RESILIENT ECONOMIES AND COMMUNITIES

eRural resilience

COMPETENCY PROFILE OF E-BIO-BUSINESS SUPPORTERS

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Programme: Interreg Baltic Sea Region

INTERREG BALTIC SEA REGION is a European Union funding programme that supports transnational cooperation.

Interreg Baltic Sea Region covers nine countries, eight of them EU Member States (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden) and one third country (Norway). The European Commission has suspended the participation of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus in the cooperation programme "(Interreg VI-B) Baltic Sea region" 2021-2027 following Russia's unprovoked and unjustified military invasion of Ukraine, and Belarus involvement, and in light of the European Council Conclusions of 24 February 2022.

The Programme covers an area of around 2.9 million km² with a population of 80 million inhabitants. It stretches from central parts of Europe up to its northernmost periphery. The programme area comprises European metropolitan areas such as Berlin, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Oslo, Stockholm and Warsaw. Still, major parts of the programme area are counted as rural. Settlement structures in the south are denser. Most rural areas are in close proximity to a city. In the northern, and to some degree also in the eastern part of the region, often, rural regions are characterised as remote. The Arctic regions in the northernmost part of the programme area represent specific challenges and opportunities in respect of remoteness, geographic and climate conditions.

The Baltic Sea region is characterised by regional differences. At the same time, the countries and regions share joint challenges. In the past two decades, many of them have successfully been addressed through transnational cooperation. A wide range of networks at national, regional and local level as well as between business, the academic sector, and civil society have long been established. They contribute effectively to the territorial development in the region. Since 2009, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) has framed cooperation in the area. The policy areas and activities are defined in the accompanying action plan.

The EUSBSR and its Action Plan provide the central reference to the Programme identifying the main joint challenges and cooperation needs in the region. In addition, the Programme draws upon a large number of existing analyses, visions and strategies pointing out the cooperation needs for the region. The Programme is built on vast experience gained from previous programme periods as well as on the know-how of experienced pan-Baltic stakeholders and networks. In 2019, a review of strategic priorities in the BSR was carried out. Relevant pan-Baltic and national documents were systematically screened and analysed. The main findings regarding potential priorities for the Programme 2021-2027 were filtered out. Following the review, a Joint Programming Committee (JPC) was set up. Supported by the Managing Authority and the Joint Secretariat, the JPC selected the priorities for the Programme.

1.2. The Project: eRural Resilience: Creating resilient rural communities in BSR based on the opportunities of digital bio business

The attractiveness of living in the countryside with a great quality of life may have grown over the past few years (specially pushed by COVID crisis), but rural areas still battle with problems that prevent people from staying there, so the divide between urban and rural areas is growing, and BSR needs to enhance the focus on rural areas (Interreg BSR final evaluation report).

Local authorities, business support centres, SME associations, NGOs… they work daily in the implementation of solutions for the promoting of rural business, but they need to overcome barriers of the rurality itself (limited local market, high cost of utilities or transport, deficit of skills, etc.).

In this framework, many promising solutions come from the combination of the digital transition and green transition. A better use of renewable biological resources in the rural communities, and their conversion into food, livestock feed or bio-based higher valued products, can be a success if the rural producers can find a proper market to place these high value products.

Thus, communities need to build up full digital capacities of business (e-business), while they create bio-products that reflect rural value yet are globally acceptable (bio-business), converting the current SMEs into e-bio-business.

However, there are clear challenges to be solved by local actors:
- They don't have the technical knowledge to support the conversion of classical natural resources into higher valued products, nor the knowledge required for specific benchmarking of bio-business plans.
- Even if the staff have general knowledge about the topic, they need to reinforce their capacities to support SMEs about the emerging selling platforms for bio-products, the rightness of each selling channel per product, the general logistic and packaging system, etc.

The project aims to provide the target groups, rural local authorities and business promotion centres, with a holistic solution to support the creation of e-bio-businesses in rural areas.

1.3. What is a Competency Profile

A **Competency Profile** is a description of competencies that are necessary for a profession or a particular job role. Competencies are defined as a combination of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for adequate functioning on the profession or role, where:

- **Knowledge** is understood as the concepts, facts, and figures, ideas and theories which are already established, and support the understanding of a certain area or subject.
- **Skills** are defined as the ability to carry out processes and use the existing knowledge to achieve results.
- **Attitudes** describe the disposition and mindset to act or react to ideas, person or situations.

Competency Profiles are essentially the collection of competencies, including their associated behaviours, needed to be successful in a role.

The **eRural Resilience Competency Profile** has been created to help describe competencies which define expectations for e-bio-business supporters. Local authorities and business support organizations need to assess their capacity to support e-bio-business, identify their gaps and cover the gaps with capacity building and external expertise.

Competencies are the focal point of e-bio-business supporters' underlying skills and knowledge.

- **Activities** can be collectively described as the "functional" elements of a competence. These elements are the drivers of actual tasks performed by e-bio-business supporters as they move through the assessing and promotion process.
- **Skills and technical knowledge** can be collectively described as the "foundational" elements of a competence.

By defining competencies in this way, we recognise the importance of the underlying elements while acknowledging that a e-bio-business supporter must combine these elements effectively in order to apply a particular competency in practice.

Competencies represent a dynamic combination of knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities. Competencies can be distinguished in subject specific and generic ones. Although the authors acknowledge to the full the importance of building-up and developing subject specific knowledge and skills as the basis for specific jobs, it should be highlighted the fact that time and attention should also be devoted to the development of generic competencies or transferable skills. This last component is becoming more and more relevant in terms of business promotion.

The **eRural Resilience Competency Profile** will describe the required skills and competencies that the institutions have to gather in order to cover the required knowledge to support the businesses in their transition to bio-businesses and e-businesses.

2. THE E-BIO-BUSINESS CONTEXT

The **eRural Resilience Competency Profile** responds to the growing awareness among many European Member States that business promotion bodies and local authorities need a set of

competencies specific to their profession in order to be able to promote the transformation of bio-businesses into e-bio-businesses.

The eRural Resilience Competency Profile aims to capture and describe these e-bio-business supporters' specific competencies by proposing 15 elementary competencies organised in 4 sections:

- Section 1: Business and Management is directed at the broader professional environment, implementing strategic plans for e-bio-business supporters, encompassing goal setting, market analysis, and formulation of strategies.
- Section 2: Digital know-how looks at the competencies needed to be effectively updated on the latest digital technologies, and elevate the digital proficiency of the workforce.
- Section 3: Biological Production and Sustainability is dedicated to the integration of sustainability and biological principles into the e-bio-businesses' operations, supply chains, and marketing strategies to enhance their environmental and social responsibility.
- Section 4: Networking addresses the importance of networking competencies to effectively assist clients.

3. COMPETENCY PROFILE FOR E-BIO-BUSINESS SUPPORTERS

3.1. Section 1: Business and Management Skills

Business and management skills are indispensable assets for the effective functioning of e-bio-business supporters. These skills enable them to develop and execute strategic plans tailored to meet the diverse needs of businesses they serve.

1.1. Business Strategy and Planning

The Business Strategy and Planning skill is the ability to develop, articulate, and implement a strategic plan for a business. Including clear goals setting, understanding the competitive landscape, analysing market trends, and formulating strategies is crucial to achieve business objectives.

Professionals with this skill are adept at long-term planning, risk assessment, and decision-making to guide a business towards sustainable growth and success.

1.2. Financial Management

Financial Management consist in efficient and effective management of money (funds) in such a manner as to accomplish the objectives of the organization. Budgeting and forecasting include the ability to guide and create realistic, detailed budgets and forecasts that guide the organization's financial decision-making.

Cash flow management guidance ensures that the organization maintains adequate liquidity to meet its short-term obligations and invest in growth opportunities.

Financial Management fosters the planning, organizing, directing, and controlling of financial activities such as procurement and utilization of funds. It also refers to the ability to analyse financial data to identify trends, challenges, and opportunities, and reporting.

Understanding that financial management is integral to the health and efficiency of a business, ensuring that the company's financial resources are used effectively and strategically to achieve its objectives and increase its value.

1.3.   Marketing and Sales

Both Marketing and Sales are essential for attracting and retaining customers, increasing revenue, and ensuring the long-term success of businesses. Effective integration of these competencies can lead to better market penetration, customer satisfaction, and business growth.

Marketing and Sales in the context of e-bio-business supporters involve strategies and activities aimed at promoting products or services and converting prospects into customers. This field is crucial for driving rural business growth, creating brand awareness, and establishing a competitive market position.

Understanding the needs and trends of the local business community and researching the market helps to identify opportunities, understanding what entrepreneurs and businesses need, and tailoring services to meet these needs.

1.4.   Leadership and People Management

Leadership and People Management is a crucial skill that includes vision-setting, decision-making, and motivating staff to innovate and excel in a dynamic, often fast-paced environment. Strategic thinking, adaptability, and a deep understanding of market trends and customer needs.

Effective administration and coordination of team members helps to optimize their performance and contribution to the company's objectives.

1.5.   Operational Management

Operational Management focuses on the efficient conversion of materials and labour into goods and services as effectively as possible to maximize profit and minimize waste. It's a balancing act of managing people, processes, and technology in an ever-changing business environment.

Competence	Knowledge	Skills	Attitudes
1.1 Strategy and Planning	- Understanding of market dynamics and trends	- Strategic analysis and planning	- Open-mindedness towards new ideas and perspectives
	- Knowledge of industry regulations and standards	- Scenario planning and risk assessment	- Willingness to adapt plans based on changing conditions
	- Awareness of competitive landscape	- Aligning strategies with organizational objectives	- Confidence in decision-making and problem-solving
1.2 Financial Management	- Understanding of financial statements and ratios	- Budgeting and forecasting	- Attention to detail and accuracy
	- Knowledge of taxation and financial regulations	- Financial analysis and reporting	- Ethical and responsible financial practices
	- Familiarity with cash flow management	- Resource allocation and cost control	- Ability to prioritize financial goals
1.3 Marketing and Sales	- Understanding of consumer behaviour and market research	- Strategic marketing planning	- Customer-centric mindset
	- Knowledge of marketing channels and tools	- Brand management and promotion	- Adaptability to changing market trends
	- Familiarity with product positioning and pricing	- Sales forecasting and target setting	- Effective communication and persuasion skills
1.4 Leadership and People Management	- Understanding of motivational theories and team dynamics	- Effective communication and interpersonal skills	- Empathy and respect towards team members
	- Knowledge of leadership styles and strategies	- Conflict resolution and team building	- Openness to feedback and continuous self-improvement
	- Familiarity with performance management systems	- Delegation and empowerment	- Integrity and fairness in decision-making
1.5 Operational Management	- Understanding of supply chain and logistics	- Process optimization and efficiency improvement	- Attention to detail and quality assurance
	- Knowledge of inventory management techniques	- Resource allocation and capacity planning	- Problem-solving and troubleshooting skills
	- Familiarity with project management methodologies	- Risk management and contingency planning	- Adaptability to changing operational requirements
	- Awareness of regulatory compliance	- Performance measurement and KPI tracking	- Commitment to continuous improvement

3.2.   Section 2: Digital know-how

By possessing these digital competencies, e-bio-business supporters can effectively guide companies through the digitalization process, enabling them to stay competitive and thrive in the digital era.

2.1. Digital Strategy Development

A comprehensive Digital Strategy Development involves grasping business models and industries, aiding companies in crafting digital strategies harmonized with their objectives.

Additionally, it entails evaluating the existing digital maturity of businesses and formulating tailored roadmaps for digital transformation. This process demands a nuanced understanding of market dynamics and technological trends to ensure strategic alignment.

2.2. E-commerce Enablement

Providing support in both setting up and fine-tuning e-commerce platforms is crucial. Additionally, offering guidance on digital payment systems, cybersecurity, and optimizing online customer experience ensures seamless operations.

By addressing these aspects comprehensively, businesses can enhance their online presence and maximize customer satisfaction. Ultimately, this proactive approach fosters trust and loyalty while driving growth in the digital marketplace.

2.3. Cybersecurity Awareness

Having a solid grasp of cybersecurity threats and protective measures is paramount. Furthermore, offering aid in formulating cybersecurity policies and executing industry best practices is crucial. By addressing these concerns comprehensively, businesses can fortify their digital infrastructure and mitigate potential risks effectively. Ultimately, this proactive approach bolsters trust and safeguards valuable digital assets from evolving cyber threats.

2.4. Legal and Regulatory Knowledge

Remaining updated on digital laws, regulations, and compliance is imperative. Providing guidance to businesses on legal matters concerning digital transactions, data privacy, and intellectual property ensures adherence to regulatory frameworks.

By navigating these complexities effectively, businesses can mitigate legal risks and safeguard their interests in the digital realm.

Competence	Knowledge	Skills	Attitudes
2.1 Digital Strategy Development	- Understanding of business models and market trends	- Strategic planning and analysis	- Open-mindedness to innovative approaches
	- Knowledge of market trends and technological advancements	- Scenario planning and risk assessment	- Proactive and forward-thinking
	- Familiarity with digital transformation frameworks	- Setting measurable digital objectives	- Commitment to continuous learning and adaptation
2.2 E-commerce Enablement	- Understanding of e-commerce platforms and technologies	- Setting up and optimizing e-commerce platforms	- Customer-focused approach to e-commerce
	- Familiarity with online marketing strategies	- Managing inventory and order fulfillment	- Attention to detail and quality
	- Awareness of consumer behaviour and e-commerce laws	- Analyzing e-commerce metrics and KPIs	- Commitment to providing excellent customer service
2.3 Cybersecurity Awareness	- Understanding of cybersecurity threats and risks	- Implementing cybersecurity measures and protocols	- Vigilance and proactivity in identifying security risks
	- Familiarity with cybersecurity tools and technologies	- Responding to security incidents effectively	- Proactive in staying updated with security trends
	- Awareness of best practices for secure digital environments	- Educating others on cybersecurity practices	- Responsibility in maintaining secure systems
2.4 Legal and Regulatory Knowledge	- Understanding of digital laws and regulations	- Providing legal advice and compliance guidance	- Integrity and ethical conduct in legal matters
	- Knowledge of data privacy and intellectual property laws	- Conducting legal audits and assessments	- Integrity in business practices
	- Familiarity with industry-specific regulations	- Drafting and reviewing digital contracts and policies	- Attention to detail in legal documentation

3.3. Section 3: Biological Production and Sustainability

Demonstrated expertise in the intersection of biological production and sustainability, including the utilization of biological systems for resource-efficient and environmentally friendly practices.

3.1. Biological production processes

Biological production processes refer to the methods used to cultivate, extract, or manufacture products derived from living organisms or natural materials. This includes techniques such as organic farming, fermentation, biotechnology, and extraction processes that aim to produce goods while minimizing environmental impact and promoting sustainability.

Advising companies on biological production processes involves guiding them on how to optimize these methods to ensure product quality and safety.

3.2. Sustainability

Sustainability refers to the practice of conducting business operations in a manner that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This includes considering environmental, social, and economic factors throughout the product lifecycle, from sourcing raw materials to manufacturing, distribution, and disposal. Sustainable practices aim to minimize environmental impact, conserve natural resources, promote biodiversity, support local communities, ensure fair labour practices, and contribute to long-term business viability.

Advising companies on sustainability involves helping them integrate these principles into their operations, supply chains, and marketing strategies to enhance their environmental and social responsibility and meet the growing demand for sustainable products from consumers.

3.3. Organic certification

Organic certification by the EU refers to the process of verifying that agricultural products or processed foods comply with organic standards set by the European Union regulatory bodies. This certification confirms that the products have been produced using organic farming practices, which typically exclude the use of synthetic pesticides, fertilizers, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), and irradiation. Organic certification involves rigorous inspection and verification of production methods, inputs, and practices to ensure compliance with EU organic regulations.

Advising companies on EU organic certification involves guiding them through the certification process, helping them understand and implement organic farming practices according to EU standards, maintaining records, and ensuring compliance to gain consumer trust and access EU organic markets.

Competence	Knowledge	Skills	Attitudes
3.1 Biological production processes	- Understanding of biological principles and production methods	- Implementing biological production techniques	- Respect for natural ecosystems and biodiversity
	- Knowledge of microbial cultures and fermentation processes	- Monitoring and optimizing production parameters	- Commitment to sustainable and eco-friendly practices
	- Familiarity with bioreactor systems and bioengineering	- Troubleshooting and problem-solving in production	- Openness to innovation in biological production methods
3.2 Sustainability	- Understanding of sustainability principles and frameworks	- Developing and implementing sustainable practices	- Awareness of environmental and social impacts
	- Knowledge of sustainable resource management and circular economy	- Evaluating sustainability performance	- Willingness to promote and advocate for sustainability
	- Familiarity with green technologies and renewable energy sources	- Conducting sustainability assessments	- Commitment to continuous improvement in sustainability
3.3 Organic certification	- Understanding of organic farming principles and regulations	- Applying for and maintaining organic certification	- Respect for organic farming standards and practices
	- Knowledge of organic certification processes and requirements	- Ensuring compliance with organic standards	- Commitment to transparency and integrity in certification
	- Familiarity with organic labelling and marketing regulations	- Documenting and tracking organic production	- Dedication to promoting consumer trust in organic products

3.4.   Section 4: Networking Skills

Organizations supporting businesses in networking must possess diverse competencies to effectively assist their clients. Here are several key competencies that are essential in this area:

4.1. Contact Management

Contact management refers to the ability to systematically organize, maintain, and leverage relationships with individuals and entities within a network. This involves capturing, categorizing, and managing contact information, as well as tracking interactions and communications to foster meaningful connections.

Effective contact management enables individuals to build and sustain their network, streamline communication, and maximize opportunities for collaboration and mutual support.

4.2. Communication

Communication refers to the ability to effectively exchange information, build and maintain relationships, and engage with various stakeholders within a network. This competency includes skills such as clear articulation, active listening, providing and receiving feedback, conflict resolution, and empathetic understanding of others' needs and perspectives.

Strong communication enables network members to strengthen relationships, build trust, and achieve shared goals more effectively.

4.3. Building Relationships

Building relationships involves the ability to establish, nurture, and maintain meaningful connections with individuals and organizations within a professional network. This includes initiating conversations, demonstrating genuine interest, cultivating trust, and fostering mutual respect and understanding.

The goal of relationship building is to develop strong, long-lasting connections that can lead to collaboration, support, and opportunities for professional growth and advancement within the network.

Competence	Knowledge	Skills	Attitudes
4.1 Contact Management	- Understanding of contact management systems and tools	- Organizing and categorizing contacts efficiently	- Value for maintaining organized and updated contact lists
	- Knowledge of data privacy regulations and best practices	- Updating contact information regularly	- Respect for individuals' privacy and consent
	- Familiarity with networking events and platforms	- Utilizing contact management software effectively	- Commitment to building and maintaining professional networks
4.2 Communication	- Understanding of communication principles and techniques	- Active listening and clear articulation of ideas	- Openness to feedback and constructive criticism
	- Knowledge of various communication channels and tools	- Effective written and verbal communication skills	- Empathy and understanding in interpersonal interactions
	- Familiarity with cultural differences in communication	- Adaptability in communication style to different contexts	- Confidence in expressing thoughts and ideas
4.3 Building Relationships	- Understanding of the importance of relationship-building	- Building rapport and trust with contacts	- Genuine interest in getting to know others personally
	- Knowledge of networking strategies and best practices	- Maintaining regular communication with contacts	- Willingness to offer help and support to others
	- Familiarity with social etiquette and networking norms	- Nurturing professional relationships over time	- Integrity and honesty in all interactions

4. COMPETENCY PROFILE PROGRESSION MODEL

The progression from Fundamental to Expert represents a journey from basic understanding and application to strategic expertise and thought leadership in each area.

Level of proficiency		Fundamental (Basic knowledge)	Intermediate (Practical application)	Advanced (Applied theory)	Expert (Recognized authority)
		To have common knowledge or an understanding of basic techniques and concepts	To have applied this competency to situations occasionally while needing minimal guidance to perform successfully	To be capable of coaching others in the application of this competency	To create new applications for and/or lead the development of reference and resource materials for this competency
Area	**Competency**				
Business and Management	**1.1. Strategy and Planning**	Basic understanding of business models and strategies.	Proficient in strategic planning and business model development.	Proficient in strategic planning and business model development.	Thought leader in innovative business strategies.
	1.2. Financial Management	Basic understanding of financial statements and budgeting.	Proficient in financial analysis and reporting.	Expert in financial strategy and capital structure optimization.	Authority on financial modelling and economic theory.
	1.3. Marketing and Sales	Basic knowledge of marketing principles and sales techniques.	Proficient in developing marketing strategies and sales plans.	Expert in integrated marketing campaigns and sales channel development.	Pioneer in innovative marketing and sales methodologies.
	1.4. Leader and people Management	Basic understanding of leadership styles and team dynamics.	Proficient in team building and conflict resolution.	Expert in leadership during change and organizational transformation.	Authority on executive leadership and organizational psychology.
	1.5. operational Management	Basic understanding of operational processes and efficiency.	Proficient in process optimization and supply chain management.	Expert in lean management and continuous improvement strategies.	Pioneer in operational innovation and futuristic business solutions.

Digital know how	**2.1. Digital Strategy Development**	Understanding of basic digital concepts	Ability to analyze digital trends and market dynamics	Proficiency in strategic planning and alignment	Mastery in developing transformative strategies
	2.2. E-commerce Enablement	Basic awareness of e-commerce fundamentals	Ability to set up and manage basic e-commerce platforms	Proficiency in scaling and optimizing e-commerce operations	Mastery in driving e-commerce growth and innovation
	2.3. Cybersecurity Awareness	Basic knowledge of cybersecurity threats and measures	Understanding of cybersecurity best practices and protocols	Ability to implement cybersecurity measures effectively	Expertise in developing comprehensive cybersecurity strategies
	2.4. Legal and Regulatory Knowledge	Awareness of basic digital laws and regulations	Understanding of industry-specific legal requirements	Proficiency in navigating complex legal and regulatory frameworks	Expertise in developing and implementing compliance strategies
Biological production	**3.1. Biological production processes**	Basic understanding of biological production principles	Familiarity with common biological processes	Proficiency in implementing advanced production techniques	Mastery in optimizing biological processes
	3.2. Sustainability	Awareness of basic sustainability concepts	Understanding of sustainability frameworks	Proficiency in integrating sustainability practices	Mastery in driving sustainable initiatives
	3.3. Organic certification	Basic knowledge of organic certification standards	Familiarity with certification processes	Proficiency in obtaining and maintaining organic certification	Expertise in developing organic certification strategies
Networking	**4.1. Contact Management**	Basic understanding of contact management systems	Ability to use contact management tools effectively	Proficiency in organizing and segmenting contacts	Mastery in optimizing contact management processes
	4.2. Communication	Basic verbal and written communication skills	Competency in clear and effective communication	Proficiency in adapting communication styles	Mastery in influencing and persuasive communication
	4.3. Building Relationships	Awareness of the importance of relationship-building	Ability to initiate and maintain professional relationships	Proficiency in networking and rapport-building	Mastery in cultivating strategic partnerships and alliances

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