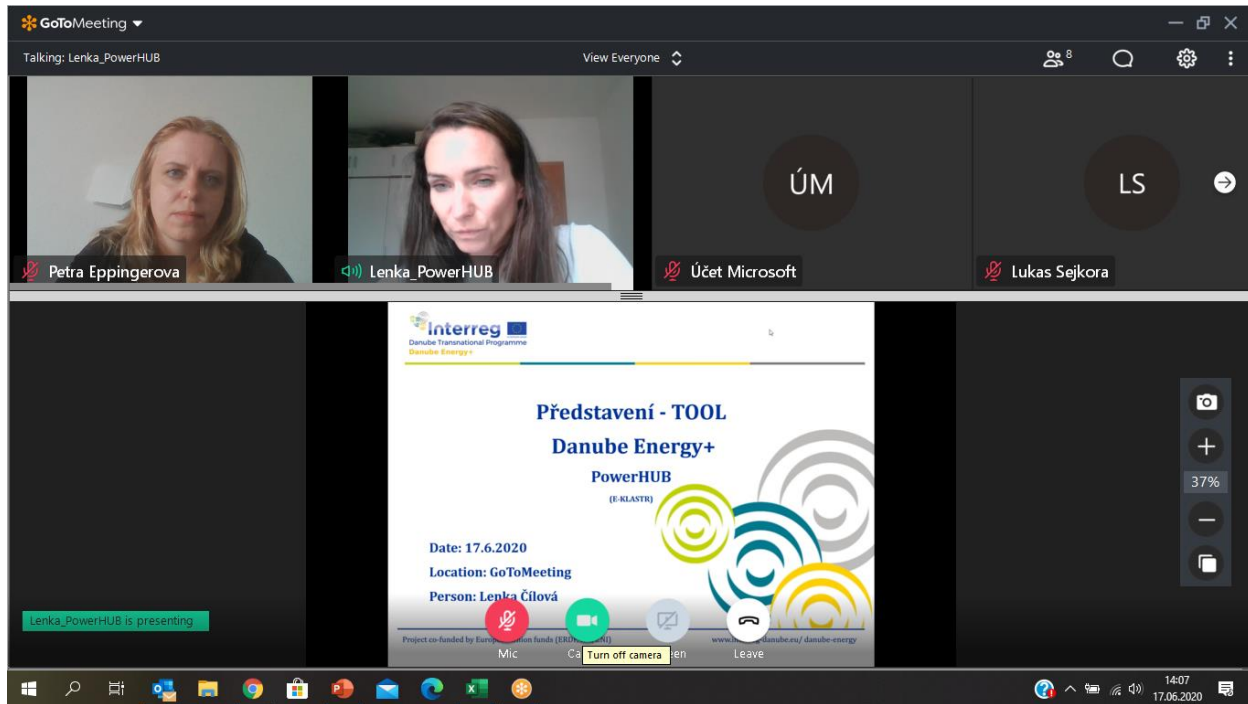


Photo from the online bootcamp



Photo from offline part of the bootcamp

Demo Day

The Demo Day was included in the second part of the pilot, on the second day. Young Innovators had ample time (about a month) to prepare between the start of the pilot and the “final” Demo Day. In addition to that, the innovators had the first day of the physical part of the pilot to prepare their pitches for the demo day and had the opportunity to ask about any part of their presentation that they could improve. The Demo Day has included networking as well, where the innovators on their own accord have not conversed just with the mentors, but other innovators too. Talks of collaboration were heard in many a conversation.



Photos from the Demo Day

Connecting Events

After the Demo Day, we got in touch with the most successful innovators and asked them to meet with us, regarding their next steps. As some have received prizes containing consultation services with us and our partners, we combined these two. Conversations were held with 5 of the Innovators, each having a different subject to talk about. While the younger of the group were interested in what way they can make a difference, such as helping get more young people on board, the older were ready to get their projects out into the real world. For some of the connecting events, a regional stakeholder was invited to hear about the idea and see if it's feasible for them to use it. These stakeholders were for example cities or investors.

2. Outcomes

Lessons learned from reaching out to Innovators

We have learned that the innovators are reachable both physically and virtually, but the former is much more effective in this age group. It is much more difficult to sustain attention online, as there are many more things that happen on the internet for this generation.

Platforms such as Facebook are only good as a tool to reach into specific student groups, as those are sometimes the only thing that the innovators use. They are much more likely to use Instagram and other platforms daily. LinkedIn is also not very populated by this age group yet, so it is not as useful.

It is best to have a partner in your Regional Alliance that has an active presence among students. That is the easiest and most effective way to reach out.

Lessons learned from the pilot from different perspectives

General – from the perspective of E-KLASTR

What went well for us was the reaction and support of city of Pardubice, who were excited to have so many Young Innovators present stellar ideas. In their words, this could have been the catalyst for bigger things to come in start-up incubation and acceleration in Pardubice. In addition to that, the physical event went largely without any hitches, particularly due to relaxed restrictions on Covid19 precautions at the time. One important advice to the partners that have yet to implement their pilot, is to discuss role with regional stakeholders beforehand, as there can be problems arising pertaining to responsibilities and tasks. We had minor issues with the organization of the physical part of the pilot as it has not been decided far enough in advance, and thus had some things that would have been fixed with more time. We will be taking this into account when the next year of this competition is organized.

Feedback from YIs

The experience of the participants was varied, for some the presentations were very useful in uncovering a lot of new information, for others they were a refresh on what can be done better. However, we can say that most participants have learnt something new, especially about business model requirements. It was especially apparent in the progress that we have noticed from the first day of the online bootcamp to the Demo Day.

In their own words, they also gained a new interest in the field for pitching their ideas, which does not have to be a skill that is limited to their project but can be used in other business as well.

Feedback from other stakeholders (incl. mentors)

The stakeholders were excited to work with these young innovators as soon as they could see that they have something to work with. They were surprised how well the innovators adapted to new information and adjusted their presentation pitches accordingly. Everyone we have asked is hoping that next year we can repeat this competition and find a new set of innovators that can go on and continue with their projects. This is obviously apparent in the closest partners of the pilot, who are the city of Pardubice as well as the region of Pardubice. For both, it's good PR to have successful projects arise in their backyard.

Success stories and regional impact

Examples

A few of the innovators were invited to work with P-PINK in Pardubice. They will extend their experience in the field, while also helping to attract more of their contemporaries. Innovators that were further in their project even before the pilot were accepted into the Accelerator programme that PowerHUB is organizing on behalf of EIT Urban Mobility. Here, they will get in touch with cities who are interested in their idea. As well as that, sessions designed to aid expansion of the idea were planned out, where they can get hands-on experience with mentors specializing in certain facets of business.

Impact on other stakeholders (e.g. learning)

There was a measurable impact for P-PINK the incubator in the city of Pardubice. It has grown its portfolio of start-ups, as well as went further in their cooperation with the city government of Pardubice. They are hoping that at the next event, there will be even more interest and support from the city, as well as a larger number of excellent ideas.

3. Interviews with participating YI and their short idea “pitches”

1. Lucie Částková (OLA) is the winner of this year’s event. At the beginning of the meeting, we asked Lucie about her experience from the Parádní nápad event (Pilot). She mainly appreciated having the option to get feedback on her product and its showcase in the presentation. In addition to that, she valued newly obtained skills, knowledge and information from the Bootcamp and the event’s finale. Lastly, she has used this opportunity to network with the other competing Young Innovators.



Photo of Lucie Částková during the pilot



Photo of Lucie Částková at the connecting event after the pilot

2. Viktoria Švarcová (Rosviť si) won the "Best Student Project of the Pardubice Region" award from the Parádní nápad competition (Pilot). Viktoria was one of the least experienced participants, but thanks to that she gained a lot of new experience and knowledge. She claims that the competition has changed her life, is more confident and she has learned to present to people. Like the other participants in the meetings, she mentioned the difficult situation regarding COVID, which affected the competition. She certainly preferred the offline meeting to the online training that took place in June, but she was still glad to be able to attend the training online.



Photo of Viktoria Švarcová at the connecting event after the pilot

3. Tomáš Vlach, the winner of the "Best Innovation" category within the Parádní nápad (pilot) competition. Tomáš evaluated his participation in the competition. He liked the course and the opportunity to meet other projects and the opportunity to get feedback not only on his project, but also the presentation itself. He also liked the overall course and training in presenting skills.



Photo of Tomáš Vlach during the offline bootcamp