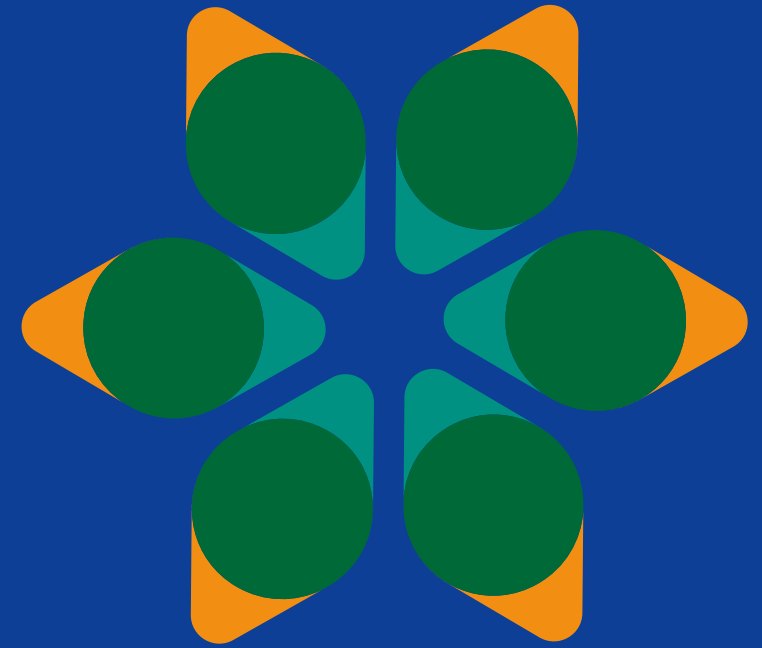


Innovative Sector Exchange Project

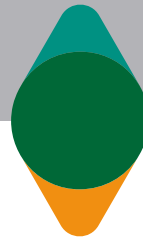


www.kentinternationalbusiness.co.uk/ise/
#ISE2Seas

Interreg 
2 Seas Mers Zeeën
ISE


European Regional Development Fund

ISE is part financed by EU Interreg 5A 2 Seas Programme and run by these organisations



supported by



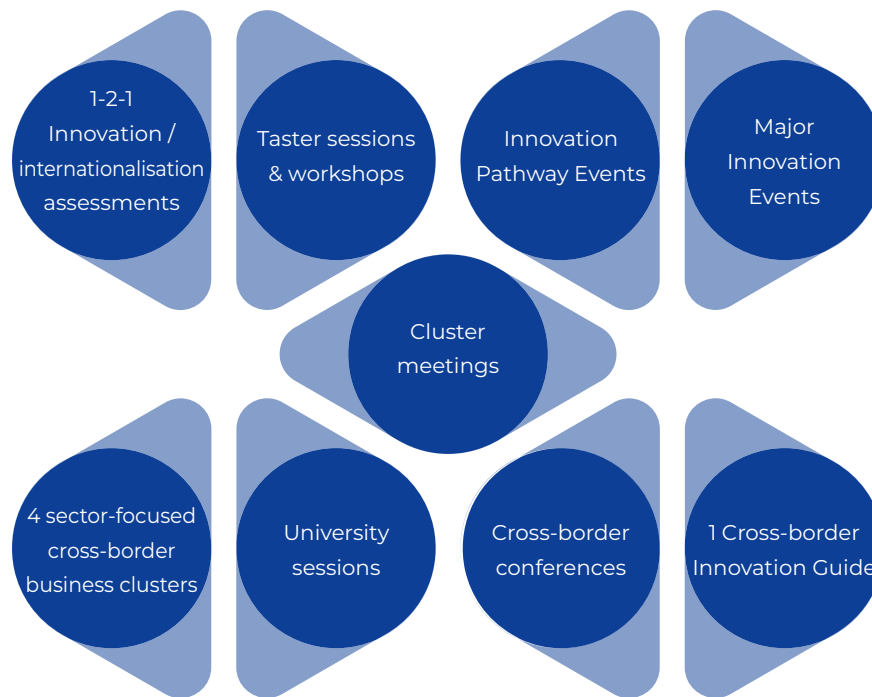


**“Where we go
is only half the
experience - it’s the
people we’re really
interested in.”**

Intro

The Innovative Sector Exchange Project (ISE) was a 4-year project part-financed by the EU Interreg 5A 2 Seas Programme and the European Regional Development Fund.

The project helped small businesses from Kent, East Flanders, West Flanders, France, and the SW of the Netherlands innovate, connect, explore collaborative opportunities and discover international markets.



Seven project partner organisations from the ISE 2 Seas region delivered a range of support activities to help local businesses from different sectors to connect and explore innovation and internationalisation.

These services included:

- **1-2-1 Innovation / internationalisation assessments**
- **Taster sessions & workshops** locally around topics on internationalisation and innovation
- **Innovation Pathway Events** – Visits to fairs or partner regions to exchange experiences between SMEs
- **Major Innovation Events** – Visits to trade shows and centres of excellence in mainland Europe
- **Cluster meetings** - Smaller and more targeted networking meetings for businesses
- **4 sector-focused cross-border business clusters** – (Agri-Food, Digital & Creative, Mechatronics & New Materials)
- **University sessions** with academic experts
- **Cross-border conferences**
- **1 Cross-border Innovation Guide** created and shared with over 2,000 SMEs in the ISE region



What is ISE?



VIDEO



Karim Neghli

Aditec

Hauts-de-France

ISE Project Partner

Taster Sessions and Workshops

Many SMEs wish to explore new markets for their products or services; or aim to innovate to secure new business opportunities and simply do not know how to approach it.

Through a series of taster sessions and workshops in the different ISE regions, we helped **more than 900 SMEs** understand how innovation can apply to various aspects of their business.

We helped them understand the concept and benefits of innovation as a route to business growth, with a particular emphasis on how this applies to different sectors and in the context of internationalisation. They discovered and adopted new ways of working, product development (adapting products, services, packaging, marketing etc.) and found new applications for existing/emerging technologies or products. This lead to

operational efficiencies and new market opportunities in collaboration with SMEs from other partner regions.

A series of **31 Taster Sessions** were organised and delivered by partners in each ISE region, aimed at companies from target sectors covering innovation in all aspects of a business from processes to products. Inspiring and renowned external experts and leading SMEs presented techniques and ideas to companies.

Eight sector-focused innovation workshops were also organised by partners and facilitated by external experts from a different partner region to provide a cross-border overview of innovation concepts and methods from the 2 Seas area. Through this, SMEs learned more about innovative practices and ideas.





VIDEO

1-2-1 Innovation Assessments

ISE partners Aditec and the Innovatiehuis developed a bespoke tool for the ISE project to enable the partners to carry out 1-2-1 diagnostic assessments with SMEs from the ISE partner areas.

Henk van Dijk

Stichting Innovatiehuis
Netherlands
ISE Project Partner

A business advisor from the partner organisations could then use this tool when visiting a company and carry out an assessment using a standardised scan (diagnostic tool).

The advisor identified the SMEs characteristics after asking them a range of questions, visiting their premises and meeting other SME staff. A qualified assessment of the company's requirements regarding innovation and international collaboration was created.

The ISE scan looked at the 'fingerprint' of the SME and could be used to give them useful and relevant advice.

The partners evaluated the company after the 1-2-1 diagnostic assessment and produced a range of recommendations which were shared with the whole partnership. Expertise and contacts from the partner regions were provided to the companies based on their needs.

The scan had three elements:

1. An interview guideline which partners used to ask a series of questions.
2. A spreadsheet to fill in the relevant statistics.
3. An output poster/document, which was the result of the scan and was used to discuss the results.

The scan consisted in part of data such as the number of employees, sector, turnover, international experience, use of technology etc. The other part gave a qualitative snapshot of the capacity of the company regarding internationalisation, innovation and local positioning. The idea behind these output posters containing radar charts was that the SME could then have something physical to hang on their wall at their business premises to use as an internal guideline for action.

The partners were trained on how to use the scan tool at the beginning of the project. In total, **117 SMEs** were contacted and visited to complete an ISE 1-2-1 diagnostic assessment.





VIDEO

Innovation Pathway Events

Tudor Price

Invicta Chamber of
Commerce
Kent
ISE Project Partner

The ISE Project organised 12 innovation pathway events throughout the programme.

The purpose of these events was to bring SMEs in their respective clusters to events that would inspire and nurture innovation within their own business; applying them to their products and services, ultimately creating internationalisation opportunities.

The events were useful in demonstrating how prototyping can help bring new products to market and to showcase emerging technologies.

Collaborations were not the original purpose of the pathway events, but the opportunity arose through the exchange of ideas and techniques.





VIDEO



Natasha White
Kent County Council
Kent
ISE Project Partner

Cross-border Clusters

The ISE project established cross-border clusters that brought together businesses and experts from the ISE project areas. Four different target sectors were identified; Agri-food, Digital and Creative, Mechatronics, and New Materials..

The purpose of the cross-border clusters was to help companies to:

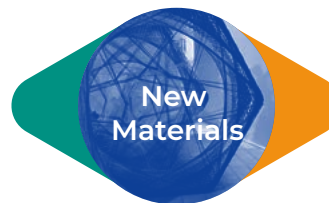
- Network.
- Collaborate & do business.
- Provide peer-to-peer support.
- Attend international business events.
- Create long-term business relationships.

149 SMEs joined the clusters to develop their business internationally and to work with companies and experts from other European regions. The presence of representatives of Higher Education or Research Institutes in relevant fields was also an added value for cluster members.

The clusters were set up and managed by the ISE project partners until the end of the project, after which cluster leads were identified to oversee future activities from 2021 onwards. The clusters were free to join, and the ISE project funded activities.



Mechatronics



New
Materials



Agri
Food



Digital and
Creative





VIDEO



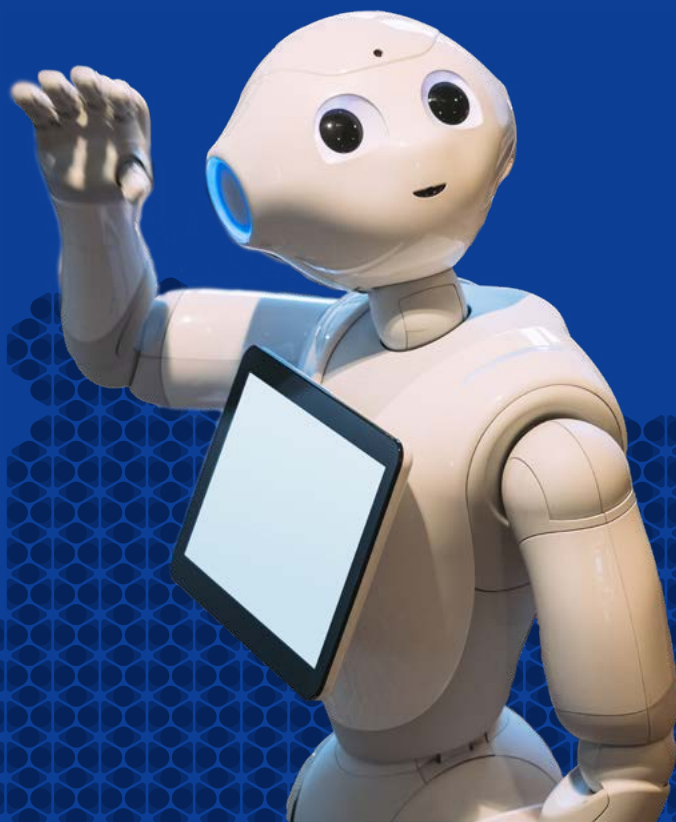
Denise van Eekeren

Stichting Innovatiehuis
South West Netherlands
ISE Project Partner

Major Innovation Events

During the project, the cluster members visited major European innovation events (including outside of the programme area) with the aim of providing cluster members access to advice, case studies & expertise from leading global innovators as well as allowing cluster members to network.

In total, 7 Major Innovation Events were organised from June 2018 until the beginning of 2020

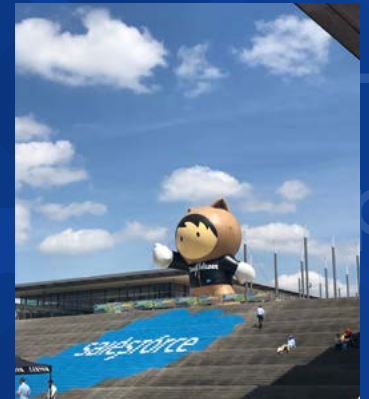


Hannover

CEBIT

CEBIT, Hannover – 12-14 June 2018

Europe's biggest festival for innovation and digitalisation. This two-night visit was the first significant innovation event. The visit included exhibits, conferences, and networking around the theme of the digitalisation of business, government, and society from every angle.



Paris

JEC, Paris - 12-13 March 2019

JEC World 2019, the leading International Composites show.

JEC World



Hannover

Hannover Messe, Hannover – 1-3 April 2019

A 3-day visit to the world's leading industrial show in Hannover, including matchmaking organised by Enterprise Europe Network (EEN).

Hannover Messe



Berlin

Tech Open Air

Tech Open Air, 3-5 July 2019

Digital & creative companies had the opportunity to attend this inspiring event to find out more about the latest digital trends and technologies that could help grow their business.



Cologne

Anuga

ANUGA, Cologne – 8-9 October 2019

One of the most influential industry meeting points for the food and beverage industry in Europe, held once every two years. The event has over 7,000 exhibitors and 165,000 trade visitors and allowed the companies to see the latest global food & drink sector.



Barcelona

Industry

INDUSTRY Barcelona, 28-30 October 2019

This event is aimed at manufacturing companies to learn about machines and tooling, robotics and automation, new materials, connectivity, and data.



Amsterdam

Horecava

Horecava, Amsterdam, 14-15 January 2020

Horecava, the largest and most important trade exhibition for the Food and Hospitality industry. Horecava is the meeting place of choice for professionals in the sector – here, you can explore the latest trends, innovations, and the future of the industry.





VIDEO

Cross Border Conferences

Leonid Guz

VOKA
Chamber of Commerce
West Flanders
ISE Project Partner

Two large cross-border conferences were held over the course of the project.

The purpose of the conferences was to inspire the participants to innovate by sharing engaging stories and innovative ideas. There was also the opportunity to participate in a sizeable cross-border networking event.

The first conference was organised on 4 December 2018 in Calais (France). This location was accessible for participants from all partner regions.

The talks were presented by renowned international speakers which attracted many participants to the conference. Afterwards, the networking event enabled participants to get to know one another and share their insights on future-proofing businesses.

The second conference, the ISE Innovation Summit, revolved around the topic of Celebrating Success. This online event placed a few innovation champions from major international companies under the spotlight by sharing their vision of how to continuously stay ahead and gain a competitive edge by applying various innovation processes.





VIDEO

University Sessions

Tudor Price

Invicta Chamber of
Commerce
Kent
ISE Project Partner

The programme of university sessions delivered by the project involved Howest, an Applied Science university based in West Flanders. The university sessions mainly involved SMEs from the ISE Mechatronics Cluster and enabled them to spend time using the latest tools and technology for prototyping coupled with in-depth, hands-on series of support from workshops led by academics in the 2 Seas region, as well as become better equipped to adapt existing products and create new ones.

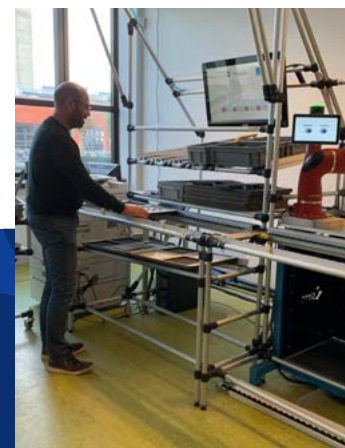




VIDEO

Making Connections

Throughout the ISE project, the Cluster members had the opportunity to visit several significant events, festivals, conferences and workshops across Europe. This was an incredible opportunity for the members to network, exchange ideas, and ultimately, make lasting connections.



Measuring Success

Conversion

117

1-2-1 Diagnostic
Innovation
Assessments
carried out
with SMEs

920

SME's
attending
ISE Taster
Sessions

149

active
ISE members
across
4 clusters

1,500+

SME's from
the 4 ISE
partner regions
benefitted
over 4 years

Engagement

Major Innovation
Events

7

with

117

attending
SMEs

Cross Border
Conferences

2

with

141

attending
SMEs

Cluster
Meetings

16

with

227+

attending
SMEs

Online
Minutes

360+

with

120+

virtual
SMEs

Achievements

46% of companies who provided feedback stated that they would adapt their business as a result of attending the ISE activities



Achievements

90% of companies who provided feedback stated that they came away from ISE activities with new ideas and knowledge to adopt in their business



Achievements

50%

of SMEs attended Major
Innovation Events and
Innovation Pathway Events



Achievements

46%

of a small number of SMEs who completed the end of ISE project survey rated their overall satisfaction with the ISE Project as very good to excellent



Achievements

16%

of SMEs who responded to the end of ISE project survey said they had already seen an increase in the number of international markets between the start of the project (late 2016) and the end of the project (in 2020)



Achievements

87% of SMEs that attended Major Innovation Events said that they obtained new leads, and/or contacts from the events.

This included Academic contacts as well as business



Results & Testimonials



Selma found inspiration and broadened her horizons through active business networking.



Warren was inspired to hire an animator after attending the Playground Festival in Breda. He was encouraged to make effective, long-term changes to his business.



Christel has discovered the benefits of networking across borders and made first contact with a potential export partner.



Katja from the Netherlands has been working on an active project with other ISE Digital & Creative Cluster members from the UK and France.



Dan is now chairman of a new committee of Cluster members who together form Imagineers International.

Lessons Learned

So, what are the main things that the partners learned from delivering the ISE project?

Steve Samson

Kent County Council
Kent
ISE Project Partner

1 - Widen the scope

A sector approach can sometimes be helpful but not always - when we designed the project, we focused on the sector strengths of the partner regions. As the project progressed, we found that it was easier for businesses from specific sectors to engage. We had high levels of participation from digital & creative companies and those working in the food & drink sector. It proved harder to involve companies from the mechatronics and new materials sectors. Maybe because businesses don't always see themselves as fitting into a particular category, or they consider using new materials or advanced engineering solutions as a regular part of their business processes rather than a sector they belong to. So for future projects, we would widen the scope and encourage more interactions between companies from different sectors.

2 - Be Flexible

There were two main disrupting challenges as we implemented the project: the results and impact of the EU referendum in the UK in June 2016, and the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. These had a significant influence on the availability of businesses to participate in the project, and we had to adapt our programme of activity to respond. We played a crucial role in keeping networks together from our different partner regions and more recently had to take some of our planned physical activities online due to restrictions on travel and gatherings.

We learned that a lot could change in the four years since the project application was approved, so we were creative as a partnership in adapting our programme of support to the fast-changing economic context with the backing from the Interreg programme.

3 - Allow plenty of time

Allow plenty of time in an event programme – with international travel, visits to partner regions, trade shows and centres of excellence; it's always hard to squeeze everything into a one or two-day programme. We found that our businesses valued opportunities just to talk, meet, network and pitch themselves to their counterparts from other regions. Hence, allowing time to prioritise this was a crucial factor of organising a successful event.

And finally, a few other things we learned:

Complex EU funded projects are demanding, but it's rewarding working with a range of excellent European partners to support the business community.

Things don't always go exactly to plan. Understanding this and being reactive to a crisis is crucial to the success of any large project.

And one last tip: if your coach or bus gets stranded in the middle of a tunnel in London for several hours, make sure it's with a group of food and drink companies so that you have supplies to keep spirits high and encourage informal networking in unusual situations!

What's next?

We listened to feedback from companies and adapted and perfected our approach to company pitching during the project. We now have a model and format that can be used by the partners and other organisations in future.

Clusters

ISE Food & Drink

Following a very comprehensive programme of activities from 2017 to the beginning of 2020, ISE partners were unable to hold the planned series of events for 2020 due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. The ISE partners organised a series of online events (cluster meetings) specifically targeted to the food and drink sector to ensure support was offered for the remaining months of the project. Although we couldn't get together physically to plan future activities, the food and drink cluster will have various platforms still available to them which will continue after the end of ISE, such as:

Voka Connect

A platform set up by our West-Flemish partner (Voka Chamber of Commerce) which enables businesses to find international opportunities and partner with other companies. The matching platform is free to use, and any company can search for a partner via this site in the future.

LinkedIn

The ISE Food & Drink Cluster group on LinkedIn is available for companies after the programme. Food and Drink companies can stay in touch with one another and ISE partners. The partners will also continue to share relevant information in the group.

The group can be accessed by scanning the code.

We also anticipate being able to organise activities for food & drink cluster companies in the ISE partner regions to continue to connect businesses in the future.

Imagineers International (ISE Digital & Creative Cluster)

A small group of Digital & Creative Cluster members from across the ISE partner regions have been working together as a committee to put plans in place for when the ISE Project comes to an end in December 2020. The group is working on ideas to support collaborations between businesses in the different partner regions and to extend the cluster globally. Work has begun on branding and a new website for the new initiative, which is to be called Imagineers International.





www

The future?

With the current EU funding coming to an end, the partners will be exploring how to utilise the ISE partnership and help companies within the ISE region in the future. This is particularly important as the end of the project coincides with the end of the UK's withdrawal period from the EU, and the ongoing consequences of Covid-19 Pandemic.

The ISE partners, with support from the wider Straits Committee initiative, will continue to keep in contact and find new ways of assisting SMEs from the different ISE regions.

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2 Seas Mers Zeeën
ISE

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