



Newsletter No. 4 – March 2018

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To get further information please visit the project website at: <http://www.interregeurope.eu/niche/>

Partnership:

- ✓ Regional Development Agency of West Region Romania (RO) - Lead Partner
- ✓ Donegal County Council (IE)
- ✓ Derry and Strabane District Council (UK)
- ✓ Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia (FI)
- ✓ Tartu Science Park (EE)
- ✓ Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship (PL)
- ✓ Region of Crete (GR)

NICHE is an Interreg Europe project running from 1st April 2016 until 31st March 2020. NICHE will establish effective open innovation ecosystems, at both regional and interregional level, that will bring together all the relevant actors in food sector to facilitate technology and knowledge exchange that will be translated in new products and services.

Dear Readers,

The food sector as a whole is faced with major challenges that arise from changes in the sector's economic and non-economic environments. The availability of safe, sustainable and healthy food has taken a new and pressing dimension in the light of an ever-growing global population and increasing environmental and sustainability concerns. Based on that vision 7 partners from EU Regions have established a common international project called NOCHE.

It commenced on 1st April 2016 and its lead partner is the Regional Development Agency of West Region Romania. Throughout the project several partners' meetings and staff exchanges took place: the last ones in Donegal and in Kujawsko-Pomorskie.

By working together the NICHE partnership aims, by 2019 and through the improvement of existing policies, achieve an average 15 % increase in the adoption of research and innovation solutions by food sector companies in their regions to give response to the demand of this sector identified as high-potential sector for their smart growth. There are already examples of fruitful cooperation between producers from the partner regions, i.e. Lapland Beer presented in this newsletter.

On behalf of the project team I am very pleased to introduce you to our 4th NICHE newsletter. Enjoy reading !



KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE IN THE NICHE PROJECT

Staff exchange in Kujawsko-Pomorskie

Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship hosted NICHE project partners and regional stakeholders during Staff exchange between 13th and 14th of September 2017. The participants had a chance to visit Toruń Technology Park and four regional food producers who shared their knowledge about their activities.

More information:

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/niche/news/news-article/1651/staff-exchange-in-kujawsko-pomorskie/>



Peer Review Meeting in Donegal

On the 28th November 2017, partners and stakeholders of NICHE project met in Donegal, Ireland to review the draft action plans for the project and to learn more about the good practices from Donegal and Derry & Strabane District Council regions. At the peer review meeting, partners and stakeholders got to hear about two good practices, the Donegal Food Coast and the Foodovation Centre at North West Regional College.

Eve-Anne McCarron from the Local Enterprise Office Donegal presented the objectives and activities of the Donegal Food Coast initiative and Brian McDermott from North West Regional college presented the model and activities of the Foodovation Centre.

More information:

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/niche/news/news-article/2209/niche-peer-review-in-donegal/>





NICHE PROJECT UPDATE - HIVE HONEY

Donegal was represented at the EU Honey Marketing Conference held in Tourń Poland during 14-15 November 2017. The NICHE Honey Conference is part of a market development programme which aims to enable EU honey producers and leading food processors extract greater value from their honey which is currently sold bulk product as a commoditised low value export. The event was co-hosted by EU NICHE Food Innovation Project and the Marshal's Office of Kujawsko-Pomorskie Region.

The conference attracted honey producers from throughout Poland and the Kujawsko-Pomorskie region. Following the conference, there were site visits and meetings involving leading honey processors, local government agencies and industry representatives from the sector. Utilising a new and innovative Honey Testing and Marketing Model first developed in Donegal, conference guest speaker, Conor Daly outlined how honey producers with the capability to certify, track (farm to fork) and communicate the authenticity plus the health benefits of their honey can achieve a higher price for their products. "The biggest problem by far is the spread of fake honey in the internal EU market, which is responsible for the purchase price of honey falling to half its 2014 value by the end of 2016, primarily in the honey-producing countries such as Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Spain, Portugal, France, Croatia and Hungary. This is putting Europe's beekeepers in a hopeless position. While the EU honey sector is small it is essential for agriculture for pollination. Hence the alarm and interest in reversing the trending decline.

Profitability is crucial for the sustainability of the apiculture sector. Low prices make for a challenging business environment for EU bee-keepers and honey producing countries. Cheaper imports from countries with lower production costs and less food safety regulations represent a threat to EU producers'. Furthermore, a '[control plan](#)' organised recently by the European Commission has highlighted illicit practices (e.g. adulteration of honey with sugar) carried out both in and outside the EU. Non-compliance with EU rules on [production standards](#), labelling, etc. affects beekeeper income and has triggered a call from producers for [broader checks](#) to secure fair competition on the EU market.

The HIVE honey testing and marketing model delivers higher prices to EU honey-producers and has the potential to reverse the declining trend in EU bee-keeping while supporting high value science and information technology jobs within the Northwest of Ireland. Subsequent to the Polish conference, new regions from additional countries (Canada, UK, Romania) have expressed interest with the HIVE Honey Marketing Model. The initial co-operation resulted from an International Stakeholder Conference and Networking Event held in LYIT, Donegal NICHE project has facilitated international introductions between SME's has led to opportunities. For HIVE to proposed as one of the EU NICHE Food Innovation Projects progressing as a PHASE II Action for implementation is note-worthy. It's been a team-effort to date which NICHE Project has been happy to support - we view it as another vote of confidence in the creativity and innovation that we have available through co-operation and networking opportunities.



NICHE Partners' meeting in Kujawsko-Pomorskie

On the 6th of March 2018, NICHE partners met for the 4th time in Toruń, Poland, to discuss their action plans to be undertaken in the second phase of the project. It was the last meeting of the NICHE steering committee in the phase 1 of the project.

The action plans will be soon accomplished and ready to put into practice. After almost two years of knowledge exchange and elaborating common conclusions, the next two years will be dedicated to implementation and monitoring of the planned actions.

The main issues tackled in the action plans presented by the partners are promotion of the local products on internal and external market, facilitating regional networks of producers, cohesion of tourist and culinary routes. Many of these efforts demand commitment from local stakeholders. The necessary know-how have been learnt through so far project partners' cooperation and thanks to staff exchange – visits of the local producers in the partners' regions. This exchange of knowledge and observation of good practices might in the future lead to a new project tackling issues of healthy food production.





Walled City Brewery 'NICHE' collaboration leads to launch of 'Lapland Beer'

Following on from a successful visit to Finland this year as part of the Council-supported 'NICHE' project – the Walled City Brewery have been working in collaboration with Lapland's Tornion Panimo Brewery to produce an 'Irish Red Ale' and 'Lapland Beer' to be launched in the run up to Christmas.

Derry City & Strabane District Council hosted a 'NICHE' summit in March 2017 – attended by delegates from seven European regions involved in the INTERREG project which aims to develop international best practice in food innovation. Since then, there has been 'staff exchange trips' throughout the partner regions to help food and drink producers build innovative 'food value' chains.

Walled City Brewmaster James Huey said: "Following on from our successful visit to Finland on the back of the DCSDC-supported NICHE project, our Executive Chef Jill McKillop made contact with a brewery from Lapland called Tornion Panimo. Tornion Panimo are a large craft brewery in Northern Finland with a history spanning over 140 years, and are now launching a 'Brewmaster Legends' range of family beers. This involves brewing beer with brewmasters from different countries and backgrounds. So far, they have worked with a legendary brewmaster from Finland, Leo Andelin (creator of Lapin Kulta), a Czech brewmaster David Maša, and now

I am to become the third brewmaster to collaborate with them on this project when I visit later this month. It's an incredible opportunity for a collaboration between Tornion Panimo and the Walled City Brewery with thanks to the NICHE project. This is about brewing beer styles native to the brewmaster's country, so together we will be brewing an 'Irish Red Ale' which will be launched in Finland. We are also pushing our collaboration further by planning to brew a 'Lapland Beer' to be launched in Derry in the run up to Christmas."

Welcoming the joint collaboration between the Walled City Brewery and Tornion Panimo, Acting Tourism Manager with Derry City & Strabane District Council Jennifer O'Donnell said: "I am delighted that the Walled City Brewery and Tornion Panimo have developed such a strong, collaborative working relationship. This is a great example of how the NICHE project can help businesses increase their capability and capacity for innovation, thus ensuring sustainability and growth. We have seen food provenance and production really come to the fore in recent years. The NICHE project helps us to learn from other regions in Europe facing similar challenges and opportunities within the food and drinks sector. Strong collaborative working relationships – such as this one established between the Walled City Brewery and Tornion Panimo – provides us with a great opportunity to build upon international best practice and reinforce our position as a real foodie hub."



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