



## FISSH Insight: A Sustainable Future for the Food Sector

The agri-food industry plays a crucial role in providing livelihoods and well-being to residents of the regions covered by the FISSH project. However, transitioning to sustainable food systems poses significant challenges for food companies, necessitating changes in their operations. To remain competitive in the face of a rapidly changing environment, these enterprises need support in the transformation process—from strategic levels to production practices and responsible communication.

A particular challenge lies in the situation of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which dominate the food sector in the FISSH regions. With limited resources and capabilities in research and development (RDI), many of these firms perceive sustainable development as a barrier rather than an opportunity. In response to these challenges, new initiatives and supporting policies

are essential to increase awareness and knowledge among SMEs about sustainable practices. It is also crucial to transform the mindset regarding sustainable development so that the food industry in the FISSH regions can maintain its competitiveness in the future.

## Cooperation for Sustainable Development

### *The FISSH Project Supports SMEs in the Food Industry*

*What challenges do small and medium-sized enterprises in the food industry face, and how does the FISSH project support their sustainable transformation? Partners from five countries have decided to collaborate to provide tools and support for SMEs, enabling them to adapt to the changing environment.*

The FISSH project aims to strengthen business support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the food industry to assist them in transitioning to sustainable operational systems. The project focuses on support in three key areas: ecological, economic, and social, utilizing recognized tools and best practices from partner regions.

FISSH seeks to improve the implementation of regional policies to better support the transformation of SMEs in the food industry. These actions aim to increase the innovation and sustainability of production and adapt businesses to the growing market demands for sustainability.

To ensure a comprehensive approach, the project analyzes support for SMEs in three key thematic areas (TFA):

1. **Business strategies and new sustainable business models for food SMEs** – supporting companies in creating more ecological and innovative business models.
2. **Sustainability of the food production process and the product value chains** – assisting in optimizing production processes to make them more efficient and environmentally friendly.
3. **Marketing and consumer perspectives on sustainable food products** – supporting the adaptation of marketing strategies to changing consumer expectations.

Within each of these areas, the project focuses on three key issues:

- **RDI and business support for sustainability** – how to support the development of sustainable solutions.
- **Measurement and assessment of sustainability** – setting goals and monitoring progress in transformation.
- **Policies and financial instruments** – how to support sustainable development through appropriate policies and additional resources.

One of the main elements of the project is the creation of State of the Art Reports (SAR), which will assess the development level of SMEs, their needs, and challenges in individual regions. These reports are developed in collaboration with local stakeholders to best address regional needs.

Each project partner will also have the opportunity to present best practices, evaluated according to sustainability criteria and the political needs of the regions. A significant aspect of the project will be interregional educational events, including thematic workshops and study visits, where partners and stakeholders will share experiences and ideas for improving regional policies. The results of work in

each thematic area will be presented in special e-publications, illustrating the key findings and conclusions from the project.

The FISSH project involves seven partners from five European countries:

- Organization for Local Development ANATOLIKI S.A. (Greece),
- Regional Development Fund of Central Macedonia (Greece),
- Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences (Finland),
- Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia (Finland),
- Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship (Poland),
- Economic Council of East Flanders (Belgium),
- Coimbra Region Intermunicipal Community (Portugal).

Through the collaboration of these partners, FISSH aims to strengthen the competitiveness of SMEs in the food industry by supporting their transformation towards more sustainable and innovative solutions.

## Summary of Project Partners Meetings



## *Events and Key Discussion Topics*

*In the first semester, the partners of the FISSH project met twice—in April and May—to discuss the progress made and to outline the directions for further actions. These meetings were crucial for coordinating efforts and strengthening cooperation among the regions participating in the project.*

The first meeting of the project consortium took place on April 18 in an online format. This was an inaugural event for all partners involved in the FISSH project. During this meeting, key organizational issues were discussed, including presentations from the various organizations and regions participating in the project. The partners familiarized themselves with an overview of the project's objectives and the planned activities for each semester. Administrative matters, such as the formal launch of the project, contract signing, and the next steps in the schedule, were also discussed.

The meeting was also an opportunity to discuss the results of field research on sustainable food production. In particular, proposals for new technologies aimed at supporting local producers were presented, which is one of the key aspects of the FISSH project.

The May meeting, held on May 21-22 in Thessaloniki, served as a kick-off meeting, marking the official start of the project. It was the first opportunity for partners to meet in person and strengthen collaboration around common goals. Over the course of two days, political instruments used in each region and stakeholder engagement were discussed. An analysis of thematic areas, key good practices, and planned political changes to support the development of sustainable food production was also presented.

An additional element of the meeting in Thessaloniki was a detailed discussion on the project's communication strategy, management, and administration, which helped lay solid foundations for future cooperation. This meeting was an excellent opportunity to strengthen the bonds between partners, exchange experiences, and collaboratively outline the steps needed to ensure the effective achievement of the project goals.

Summaries and full reports from both meetings, the online one in April and the in-person meeting in Thessaloniki in May, are available on our website. We encourage you to regularly follow updates on the project's further progress and upcoming events.

## The Role of Stakeholders in Interregional Projects



### *Unlocking Success: The Crucial Role of Stakeholders*

In the FISSH project, stakeholders play a key role, as their active engagement brings numerous benefits both to the project itself and to the development of the regions in which it is implemented. Through cooperation between authorities, organizations, and businesses, sharing knowledge, experience, and resources becomes possible, leading to better results and more effective actions.

One important element of the FISSH project is the creation of **Regional Stakeholder Groups (RSGs)**, which engage various individuals and organizations in discussions about the future of the region. This collaboration allows for a better understanding of the needs of local communities and the joint development of growth strategies. Furthermore, stakeholders provide valuable data and information essential for creating reports and assessing the project's progress. This enables the project to be continuously improved and adjusted to real needs.

The partners of the FISSH project have already initiated collaboration with local stakeholders by organizing the first meetings with their Regional Stakeholder Groups. These meetings took place on:

- **June 20, organized by the East Flanders Economic Council, Belgium**
- **September 16, organized by ANATOLIKI S.A. and the Regional Development Fund of Central Macedonia, Greece**
- **September 23, organized by the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship, Poland**
- **September 25, organized by the Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia and Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences, Finland**

These initial consultations have already yielded valuable insights into local challenges and priorities, allowing for better direction in further project activities.

However, the role of stakeholders does not end with consultations and data provision. Their engagement in monitoring project activities helps identify areas that require improvement, leading to the optimization of initiatives undertaken. In this way, stakeholders have a direct impact on local and regional decisions, and their voice becomes significant in shaping policies.

By participating in visits to partners, training sessions, and workshops, stakeholders not only develop their skills but also contribute to achieving sustainable development goals. Through their active stance, they support actions aimed at environmental protection and improving the quality of life for residents of the region. It is thanks to their contributions that more effective actions for sustainable development and a better future for the regions where the FISSH project is implemented become possible.

## **FISSH Lead Partner Trains in Effective Project Management**

### *New Skills – Better Project Outcomes*

*The Lead Partner of the FISSH project has undergone intensive training in project management, conducted by experts from Interreg Europe. With the skills gained, the team will be able to more effectively coordinate partner activities and manage interregional cooperation processes.*

From September 24 to 26, training days for lead project partners within the Interreg Europe Programme took place in Lille, France. The Joint Secretariat of the Interreg Europe Programme organized this event to support partners in acquiring key skills necessary for effective management of interregional projects.

During the intensive workshops, participants deepened their knowledge in three key areas: project management, finance, and communication and promotion of projects. These trainings aimed not only to improve the efficiency of actions but also to enhance understanding of the procedures and challenges that arise during the implementation of international cooperation initiatives.

Good financial management is the foundation of any project, especially when it operates at an international level and involves partners from different countries. Participants had the opportunity to learn how to manage financial resources and report expenditures in accordance with the requirements of the Interreg Europe program.

An important element of the workshops was also the topic related to communication and promotion. Activities in this area play a significant role in interregional cooperation projects, as they enable not only effective communication about progress and successes but also foster engagement from local communities and external partners. Participants learned best practices in planning communication activities, managing social media, and effectively reaching various target groups.

The training sessions were attended by representatives from the lead partner of the project and the partner responsible for communication. By participating in these workshops, they gained valuable knowledge and skills that they can apply in the implementation of the project, which will certainly contribute to more efficient management and more effective promotion of the activities undertaken.

Such training sessions are an invaluable support for partners implementing interregional projects, allowing them not only to better cope with daily challenges but also to strengthen cooperation among partners, which is crucial for the success of long-term initiatives.

## What's Next in the Upcoming Months?

In the **second semester of the project**, we plan to undertake a series of actions aimed at further improving the implementation of our project and gaining a better understanding of market needs. We anticipate additional working meetings and workshops with stakeholders that will allow us to delve deeper into the key challenges facing the regions and identify the most important development needs.

Additionally, we will continue our regular partner meetings to ensure ongoing coordination of activities and knowledge exchange. A significant element of these meetings will be the development of **State of the Art Reports (SAR)**. These reports aim to accurately identify the level of development in regional industries, key territorial challenges, and developmental needs, with their content being prepared in collaboration with local stakeholders. The SARs will serve as the foundation for further shaping development strategies, helping to precisely define actions that will have the greatest impact on the growth of individual regions.


One important aspect of the project will also be the **identification of best practices in business strategies and new sustainable business models for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the food sector**. Developing these solutions will assist SMEs in adapting to changing market conditions and implementing more eco-friendly and innovative operational methods.

In February, a **study visit** is planned in **Ghent**, where we will have the opportunity to closely examine **practical solutions** used in the region and exchange experiences with local partners. Additionally, meetings with regional stakeholders will take place to help us **better understand** the specifics of this area and incorporate local knowledge into our actions.

We invite you to follow our website and social media, where we regularly publish the latest information about the progress of the project, upcoming events, and activities. Stay tuned to learn more about our next steps and the results we are steadily achieving together with our partners and stakeholders.

### Find Us Online!

Stay connected and keep up with all the exciting developments of the FISSH project! We're dedicated to sharing valuable insights, updates, and engaging content about sustainable practices and interregional cooperation.

 **Visit our website:** [FISSH - Food Industry SMEs Sustainability Support and Help | Interreg Europe - Sharing solutions for better policy](#)

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