

LEONARDO DA VINCI

BELT – Blended Learning Transfer

Rationalising, learning and transferring the use of technological platforms to enterprise-based learning strategies

LLP-LDV/TOI/2007/IT/197

POLISH SCENARIO

SUB REPORT



CONFINDUSTRIA
Veneto SIAV S.p.A.

RSO



eurofortis

ICUS
Think again



KOPERNIKUSZ
NETWORK FOR EUROPEAN PROJECT DEVELOPMENT



This project has been funded with support from the European Commission under the Lifelong Learning Programme.

This publication reflects the views only of the author and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

2.1. ADDRESSEES AND NEEDS

The SMEs local systems

Main industrial sectors, industrial districts acting in the territory, description of the main productive chains.

Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voievodeship has (as of 2005) 110,390 business entities with the predominance of micro-enterprises (employing up to 9 persons) – 108,802 (94%). 5,086 enterprises (4,6%) employ 10-49 persons and 1,068 enterprises employ up to 249 person. The entrepreneurship is rather small, as the number of business entities in the region is below 10 per 100 inhabitants. The majority of those micro-enterprises were established after the transformation (early to mid 90's).

The main sectors of regional economy comprise healthy food production, wood and furniture industry, pro-ecological forest management, eco-tourism as well as manufacture of tyres, machinery and equipment (the production processes are based on ecology-friendly technologies and aim at increasing usage of renewable sources of energy). The predominant industrial sectors include production of food and beverages (about 32.2% of the total industrial production), furniture (about 14.3%), electrical machinery and apparatus (about 4.3%), clothing and fur garments (about 1.6%). The regional strategy points out three sectors of economy as the leading ones for future: agriculture, tourism and environmentally-friendly industry (esp. furniture production).

Apart from the vast number of mostly small enterprises (95% of them employ less than 9 persons), there are also some big international companies present in the region. Among the biggest overseas investors in Warmia and Mazury the following ones should be mentioned: Michelin (France, tyre manufacture in Olsztyn), Philips (Netherlands, electric engineering in Kętrzyn), Heineken (Netherlands, brewery in Elbląg), Schieder (Germany, furniture industry), Ikea (Sweden, furniture plant in Lubawa). Those huge investors are both a threat and an opportunity for local enterprises. On one hand they are a strong competition very hard to beat, but on the other hand they make a good and reliable partner, enabling establishing of long-term cooperation and becoming a core for development of local business.

The SME sector in region is rather under-developed and dispersed. In the furniture industry, for example, there are a few large companies that dominate the branch, but also make some sort of a spinning wheel for the development of smaller entrepreneurs. Investments done by regional enterprises are among the lowest in Poland. There is no sustainable process of the technology transfer, probably due to domination of low-technology sectors in regional economy. The enterprises' competitiveness is rather poor, research and development expenses very small and the productivity weak. Outsourcing and subcontracting is not very popular and nearly all the production process takes place within the company. Although use of ICT in general is known in companies (76% of employees of micro-enterprises declare using a computer at least once a week), the scope of embedding it in real business processes is rather limited (mostly to e-banking and e-mail).

Cooperation amongst SMEs

Cooperation support bodies, significant cooperative experiences, failed cooperation experiences.

Warmia and Mazury is one of the poorest regions in Poland, making it rather difficult to run business here. Because of that, entrepreneurs in general were used to perceiving each other rather as a competition, not a partner. They would be very reluctant to make cooperation networks, to subcontract or to outsource their processes. As a result, they were acting separately, which wouldn't allow them to fully exploit their potential. For example, they were losing public tenders to big international building companies and then struggling to get less profitable subcontracting agreements from them. Another example would be from agro-tourism sector, where each of entrepreneurs would individually market their offer, whereas no tourist would be willing to come for 2 weeks to one single agro-tourist company.

Hopefully, there is a new tendency emerging in recent years. The enterprises are starting to work closer together and to combine their strengths. This tendency is supported by the state and various development agencies. The industrial clusters are being established (e.g. furniture, dairy), although with some difficulties and reluctance. Branch associations are growing in strength and take more and more actions to support cooperation networks between entrepreneurs.

There is a number of BSOs (business support organizations) working in the region. Some of them are public (e.g. Regional Development Agency), some are private (Chambers of Commerce, chambers of industry branches, trade associations, etc). They work in many areas, promoting and facilitating export, introducing innovations to their sectors (e.g. by engaging in EU-funded projects), lobbying for their branches.

The biggest obstacle to cooperation seems to be a situation in which there are two strong local leaders, interesting rather in beating the opponent than cooperating with him (like it is in the dairy industry in warminsko-mazurski region right now).

Training offer and experiences

Main training providers, specific significant sectoral/local training topics and programmes, significant training experiences, failed training experiences.

The educational boom in Poland came in the last couple of years, partly due to inflow of the European structural funds devoted to human resources development and partly because of increasing awareness in society. Nowadays 90% of enterprises employing more than 9 persons declare their participation in trainings (in micro-enterprises it is only 59%). The biggest interest is in purely vocational trainings (49%) and obligatory trainings like health and safety regulations (53%). Difficulties related to participation in trainings are usually related either to lack of time (organizational issues, lot of duties, etc) or lack of money (which becomes more and more insignificant due to support from EU).

The willingness to attend training courses goes in line with the size of a company – the bigger the enterprise, the more training-oriented it gets. Small companies usually focus on the necessary (obligatory) or strictly vocational, technical skills, whereas medium-sized and large entities also see the need to develop soft skills, managerial, marketing, etc. It is especially visible in Polish branches of international companies.

There is an increasing number of training service providers, emerging on the wave of European funds (more than 3 thousands entities). Over 90% of training companies are rather small (just several employees). The quality of service they provide is questionable, because of low quality staff employed as trainers (young psychologists or academics; with next to none business experience).

E-learning is quite unpopular - only 3% of companies would be willing to participate in education delivered that way. Blended learning methodology seems to be a little more attractive to enterprises (25% of interested companies), but the majority still chooses traditional education, probably because they lack knowledge and experiences related to e-courses and have some psychological barriers. One third of entrepreneurs claim that their company is not prepared to receive internet-based trainings.

2.2. STAKEHOLDER LOCAL SYSTEM: KEY PLAYERS, SPONSORS, PROVIDER NETWORK

Key players

Key players in the different SMEs local systems, commitment in developing innovation and cooperative networks.

In Warmia and Mazury region there are, of course, key players who are perceived in their own environments as leaders. But because of the big amount of SME's that mostly compete against each other instead of creating the cooperation it's hard to identify the most important players in researched local system. That is why in one industrial sector more than one company can be called the key player. However in each case the leaders have similar features as listed below:

- key players are usually the biggest and the most significant within the region/district or within the industry;
- because of the big competitiveness between small and micro companies on the local market key players do not create the environment of cooperation but they dictate the conditions of agreement. In that case for example suppliers of resources willing to stay on the market agree on the proposed condition.

Fortunately situation on the local market begins to change. For example in dairy industry there arose a cluster, there is also prepared strategy for creating cluster in furniture industry. Besides there is more and more established partnerships between companies (e.g. in building sector). These changes are the chance for smaller companies to participate in innovative programs of developing local industry. Until now without the external support they were not able to implement any significant innovations that could change their position on the market.

Sponsors

Relevant personalities, cooperation experiences already carried out, cooperation opportunities, current financial support measures.

Researched sector of SME's is rather young and still needs different kinds of support especially in times of high level of competitiveness and globalization. Unfortunately it is not possible to point at individuals supporting the SME's because on the regional market there are present various institutions of business environment, such as:

- regional development agencies,
- chambers of commerce,
- organizations of employers,
- branch associations,
- craft and agriculture associations,
- associations of trade, service and transport,
- research and development institutions,
- university, etc.

In region of Warmia and Mazury each of the above mentioned institutions have several branches. Only in the capital of our province there are 17 organizations that associate small and medium sized companies and create propitious conditions of development.

The example bodies helping the SME's in Warmia and Mazury region are:

Warmia – Mazury Regional Development Agency P.C. – has the mission to support small and medium enterprises in order to provide economic development of region. This aim is realized through varied activities strictly connected with supporting enterprises in form of donations, giving loans for developing enterprises activity, providing consultancy, organizing and conducting trainings and information activity. Supporting enterprises is also provided by creating conditions for further development. This task is realized by versatile cooperation with Local Province Government.

WMRDA activity is strictly connected with operating European Union Programs. Since the agency was brought to life it was mediating in allocation EU funds. At the beginning operating pre-accessing programs Phare – STRUDER, Phare – STRUDER 2, Phare – RAPID, Phare 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003 and since 2004 specific operations within programs financed by structural funds IROP, SOP ICE and SOP HRD. Moreover the institution actively participated in development of region by taking part in a process of programming and preparing following ways of utilizing funds from Structural Funds. The agency also realizes own projects that in a significant way widen possibilities of active supporting enterprise development in our region. Within above projects WMRDA puts into operations initiatives: Investor Assistance Centre and Export-Import Offers Exchange Point.

Branch of Business Centre Club supports all kind of companies from different industry sectors and with different size. The main aims are integration of local businessmen and creating the platform of exchange the knowledge, experience and ideas. The participants of the BCC create the group of friends that can count on each other in different situations. The main activities of BCC concentrate on: helping, consulting and lobbying entities of the region.

Olsztyn Chamber of Construction Industry (OIB) associates 60 entities connected with building sector. The main aims of this organization are: representation of business associated companies, creating a condition of economical development and supporting initiatives of participants, shaping and disseminating rules of business ethic, supporting the training process for employees and their professional position, training the members and their workers. Representing the major construction companies in the region OIB stimulates economic development and is involved in keeping up professional standards and ethic profile within the construction sector.

Polish Corporation of Sanitary, Heating and Gas Installation Companies similar as may other economic associations, represent interests of it's members (usually small companies from the sector). It arranges seminars and trainings with focus on new technologies.

Cooperation experiences:

W-M ZDZ acting as an association provides training services also for companies and support for economics association influencing at their development and growth. That is why from several years it applied for European Funds from local development agencies which are responsible for operating European Union Programs. During last three years using the public funds our association organized trainings for over 1500 employees especially in professional trainings connected with using computers, logistic, transport, building and installation sector. Their aim was to increase the competences of the participant in order to make their skills more suitable to market needs and make their job more effective and on the other hand to get know new solutions and innovations. During that experience the one noticed difficulties, as complain entrepreneurs and employees is the lack of time to participate in offered trainings.

Cooperation opportunities and financial measures:

In perspective of financial sources flowing to Poland for 2007 – 20013 (over 50 bn Euro, incl. 11,5 bn Euro for development of human resources) there are huge opportunities to increase the competitiveness of the local companies. According to local strategies of development future cooperation should concentrate on implementing innovations in companies not only technological (by financing new production lines, implementing specialized computer programs) but also by introducing new ideas influencing on effectiveness of work regarding for example usefulness of ICT tools, flexible forms of employment, production chains, job organization etc.

Provider network

Partners, typologies of supplied training programmes and methodologies.

W-M ZDZ (Warmia and Mazury Vocational Training Centre) with its network is one of service providers on the local market. The objective of the Centre is to provide continuous education for adults and youth. The educational centres of W-M ZDZ have a full range of facilities (teaching aids and premises), which serve all educational activities. The Educational Centres have also got dressmaking and tailoring workshop rooms, and a special installation training ground (for practical training in modern water-supply and sewerage installation, electric installation and the technology of construction and finishing works). Organizational aim is to provide education and supplementary training for vocational development, both of employees and the unemployed. The main activities of the Centre for Vocational Development include:

- Organizing school and extra-curricular education, organizing and managing schools and the centres of continuous education in accordance with the act of the national education system;
- Providing education and supplementary education for employees, and developing employees in terms of general, personal and professional qualifications;
- Organizing retraining courses for the unemployed and the handicapped;
- Providing education in terms of enterprise for the representatives of the local business, people who start up business activity, as well as for teachers and teenagers;
- Introducing scientific and technical innovations in various branches of the economy;

- Providing education for rural inhabitants and inhabitants of former state-owned farms - education which prepares for the restructuring of rural areas;
- Introducing activities concerning European integration and teaching foreign languages.

Each Educational Center cooperates with local governments and entrepreneurs and most of them established partnerships with significant entities. Thanks to it most needs of local partners are continuously identified and met. Till now W-M ZDZ did not practiced the action learning activities. Most of trainings are run with traditional methods (in classroom or in the enterprises) or they consist simulation games like for example "Readiness to change" or "Awareness of quality". W-M ZDZ has experience in using e-learning and blended-learning methodology in training processes.

Another service provider available for the SME's is **The National SME Services Network** (KSU) has been in operation since 1996. After ten years, it comprises over 180 cooperating outlets in 190 localizations in Poland. The network consists primarily of regional and local development agencies, business support centers, chambers of industry and commerce, and local non-profit foundations and associations, which render services directly to the SME sector. These outlets have implemented quality assurance system, which ensures that a high standard of advisory services is rendered, typically of a general and proinnovative character, on training, informational and financial topics (loan-granting and loan guarantees). This is an open system in which new centers join each year. Institutions interested in joining the KSU are invited to pursue to the registration requirements specified by the ordinance of the Minister of the Economy and Labour on KSU. A group of outlets that renders advisory services of a pro-innovative character operates within the KSU network forming the National Innovation Centers (KSI). The objectives of the KSI comprise assistance in the creation of conditions for the transfer and marketing of new technological solutions and the implementation of innovative undertakings in the SME sector. The KSI includes organisations that provide services within the aforementioned scope, with the stipulation that membership in the KSI network is restricted solely to organizations registered in the KSU as entities rendering advisory services of a pro-innovative character. KSU do not provide action learning and cooperation learning activities. It also do not utilize e-learning and blended-learning methodology.

Besides on the local market there are some others training companies but they usually specialized in one field (e.g. language learning, computers, welding etc.). There also are consulting agencies, but because of the high interest of SME's in the region, which are not interested in such a services, they do not play the significant role.

Olsztyn, Poland.





