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Innovative Training on the internationalisation of the SMEs

Final Report

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Beneficiary organisation: ATLANTIS Consulting S.A.

Project coordinator: Driss Alioui
Project coordinator organisation: Zernike Group Holding B.V.
Project coordinator telephone number: +31 ((0)50 30 50 609
Project coordinator email address: d.alioui@zernikegroup.com

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Executive Summary

Internationalisation is a global phenomenon for multinational cooperation's who need to go abroad to find cheap but qualitative better inputs. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) do not always have the right amount of resources to conduct such practises. In addition, exposure to strong international competition is a factor which brings advantages and threats to SMEs and leaves a high percentage to choose to operate only within national borders. This challenge has motivated 5 organizations to put their knowledge and expertise together to address this challenge and help foster the internationalisation of SMEs.

The projects' target audience is based on the European innovation / research driven SMEs, and particularly SMEs who are tenants in BICs, to help them to reach global markets through proper training. In order to reach this target group, the consortium intends to train the BIC managers who can then deliver the training programme as part of the counselling and consulting services to tenants (SMEs).

The consortium consists of 5 organisations. Zernike Group Holding BV is the coordinator of the project with extensive experience in coordinating international projects, including LDVs. Atlantis Consulting is the applicant of the project and has indispensable expertise in research set-up. The European Business Innovation Network is the leading dissemination partner with direct access to the target group as they are the umbrella organisation of all Business Incubator Centres (BICs) of Europe. The Instituto Andaluz de Tecnología is a central point of information of SMEs in the Andalusia region playing a vital role in the pilot testing and evaluation phase of the project. Marijampole VET Centre is the VET institute which has a strong connection to the Marijampole Chamber of Commerce. Through a combination of resources, knowledge and expertise this consortium complements each other. All the partners belong to international professional networks having direct access to the target group.

During the development of this project, the following objectives were aimed at:

- Raise awareness of internationalisation opportunities among the target group;
- Identify the main barriers, needs and skills required to increase the number of internationalized SMEs;
- To help SMEs overcome these barriers by building strengths and capabilities;
- To provide comprehensive training material with a training toolkit and e-learning platform;
- To develop training methods suitable for SMEs; and
- To enhance knowledge on the possible opportunities and threats of internationalisation, increasing thus the competitive position and growth potential.

In order to reach the full list of objectives, the first step was a European TNA. Based on the inputs of 300 SMEs in European BICs, the training content and structure was specified. Once the training framework and actual modules were in place, the drafts were tested by experts in the professional network of the consortium. The material was updated and once again tested through 60 SMEs as potential trainees through pilot testing sessions. During the duration of the entire project, the target groups were updated through many dissemination activities as events, brochures, direct e-mailing and the project website.

The project website (www.int-sme.eu) is available in 5 languages and offers full information about the project. In addition, an e-learning platform was created on which the training material is made available for future trainees.

In order to achieve sustainable project outcomes and results, the training programme will be implemented as an EBN service for their BIC managers. Besides sustainability, this also ensures the delivery of the training programme. The service will be in the framework of the Soft-landing services (www.ebnsoftlanding.org) in which SMEs can interchange experiences within new host BICs for a certain amount of time. Here these SMEs will get used to the new culture and way of doing things whilst possibly joining into cooperation with other SMEs. This will enhance the internationalization processes of both SMEs resulting in sustainable European economies and increasing the internal drive for export-led growth.

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1. Project Objectives

Despite the advantages of embracing globalization and the risks of not acting accordingly, many European SMEs remain focused on their national markets. In fact, only 8% of EU27 SMEs export and only 12% of the inputs of an average SME are purchased abroad. As stated in the study “Supporting the internationalization of SMEs” (DG Enterprise) the main reasons are: lack of financial resources, lack of skills and skilled human capital to tackle internationalization.

Therefore, our consortium decided to address this lack of skills and capabilities and thus increase the internal internationalisation capacity through training. Hence the team decided to create this training with the INT-SME project. Within this project the training material created is based on a collection of Case Studies in which SMEs tackle challenges of the internationalisation process and strategies are deployed to overcome them. These Case Study narrations are put in each module in order to demonstrate how other SMEs have dealt with issues arising at the different stages of the internationalisation process. The inclusion of Case Studies in a more traditional training method makes this project innovative enhancing thus the chances of SMEs in successfully building their internationalisation strategy.

Within the INT-SME project, the main objectives during the project lifetime were:

- To raise awareness among the target groups (direct: innovation driven SMEs; BIC tenants that are usually SMEs in terms of size and financial status; other SMEs who operate in traditional sectors and are nevertheless interested in identifying novel ways in pursuing an international market for their products. Indirect: BIC managers who will use the training and provide this as additional service to their SME tenants) of the need to internationalize and the opportunities it offers.
- To identify the main barriers, needs and skills required by the target groups in order to explore internationalization. An increase of the number of internationalized SMEs will start by understanding the main problems faced when given the possibility to operate on a foreign market.
- To help SMEs overcome those barriers by providing them with a set of skills and tools to engage into international activities, as the training will be offered to the target groups covers not only the development of the internationalization strategy but also focuses on "soft skills" development which are needed to build the capacity within the SMEs.
- To provide a comprehensive training to enable the target groups to internationalize their businesses. The training toolkit developed by the project will offer a full set of case studies, tips on how to develop a smart international strategy plus a soft landing service.
- To develop suitable training delivery methods and techniques that fit the target groups needs and requirements.
- To strengthen the internal capacities of SMEs through an effective training. Access to this training will increase their competitive position and growth potential.

Besides the aims and objectives set for the duration of the project (2 years), the consortium truly believes in the need for internationalisation of SMEs and therefore has the following objectives whom will reach beyond the project lifetime:

- The consortium has provided the training programme to European BICs managers who can utilize the programme and consult their SME tenants. Through this 'train-the-trainer' method, the target audience is quite broad leading to exploitation of more than 4.000 SMEs.
- By providing this training to BICs, the consortium fosters regional development and strengthens the regional identity through successful BICs as the skills and knowledge of BIC managers has a direct impact on the performance of the tenants (SMEs).
- The project has supported entrepreneurial spirit and development of start-ups in new (foreign) markets which will lead to additional employment and growth opportunities in EU regions.
- The INT-SME project has improved the internationalisation perspectives and results of all involved regions in the projects.
- The project partners have informed local stakeholders in regions outside the consortium partners about the benefits of the project.
- After the completion of the project, the partners have explored the possibilities of utilizing the project results and outcomes as commercially viable products.
- The consortium has informed local and regional decision and policy makers on the benefits of SMEs internationalisation so as to introduce appropriate and relevant measures.

In order to be able to meet the objectives set during the lifetime of the INT-SME project, the consortium needed to reach a large audience of the target group. The consortium ensured to reach this audience through the following communication sources:

a) EBN members. One of the partners in the consortium is the European Business Incubation Network whom has 151 BIC members throughout Europe. Within these BICs about 4122 tenants (SMEs) were reached.

b) Direct engagement of target groups was achieved within the lifetime of the project in order to create awareness, explore the training needs, and test the developed training materials:

- Project awareness was achieved through multiple communication sources which included events, website, direct e-mailing of the EBN network and brochures. At least 151 BICs in Europe were reached through the EBN network.
- The training needs analyses (TNA) phase has targeted 300 SMEs in European BICs through the EBN network. In addition, 15 BIC managers were interviewed thoroughly in various locations throughout Europe. Together the participants of the TNA phase resulted in a clear view on the actual training needs of the target groups.
- The training material was developed based on the TNA, but the consortium wanted to check the actual match of the material created and the TNA by utilizing the Pilot Testing Phase of the project. Pilot testing sessions were organized nationally in each partner's country and internationally during the Final Conference of EBN. In order to create a suitable mix of respondents, at least 60 SMEs or other representatives of the target groups were involved in this project phase.

As stated above, the project has directly impacted those SMEs and BIC managers whom were actively involved during the TNA and pilot testing phase of this project. Moreover, awareness among SMEs and entrepreneurs located in BICs throughout Europe about the need to internationalize and the benefits it brings is increased through a carefully

developed dissemination methodology. For example, the INT-SME workshops took place during the two Annual EBN Congresses (June, 2012 in Lappenranta, Finland & May, 2013 in Londonderry), which together attracted about 1.200 participants.

To conclude, the potential impact of this project during the lifetime and after the project completion has benefited the target groups by improving knowledge, providing skills and creating awareness of the benefits and advantages of internationalisation. The consortium believes that the project will increase SMEs international activities by 10% and increase BIC tenants' satisfaction by 20%. Through the combination of the available website with an e-learning platform and the possibility of the soft landing experience, we believe that the involvement of working people in life-long learning experiences will improve their skills and increase chances of continues growth of the European economy.

2. Project Approach

In order to reach the project objectives stated in chapter 1, several approaches were implemented. These included methodologies, surveys, analysis and tests carried out. In addition, the cooperation of the target group was also planned for in order to create a suitable training for the target groups. The outcomes and results of the approaches chosen will be described in chapter 3. The subsequent chapter will explain the approaches of the consortium during the project lifetime starting with the training need analysis:

1. The training needs analysis (TNA) was performed in order to identify the internationalisation training needs, knowledge gaps and training delivery methods preferred by European SMEs. A questionnaire was created with the following objectives:

- To identify informal skills and qualification of SMEs: survey among 300 SMEs in Europe (GR, NL, SP, LT, BE and other countries), so as to determine their specific needs and requirements of the training material to ensure a tailor-made training programme.
- To validate informal skills and capabilities of SMEs, 15 in-depth interviews with BIC managers were held, as they often advice and consult SMEs on internationalization strategies and therefore can reflect on the level of skills among SMEs.

The main findings, conclusions and recommendations of this approach can be found in the TNA Synthesis report. The TNA Synthesis Report served as the key input in defining the training approach, resulting in the Training Framework.

2. The Training framework provided a full structure and layout of the content of the INT-SME training programme. In order to assure a coherent set of training materials, a set of guidelines was created to ensure comprehensiveness in the types of output that partners produced. This eliminates any issues and changes of incomprehension. It served as blueprint for the specific training modules each partner developed based on their relevant expertise and experience. The framework was developed with respect to all pedagogical principles and is in line with the latest developments in the area of pedagogical content development in adult education.

The approach described above was chosen in order to reach the main objectives of the project. Two main perspectives created added value of this approach:

1. Pedagogical perspective: The project aimed to increase the professionalism and skills of the managers of SMEs through the exchange of practices, methods and pedagogical approaches. Therefore, a thorough TNA analysis was conducted among target groups to determine gaps in knowledge and skills and particular needs and requirements of this group. In addition, their preferred training method was incorporated. The Training framework therefore matches these factors that are important to the target groups and this framework will ensure a suitable training programme for filling the needs.
2. Organizational perspective: Existing training programmes are normally designed and organized from the point of view of larger companies. They simply do not fit into the organizational needs of smaller companies, given the complexity of their nature. Therefore, the consortium is determined to create an innovative training programme which matches the target groups needs not only from the content

point of view but also from the *training delivery approach* taken, making the training more accessible, attractive and useful to a broad audience.

3. The development of the training materials and tools. With the Training Framework in place, the blueprint of the actual training material was developed. Now the partners needed to develop particular modules which matched their experience and fields of expertise. The added value of our European partnership lies in the fact that many fields were covered which made the consortium able to prepare a high quality curriculum. Besides this knowledge spillover effect reached by this European consortium the international delivery and dissemination of the developed training material was made much easier. As well as bringing this knowledge to market as an exploitable product as a final stage of the project. The project quality assurance started with the draft editions of the modules developed by the partners. These drafts were checked for content by experts in the field of internationalisation, entrepreneurship and Foreign Direct Investments. The feedbacks to these drafts were then cross-checked by all the partners in order to ensure full implementation of the feedback and comments made by the experts. The training material drafts were changed accordingly. Another important part of the project approach lies beyond the project lifetime. In order to ensure the commercialize ability of the project, the consortium decided to implement the training material in two ways: through a hardcopy and online.

1. The complete training material (including PowerPoint slides, exercises and case studies) was put into a Training Material Toolkit for trainees to use during their training. In addition, a handbook for future trainers was created which included module set-up, duration of each presentation, planning of the cases and supporting activities. This Trainer's Guidebook was created to ensure the delivery of the training in the most effective way. When the Guidebook and Toolkit are put together, a full overview of the entire training programme is provided.
2. In order to support the hardcopy material, an E-learning platform was created. On this platform the complete training material was provided with extra material as papers, articles, news and events concerning the internationalisation of SMEs. This platform supports the class-based training programme and includes a forum where trainees and trainers can talk about their experiences in internationalisation. This virtual environment for interaction enhances the transfer of knowledge and development of a community. It may even result in the cooperation between SME and lead to actual internationalisation.

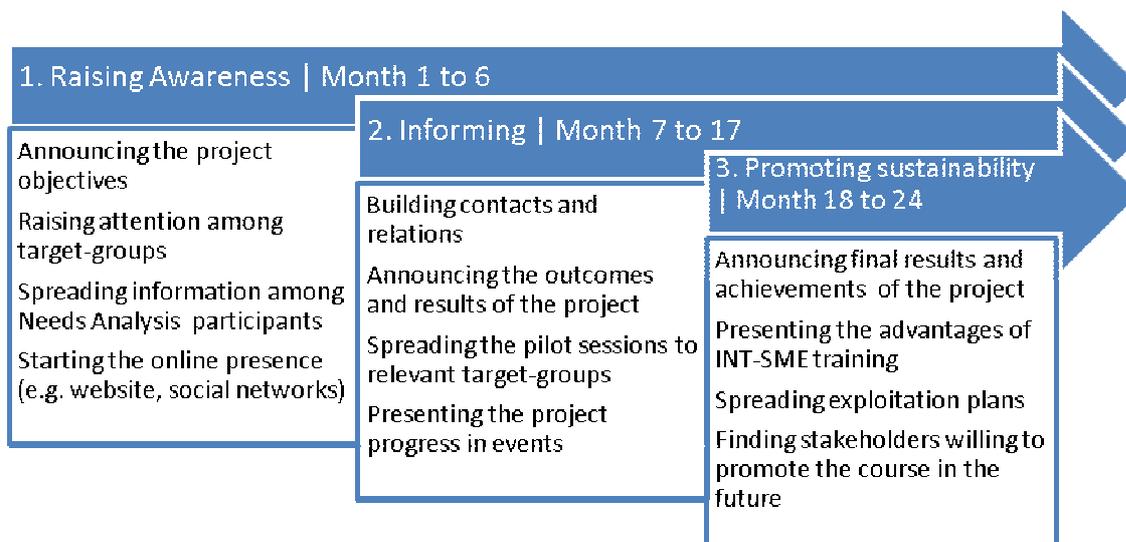
4. Pilot Testing and Evaluation. After the completion of the training material, the consortium wanted to validate the contents and see if this matched the needs and requirements of the target groups. To make sure the collection of this feedback was done in a comparable homogeneous way, guidelines and questionnaire templates were created. In addition, a suitable mix of 60 participants was envisioned. To create this group, the consortium decided to hold national pilot testing sessions (in GR, BE, NL, SP and LT) and an international session during the 22nd EBN Annual Congress in Londonderry. During these sessions the training material was presented as a training and feedback and comments were gathered on both the hardcopies and online platform.

5. Fine-tuning based on feedback. To ensure a high quality and relevance of the training programme, pilot testing results were implemented in the training materials.

6. Dissemination and exploitation strategy. The above explained approaches were created in particular phases of the project. The dissemination and exploitation strategy approaches were implemented for the entire duration of the project and were aimed at:

- creating awareness among the target groups of the importance and need for internationalization;
- ensuring that the developed training programme will be sustainable and commercially attractive in the long term;
- providing high visibility of the project and its results among the target groups;
- ensuring that the project results meet the identified target groups' needs so that they can be used in vocational training systems and practices when the project is exploited.

The approach chosen for this part of the project goes through three distinct phases:



The following results were achieved during the different phases:

Phase 1 - Raising awareness:

- Registration on ADAM and EVE databases;
- Announcements and project references on the organizational website of partners;
- TNA analysis – engagement of the target groups in the project;
- INT-SME website (www.int-sme.eu);
- INT-SME Group on LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com/groups/Training-Internationalisation-SMEs-INTSME-4661825/about>);
- INT-SME Facebook Page (<https://www.facebook.com/Int.Sme>);
- INT-SME brochure, poster and roll-up.

Phase 2 - Informing:

- National dissemination events organized by partners;
- INT-SME round table discussion with regional stakeholders in Seville;
- Pilot testing sessions performed in Greece, the Netherlands, Spain, Belgium, Lithuania and Northern-Ireland (in EBN congress 2013, in Londonderry);
- INT-SME workshop at the Annual EBN Congress (June, 2012, Lappeenranta, FI);
- INT-SME project launch during the Final Conference (May, 2013 in Londonderry, Northern-Ireland).

Phase 3 - Promoting sustainability:

- Discussion with EBN on the integration of INT-SME training programme into the Soft-landing services offered to EBN members (www.ebnssoftlanding.org);
- Development of the sustainability model and exploitation plan.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

The subsequent table shows the project outcomes and results. They reflect major achievements and results during the INT-SME project lifetime. In addition, the impact of these outcomes on the target groups is briefly described.

Results	Description	Availability
1. Roadmap, Coordination and Monitoring results: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project info pack ▪ Project meeting minutes ▪ Project check-lists ▪ Quality Assurance and Management Plan. 	During the lifetime of the project, the project coordinator created roadmaps, coordination and monitoring parameters which the consortium used as basis ensuring that the project is implemented successfully and within the timeframe determined during the planning stage. In addition, these results also monitored the quality of outputs and the budget. The impact of these outcomes remained confidential between the consortium partners.	The outputs and results are confidential and only available as annexes in the confidential report.
2. SMEs Training Needs Analysis (TNA):	This part of the project allowed the consortium to gather sufficient information regarding the characteristics of the target groups in four different countries (GR, NL, ES, and LT) and at EU level. This resulted in the first engagement of the target groups in the project. As a result the consortium has found the training needs and barriers to internationalisation, the level of knowledge on the subject and the training method preferred amongst the target groups. This phase of the project ensured matching between the needs of the target groups and the training material developed. The following outputs were developed:	Within the TNA 300 SMEs were targeted as well as 15 BIC managers. The impact of this phase was considerable.
<i>a) Guidelines and templates for the SMEs TNAs</i>	These guidelines and templates provided instructions and tools for the consortium on how to carry out the TNA: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Guidelines on how to conduct the TNA; ▪ Online questionnaires (filled in by 300 SMEs); ▪ Template for writing national TNA reports; ▪ Templates for in-depth interviews with BIC managers (15 European BIC managers were interviewed). 	The outputs and results are confidential and only available as annexes in the confidential report.
<i>b) Final results of the interviews with BIC managers</i>	This summarizes the in-depth interviews with 15 BIC managers on issues BIC tenants are confronted with when attempting to internationalise their activities: obstacles, drivers, policy tools, type of assistance required, knowledge gaps, and training available.	The outputs and results are confidential and only available as annexes in the confidential report.
<i>c) 4 National TNA reports</i>	Four national TNA reports are written and describe the main findings of the TNA researches in the respective countries and regions, highlighting the	These reports can be downloaded from the ADAM

	main areas where SMEs require training on internationalization, main barriers they face, and training delivery methods they prefer.	database.
<i>d) TNA Synthesis report</i>	This TNA Synthesis report includes the results of the 4b and 4c. It therefore describes the main findings of the TNA research European wide. As it includes valuable input of the target groups, this report is used as input to the training framework described below.	This report can be downloaded from the ADAM database.
3. Training framework	The third part of the project was to set-up a blueprint for the training development, accompanied by a set of guidelines. Together they formed the training framework which contained an outline of the training content, and delivery methods preferred in order to ensure coherent types of outputs and eliminate any issues of incomprehension.	The outputs and results are confidential and only available as annexes in the confidential report.
4. Training development	Based on the training framework the training material was developed according to the requirements of the target groups. This part of the project consisted of the following outcomes: (please see here below, a, b and c).	The training development was performed by the 5 partners and several experts who tested and provided comments on the drafts.
<i>a) Guidelines for the training development and design</i>	The output aimed at providing the partners with both practical instructions on how to design training modules and templates for producing a homogeneous set of training material. Templates included the module division among partners, module structure, power point and word lay-out design.	The results are confidential and only available as annexes in the confidential report.
<i>b) E-learning platform</i>	The e-learning platform was created in order to store all the training material which includes the presentations, case studies, exercises, additional material (as papers, exercises and articles) and a discussion forum for trainees and trainers to exchange experience and expertise.	The e-learning platform can be found at http://int-sme.eu/elearning/ . The content is restricted to participants of the INT-SME project.
<i>c) Training Material Toolkit and Trainers Guidebook</i>	Besides the e-learning platform, the training materials developed are also transformed in two files which together provide the full content of the training material. A Training Material Toolkit for trainees in which they can find all the material as presentations, case studies and exercises which will be explained during the training sessions. The	The guidebooks are displayed on the ADAM database.

	Trainers Guidebook is especially for the trainers and entails the information to actually deliver the course. It includes module set-ups, planning of the modules and supporting activities as answers to exercises.	
5. Pilot Testing and Evaluation	In order to validate the content of the training material, a pilot testing and evaluation phase was included. The consortium envisioned a suitable mix of trainees in this phase of 60 participants in order to check the actual match we have created between the TNA and the material developed.	
<i>a) Pilot Testing Guidelines</i>	These guidelines provided instructions on how to carry out a pilot test in order to ensure a coherent set of feedback by the target group. It included information on the pilot session set-up and method of feedback collection.	The results are confidential and only available as annexes in the confidential report.
<i>b) Questionnaire template</i>	A questionnaire was prepared to gather feedback and comments from the target groups with the aim to improve the developed training materials.	The results are confidential and only available as annexes in the confidential report.
<i>c) Pilot Testing Sessions</i>	Pilot Testing was done in multiple sessions during national pilot testing, testing at the EBN Congress and in combination with the Soft landing Experience. The tests resulted in 62 participants in total. The results of the tests were written in 5 national and one EBN pilot testing reports.	The results are confidential and only available as annexes in the confidential report.
6. Fine-tuning	The results of the pilot test were analyzed and used to enhance the training materials as well as the website and the e-learning platform. With the feedback provided by the target group a full circle was met, starting with the TNA report, creating the training material on this report and testing whether the match was reached. When necessary changes were made which resulted in final versions of the Toolkit and Guidebook described in 4c. This part of the project ensured the quality assurance and finalized the development of the training material.	The final Training Toolkit and Trainer's Guidebook are displayed in the e-learning platform and as annexes to the confidential part.
7. Dissemination of results:	Dissemination of the project was done during the total lifetime of the project. At the beginning of the project this was to create awareness of the importance of internationalisation of SMEs and assess their needs through the TNA. Afterwards the visibility of the project and its aims and objectives to support those SMEs became apparent. And finally it ensured the sustainability and commercial ability of the developed training programme in the	During the project lifetime, the dissemination activities resulted in a reach of about 6000 SMEs (more information on that - annex of the confidential

	long term.	report).
<i>a) Dissemination plan</i>	A dissemination strategy was created in this plan in order to schedule promotional outputs and requirements from the partners. This plan included the project graphical identity (logo), online and offline promotional actions.	This output is confidential and only available as annexes in the confidential report.
<i>b) Project website</i>	The project website was created at the beginning in order to create awareness among the target group. It includes information on the project's main results, partnership and relevant news and events. Main language is English with some of its content also in Dutch, Spanish, Lithuanian and Greek.	Visit www.int-sme.eu for a full view. During the project lifetime the website received over 128.000 hits.
<i>c) Project Brochure</i>	A project brochure was created to disseminate the project during participation in events. Key information about this project as well as advantages for SMEs is displayed on the brochure which was only created in English.	The brochure can be downloaded from the ADAM database. In total 250 copies were printed.
<i>d) Project Poster and Roll-up</i>	These outputs were mainly created for dissemination purposes during events.	See annexes of the confidential report.
<i>e) Project Social Media Presence</i>	In order to reach a large audience, the consortium has created a LinkedIn Group and a Facebook page on which information on the project was disseminated.	The impact was considerably given the 200 members in LinkedIn Group.
<i>f) Events</i>	<p>Apart from a number of small national workshops organized by partners, 3 trans-national events took place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Internationalization round-table discussion with 20 stakeholders (May, 2012 in Seville, Spain). ▪ INT-SME presentation during the 21st Annual EBN Congress in which 100 participants joined (June, 2012 in Lappeenranta, Finland). ▪ INT-SME project launch during the Final Conference in the International Incubation Lab in the 22nd Annual EBN Congress in which 120 participants joined (May, 2013 in Londonderry, Northern-Ireland). 	Reports from these outputs can be found as annexes of the confidential report. In addition, a list of dissemination activities can be found as annex as well.
8. Exploitation of results	Once the training material was finished the consortium wanted to sustain the results after the project lifetime. In addition, it had to be available for the target groups. For this reason and exploitation plan was created in which all partners agreed on organisational, financial, legal and marketing issues.	This output is confidential and can be found as annex in the confidential report.

4. Partnerships

The consortium is an important factor in the INT-SME project. This partnership provides a combination of resources, knowledge and experience required to carry out the project. The added value of our European partnership is that the consortium is not only capable of preparing a high quality training curriculum but also capable of delivering and disseminating the developed practices and bringing that knowledge to the market as an exploitable product. The benefits of this European partnership are described below:

- Experience sharing: Involvement of a wide range of organizations working directly or indirectly within vocational education and training, which will add high level of expertise and different training methodologies. The partnership provides a combination of resources, knowledge and experience required to carry out the project and it includes experienced members in the fields of SMEs support, trainings provision and formulation of international strategies for companies.
- Effective use of past experience will avoid unnecessary waste of time, resources and finances. All consortium members have previous experience in EU-funded projects, including LDVs, and are involved directly in every stage of INT-SME, contributing to proper management and implementation.
- Geographical coverage: The extensive European TNA among SMEs was conducted in the partner countries in order to identify their internationalization needs. Given that the consortium had a large geographic coverage representing different parts of Europe, the partners were able to conduct a thorough market research and gather valuable findings. In addition, the pilot testing sessions were conducted in a similar manner which resulted in a comparable and homogeneous representation of the target groups.
- Languages: Even though the working and professional language was English (for both communication between partners as to the target group) some of the information was translated. For instance, the project website shows different language options for Dutch, Greek, Lithuanian and Spanish. Additionally, the national pilot testing sessions held an option for translation open for the participants. The possibility of translating material ensured the reach of a wide target group.
- Cross-fertilization between transnational partners of ideas, procedures, personnel, and systems has added value to project activities by providing a wider base of information and expertise. It led to knowledge spillovers which indicate an innovative and considerable high level quality of outputs.
- Broader dissemination and exploitation of the project results, ultimately reaching and impacting a larger target group. All partners belong to international professional networks and have direct access to the target group, which is a key element in the valorization and the dissemination of results. Moreover, EBN, as a network organization, serves as an excellent dissemination platform for engaging the target group into the project whom are in fact the members of this EBN network.

During the project lifetime it became evident that this consortium benefitted from this European partnership. In the first place, due to the knowledge spillovers which were obtained by combining experience and expertise from different organizations. Secondly, as the geographical coverage the target groups is very broad, this project will have very good exploitation changes. And finally, when this project is exploited and the training is

actually provided, the broad array on possible trainees could definitely lead to internationalisation possibilities.

This amalgamation of different factors is a result of the partnership of this consortium. It has resulted in a coherent management of the project, high quality of training materials and a wide array of dissemination possibilities. The project objectives were met because of the approaches chosen by this partnership. In fact, this partnership resulted in a successful INT-SME project outcomes and results which will be exploited beyond the project lifetime.

5. Plans for the Future

As this is the final report, the plans for the future emphasise on the exploitation of results beyond the project's lifetime. The objective set after completion of the project entailed:

- *Provide the training programme to European BIC managers.* In the exploitation plan, the consortium agreed on two ways of providing the training programme. On the one hand, all partners have the opportunity to exploit the programme within their home countries. On the other hand, the soft landing programme will also be used to provide training to European BIC managers. Additional information on the exploitation can be found in the exploitation agreement.
- *To foster regional development and competitiveness and strengthen the regional identity through successful BICs.* The consortium strongly believes that with providing this training through the EBN network, that the knowledge and skills of the BIC manager will be enhanced. With this new level of knowledge, the BIC manager will directly influence the SME tenants.
- *To support entrepreneurial spirit and developments of start-ups, generating employment opportunities in EU region.* At this moment, this objective is hard to meet. The project results have not yet been exploited but the exploitation strategy is ready. The support of entrepreneurial spirit and development of start-ups was provided during the numerous dissemination events, but a direct result can not be mentioned as this is a process which will take a considerable amount of time. Nevertheless, the consortium did post discussions on the LinkedIn Group showing their interest in the above mentioned fields.
- *To improve the internationalisation perspectives and results of all involved regions in the project.* Several dissemination activities took place in the particular regions of the partner countries. Here the consortium actively promoted the benefits and advantages of internationalisation. In addition, as a result of the exploitation plan, the partners plan to go to additional regional meetings concerning SMEs, BIC managers or Internationalisation in order to exploit the project results.
- *To inform local stakeholders in regions outside the consortium about the benefits of the project.* Several main dissemination activities and events have already taken place during the project. As was the 21st and 22nd EBN Annual Congresses in which many stakeholders were contacted. As the EBN network holds a key part in this project, the target groups are represented by their members, the consortium believes to have contacted a reasonable amount (1300 participants during these congresses) of stakeholders. Nevertheless, as mentioned before, the exploitation plan asks for commercialization of the project results and therefore the partners have agreed to visit additional local events/meetings.
- *To explore the possibility of utilising the project results as commercially viable products.* During the project lifetime certain results and outcomes were created (see chapter 3 of this report). These results are thus available for exploitation now that the project is completed based on a concrete exploitation plan which was created by the consortium.
- *To inform the local and regional decision and policy makers on the benefits of SMEs internationalisation so as to introduce appropriate and relevant measures.* As

mentioned before, the partners will exploit the project result and visit local and regional meetings in which decision and policy makers will be actively approached.

The above mentioned objectives are to be met by implementing the valorisation strategy. This strategy will be supported by all partners and includes:

- Commitment of partners to follow up on the exploitation of the project results by attending local and regional meetings concerning SMEs, BIC Managers and Internationalisation themes and topics.
- Actively using the network of partners and disseminated by using this network.
- The quality of the training material was checked and validated ex-ante by experts in the partner's network and ex-post by conducting the international and national pilot testing sessions. Therefore, the consortium believes in the quality of the training materials and other outputs as the Training Faculty, E-learning Platform, Brochure and Website.
- Extensive dissemination mechanisms were used during the project life-time. The admins to the website, e-learning platform and associated mail addresses of the INT-SME project are provided in the confidential report. In addition, the dissemination activities are described in section 8 of the confidential part.

For additional information how the consortium ensures the sustainability of the projects results, please see the exploitation plan as annex to the confidential report.

6. Contribution to EU policies

The European Union acknowledges that SMEs are the driving force for the economic growth and sustainable development of Europe. The “Small Business Act”, which released by the European Commission in 2008, is a comprehensive SME policy framework, emphasizing the key role and political importance of SMEs for the European economy after all the SME is the engine of the economy. The need for the supporting of SMEs was also documented in the Lisbon strategy and has been further confirmed as one of the main objectives of the “Europe 2020 Strategy”. Therefore, the European Commission gives utmost importance to SMEs prosperity, underlining the strong connection between their performance and internationalization activities. A set of importance EU initiatives have taken place towards this direction, such as the establishment of EU business centres in India and China in order to support European SMEs to enter third-country markets and the Enterprise Europe Network which continues to expand to third and emerging countries. Finally, the new strategy of European Commission ‘Small Business, Big World — a new partnership to help SMEs seize global opportunities’ aims to support SMEs to internationalise their activities outside the European Union.

The INT- SME project is in-line with the respective EU policies, as its main objective is to support SMEs in tackling their problems when operating or considering operating in foreign markets. The project developed an innovative training package, which matches the SMEs needs and increases their skills and capacities in internationalization activities. Specifically, the project complements and contributes in the enhancement of the respective EU policies and objectives with the following means:

- It identifies the main barriers, needs and skills required for SMEs in order to start operating in a foreign market or enhance their international performance.

Besides the contributions of the INT-SME project toward EU policies outside the European Union, the consortium also sees the implication of the project within the European Union. With the establishment of the EU free trading zone, SMEs are allowed and better able to reach new markets. Nevertheless, as could be seen in the project objectives, only 8% export and about 12% of the resources are purchased abroad. This project will aid in the development and awareness of this problem. In addition, with more and more countries entering the EU zone, an internal market of about 500 million consumers can be reached. This offers great opportunities for SMEs and in turn also the EU. With a growing and strong engine, the European economy will continually grow, leaving all member nations in prosperity.

