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Project Title	**Boosting Smart Specialization and Encouraging Spin-offs in IT across Danube Region**
Call	**Danube Region Programme**
Project number	**DRP0200277**
Coordinator	**ZEDA**
Project duration	**30 months 0 days**
Project website	***https://interreg-danube.eu/projects/spinit***
Specific objective	**Setting up, implementing, and validating pilot measures in IT sector and smart technologies in DR**
Activity	**Next-gen Pilot Projects for Smart Specialization and IT**

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D.2.2.2: Selection of Pilot Projects

Deliverable D.1.2.1 Development of the Framework for knowledge exchange and benchmarking			
Due date of deliverable:	**30.06.2025**	Actual submission date:	**03.03.2025**
Organization:	**DEX Innovation Centre, DEXIC**	Author:	**Adam Červenka**
Status: Final (F) Draft (D) Revised draft (RV)	***F***	Dissemination level: Public (PU) Confidential, only for members of the consortium (CO)	***CO***

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1 Approach and Methodology

The methodology for pilot project selection and implementation within the SpinIT initiative is designed to ensure alignment with the project's overarching objectives, focusing on skills development, digital innovation, and smart specialization. While the Local Action Plans (LAPs) provided valuable insights into regional priorities, it became evident that some proposed pilot actions required further refinement to meet the strategic goals of the project.

To address this, a set of standardized requirements has been established, ensuring that all pilot projects align with the regional S3 strategies, EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), and SpinIT's focus areas. Rather than directly linking LAPs to pilot actions, each partner is encouraged to adapt and refine their pilot projects to meet these criteria. This approach is particularly necessary where pilot actions were not clearly defined or where engagement levels varied among territorial partners.

By implementing this structured methodology, we aim to maximize the impact, scalability, and transferability of pilot projects across the Danube Region, ensuring that they contribute meaningfully to digital transformation and innovation in the participating territories.

The selection of pilot projects for SpinIT is not just about meeting predefined criteria; it is about finding initiatives that inspire, innovate, and align with the project's broader goals of fostering smart specialization and bridging territorial disparities. Building on the knowledge from the **D.1.2.2 Best Practice Report**, this deliverable provides partners with a roadmap to identify projects that address local challenges while capitalizing on transnational synergies. The process involves asking key questions, drawing lessons from successful examples, and building a coherent strategy tailored to each region.

2 Framing the Selection: Where to Start?

When beginning the selection process, partners should consider: ***What are the pressing challenges in your region?*** Local Action Plans (LAPs) serve as the foundation, highlighting specific needs and opportunities. For instance, does your region lack digital infrastructure in agriculture? Or are SMEs in your area struggling with adopting Industry 4.0 technologies? By grounding the selection process in the realities of each region, partners ensure relevance and impact.

From there, partners should evaluate how the **defined Requirements** (D.2.2.1) shape their focus. For example, if the requirements emphasize the integration of AI in small businesses,

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how can this translate into actionable pilot ideas? What industries could benefit the most from such interventions? This step ensures alignment with SpinIT's objectives while maintaining flexibility to adapt to local contexts.

3 Drawing Inspiration from Best Practices

A powerful way to develop pilot ideas is to learn from projects that have already proven successful. For example, **PRAGMATIC**, a precision agriculture initiative, provides a compelling case study. This project integrated IoT, big data, and satellite imaging to help farmers optimize resource use and improve yields. Beyond its technical achievements, PRAGMATIC demonstrated the importance of creating accessible, user-friendly tools that directly address end-users' pain points. As a partner, ask yourself: *Could a similar approach work in our local industry?* If agriculture isn't relevant, what about other sectors where data-driven decision-making could drive efficiency, such as manufacturing or logistics?

Similarly, **LandSense** highlights the value of engaging communities in innovation. Its CropSupport app not only provided farmers with real-time crop monitoring tools but also involved them in contributing data to broader scientific research. This dual benefit of empowering users and advancing knowledge is a model for projects that seek to combine local impact with broader relevance. Partners should ask: *How can we engage end-users as active participants in our pilot projects?* What tools or platforms can facilitate this engagement?

4 Thinking Big: Where Could Innovation Lead?

When reviewing potential pilot ideas, it's essential to think beyond immediate goals. The **AI4SI initiative in Slovenia**, for example, shows how fostering collaboration between academia, policymakers, and businesses can create long-term change. By transferring AI research into practical applications, the project strengthened national competitiveness and paved the way for a cohesive AI strategy. This raises an important question: *Is there a technology or methodology that your region has yet to fully embrace?* Could your pilot project serve as the starting point for broader adoption?

Projects like **Ladies in AI**, an example from Croatia, which focused on equipping women with AI and entrepreneurial skills, also demonstrate the potential for addressing social inequalities through innovation. Partners might consider: *Are there underrepresented groups in your region that could benefit from targeted skills development?* How can technology act as an enabler for social inclusion and economic growth?

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5 Building a Strategy for Selection

The selection process is about balancing inspiration with practicality. Partners should approach this by asking:

1. *Does the pilot idea align with the strategic goals of SpinIT and S3 priorities?*
2. *Is it feasible within the resources and timelines available?*
3. *Does it offer clear and measurable outcomes, such as improved digital adoption or increased competitiveness?*

Partners should also think about scalability and adaptability. For instance, the **Danube Energy+ initiative**, which targeted young innovators to pioneer energy efficiency solutions, created a replicable model for engaging youth in sustainability. Could your pilot idea be scaled to other regions or industries? What structures would need to be in place for this to happen?

Finally, promotion and visibility are crucial. Ask: *How can the results of your pilot project be shared effectively?* Developing a communication plan that includes workshops, reports, and digital outreach ensures that the project's impact extends beyond its immediate participants.

5. 1 Encouraging Collaborative Creativity

Partners are encouraged to think collaboratively, sharing insights and brainstorming ideas that combine regional expertise with transnational perspectives. For example, combining lessons from **PRAGMATIC** and **LandSense** (both from Serbia) could result in a pilot project that applies IoT not just in agriculture but in water resource management, an equally critical area for many regions in the Danube.

Similarly, cross-sectoral collaboration, as seen in projects like **DanubePeerChains** (from Bosnia and Herzegovina), can inspire partners to look for synergies between industries. Could ICT solutions for manufacturing also address challenges in healthcare or education? Asking these types of questions encourages out-of-the-box thinking and maximizes the potential for innovation.

5. 2 Guiding Questions for Partners

To make the selection process more engaging, here's a set of guiding questions:

- *What specific regional challenges does your pilot project address?*
- *What tools or methodologies will you use, and are they accessible to all stakeholders?*

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- *What outcomes do you expect, and how will you measure success?*
- *How can your project be adapted for other regions or scaled for broader impact?*

By combining structured analysis with inspiration from proven initiatives, partners can select pilot projects that not only meet the requirements of D.2.2.2 but also embody the transformative spirit of the SpinIT project.

5. 3 Requirements of the selection based on the D.2.2.1

Pilot projects within the SpinIT initiative must focus on **skills development** in **ICT, AI, AR/VR, Industry 4.0, Edtech, and cross-sectoral collaboration**, ensuring alignment with **regional Smart Specialization Strategies (S3)** and the **EU-Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)**. They must deliver measurable benefits, such as increased IT sector employment, and contribute to the long-term objectives of SpinIT.

All pilot projects must be **feasible, well-defined, and completed by June 2025**. They must engage **10 participants (including 3 SMEs)**, develop a **transferable curriculum/methodology**, and be **properly documented and promoted**. Pure application or platform development is not eligible—projects must emphasize education, innovation, and new methodologies.

Projects should integrate **emerging technologies** (AI, IoT, blockchain, big data) and **innovative approaches** (gamification, virtual hackathons) to enhance engagement and effectiveness. Additionally, they must ensure **scalability and transferability**, allowing successful initiatives to be replicated across different regions and sectors.

Practical part - Selection of Pilot projects

A) Based on the Local Action Plans (via D.2.1.4.)

SpinIT_LAP template_FINAL.docx

B) Based on the Best Practice reports

D.1.2.2. Best practice report_FINAL.pdf

C) Based on the Defined Requirements (via D.2.2.1)

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D2.2.1 Definition of requirements for pilot projects in smart specialization and IT sector

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Annex 1: Drafting the Pilot Project

Pilot Project Template

1. Project Title

Digital food supply optimization for Public Institutions

The pilot project aims to digitize and optimize food procurement for public institutions by implementing a cloud-based ERP system. It will enhance real-time inventory tracking, reduce food waste, and streamline procurement workflows, while also developing a training curriculum on digital and green procurement strategies for institutional procurement officers.

2. General Information

Region/Location: Cluj-Napoca, North-West Region - Romania
Lead Organization: Municipality of Cluj-Napoca
Key Stakeholders:

- Local Administration (City Hall)
- Nurseries and Kindergartens
- Local Distributors & Retailers
- IT Developers & Startups
- Educational Authorities (ISJ, school administrators)
- Procurement Personnel
- Environmental NGOs focused on food waste reduction

3. Impact of the Local Discovery Group workshops

The Local Discovery Group workshops facilitated discussions among key stakeholders to identify the primary challenges in food supply chain management for public institutions. The main pain points addressed include food waste due to inefficient procurement, lack of real-time data for food inventory and difficulties in integrating local suppliers into public food distribution systems. Stakeholders highlighted the need for a digital transformation in food supply chain management. As a result, this pilot project was structured to leverage a cloud-based ERP solution, to optimize procurement workflows, reduce food waste, improve

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supply chain efficiency, and develop a curriculum and best practices for sustainable food procurement and waste reduction.

4. Project Details

Objective:

- Implement an ERP system to streamline food stock management, procurement, and distribution.
- Reduce food waste through real-time tracking and optimized order planning.
- Develop best practices and training modules on sustainable procurement and waste reduction.
- Conduct capacity-building workshops for procurement officers on digital and green procurement strategies.

Relevance to RIS3 (Smart Specialization Strategies):
This project aligns with the North-West Region's RIS3 priorities, particularly in the following areas:

- Pillar I - INNOVATION FOR HEALTH AND WELLNESS
    - Priority I.1. - AGRO-FOOD: The project enhances the efficiency of local food distribution and strengthens links between local producers and public institutions.
    - Priority I.3. - HEALTH: Supports healthier, locally sourced food options for public institutions, reducing food waste and improving sustainability.
- Pillar II - EMERGING SECTOR DEVELOPMENT
    - Priority II.1 - NEW MATERIALS: By incorporating digital tools for food procurement and inventory management, the project fosters innovation in smart food supply systems.
    - Digital transformation and green procurement: The project contributes to regional objectives of sustainable urban development, digitalization in public administration and green procurement practices.

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5. Technical Information

Digital and Innovation Tools Used:

- TinyERP: a modular ERP system providing real-time inventory tracking, automated procurement workflows and data analytics.
- E-learning tools: to train procurement officers on digital tools and sustainable food procurement practices.

Methodology:

1. Identify requirements for food supply optimization within City Hall Canteen.
2. Customize ERP to align with local procurement workflows.
3. Pilot test ERP with City Hall Canteen.
4. Develop a curriculum and best practices for sustainable food procurement and waste reduction.
5. Conduct training workshops on digital and green procurement strategies with representatives of institutions managing procurement systems.
6. Monitor and analyze data to measure project impact.
7. Scale the project to nurseries and kindergartens.

Innovative Aspects:

Unlike traditional procurement approaches, this project integrates real-time data-driven decision-making, digital procurement workflows, and a scalable training curriculum for institutional procurement officers. By leveraging TinyERP's modular system, the project ensures seamless automation of procurement processes, reducing inefficiencies and food waste. Additionally, the curriculum focuses on digital literacy, green procurement strategies, and best practices for sustainable food supply chains, equipping procurement officers with the skills to navigate modern procurement ecosystems. This holistic approach not only enhances transparency and efficiency but also fosters stronger collaboration between public institutions, local suppliers, and technology providers, paving the way for a more resilient and sustainable food procurement system.

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6. Scope and Impact

Scope:
This project targets the public food procurement sector, particularly municipal canteens, nurseries, kindergartens, and public administration procurement officers.
Expected Results:

- Reduction of food waste through improved forecasting and data-driven procurement in City Hall Canteen.
- Increased efficiency in local food supply chains.
- Capacity building for minimum 10 public sector procurement officers through dedicated training programs.
- Enhanced collaboration between IT developers, local food suppliers, and public institutions.

Who Will Benefit?
Direct beneficiaries:

  - Public institutions (City Hall Canteen, nurseries, kindergartens).
  - Procurement officers and institutional representatives managing procurement systems.
  - IT developers/startups specializing in ERP solutions.

- Indirect beneficiaries:
  - Local food producers and distributors.
  - Environmental and sustainability organizations.

7. Timeline

March: Development of methodology, curriculum, and stakeholder engagement.
April: Final ERP development and start of pilot implementation at **City Hall Canteen**.
May: Training workshops and finalization of pilot implementation.
June: Final evaluation and reporting.

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	March	April	May	June
Development of methodology, curriculum, and stakeholder engagement				
Final ERP development and start of pilot implementation at City Hall Canteen.				
Training workshops and finalization of pilot implementation.				
Final evaluation and reporting.				

8. Promotion Strategies

Communication Channels:

- Social media campaigns (municipal channels, project partners).
- Conference and regional workshop.
- Publications on digital and green procurement.

Engagement Activities:

- Organizing hands-on training/workshops sessions for procurement officers and to share best practices and project outcomes.

9. Scalability and Transferability

Potential for Expansion:

The ERP-based procurement system can be expanded to other public institutions such as hospitals, nurseries, kindergartens, elderly care facilities, and universities.
Training curricula can be integrated into formal procurement officer education programs.

Replication Opportunities:

The training methodology can be adapted to different regional and national contexts.
The project's digital tools can be customized for other sectors beyond food procurement, such as medical supply chains.

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10. Budget (Optional)

Provide an estimated budget and indicate funding sources.

Instructions for Submission

Each Partner will prepare the presentation for the consortium to present the pilot idea, proposal, and implementation plan. This plan will be presented in the middle of March (via DOODLE voting results) and later it will be decided if all is planned well, eligible, and possible to do.

Sample of PPTX: Pilot Presentation Template