



Midterm Report



SIRR-SUSTAINABILITY, INNOVATION
AND RESILIENCE IN RURAL AREAS

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SIRR

Interreg
North Sea



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Photo: Annual Partnership Conference 2025 in Town of Louvigné du Désert, France

Foreword

All onboard in rural societies for a fair future!

As we reach the midpoint of the SIRR project, We're happy to share the great progress we have made together. Our joint efforts are already making a difference in rural and coastal areas — encouraging innovation, strengthening resilience, and creating new opportunities. We have brought together a wide range of stakeholders, attracted new talent, and supported the growth of local businesses.

Our *shared motto* - “*All onboard in rural societies for a fair future!*” has guided us throughout the journey, and it's something we developed together in true partnership. The results so far reflect the dedication and hard work of everyone involved. A special thanks to our work package leaders, whose commitment and expertise have been key to moving the project forward. And Hub Managers, turning the results into action — for sustainable development in rural communities, where our goal is to have everyone onboard.

We're not just imagining a fairer future for rural communities — we're building it, step by step. This report highlights the milestones we have reached, shares insights and learnings from our project partners, and shows the positive impact we're creating together.

Emma Ek, SIRR Project Manager
Municipality of Sotenäs



SIRR

Summary

We are now at the midpoint of the project. SIRR has so far enabled the Pilot Hubs to embark on their journey towards better development, aiming for a fair future for rural and coastal areas.

The Pilot Hubs have internally focused on establishing themselves and reflecting on their goals, strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities. They have also mapped their stakeholders to develop their Hubs into the best versions of themselves, fostering a more sustainable, resilient, and innovative environment. Additionally, they have initiated processes to become long-lasting Hubs that support these goals. Meanwhile, we have organised matchmaking and exchange events focusing on various areas and challenges to facilitate mutual learning.

The academia partners continue to track the Hub development, contribute with research, support the process and develop learnings for a bigger impact of the project.

SIRR's structure is evolving through a transdisciplinary, practice-based exploration of a Multi-Helix model - one that actively cultivates partnerships among municipalities, knowledge institutions, local businesses, communities, and other stakeholders.

More exciting developments are on the way!

Photo: Læsø, Denmark





SIRR

Mission & Vision

As cities grow and younger generations flock to major universities, smaller coastal and rural areas face the challenge of keeping their communities vibrant and appealing. To address this, public sector, municipalities, local businesses, organisations, and innovators require support. It is crucial to provide, along with authorities and knowledge partners, the best opportunities for sustainable development and growth in these regions. All partners have entered the SIRR project with a mission to develop strategies and networks deeply rooted in local communities.

Local community resilience is essential for the long-term sustainability and vibrancy of rural and coastal areas, especially as urbanisation draws younger generations to larger cities. Strengthening resilience means empowering local businesses, organisations, and individuals to adapt, thrive, and create opportunities within their own regions. By fostering collaboration through initiatives like SIRR and its Multi-Helix model, communities can build strong networks between local authorities, knowledge institutions, and local actors.

Through the project, we are on the lookout for the essential elements, values, competences, tools, and data needed to kickstart and execute genuine and impactful social innovation processes in rural and coastal areas. Additionally, our focus is not just on the end result but on creating social value throughout the entire process.

All onboard in rural societies for a fair future!

Photo: Skagen, Denmark



Our Approach

Ten Pilot Hubs are being developed within the project. The knowledge partners support their development by collecting and analyzing data, provide expertise and research-based practices, and engaging students to explore shared challenges in greater depth.

Joint activities are being organised in SIRR contributing to the development of the Pilot Hubs. The activities are divided in three work packages (WP).

- WP 1: Hub development and remodeling towards deeper Multi-Helix Hubs
- WP 2: Stakeholders involvement and exchange of best practises
- WP 3: Research and support

Together we are developing:

- Action plans for the Multi-Helix Hubs
- Hub strategies on long-term Multi-Helix structures
- Strategies on how to connect Hubs to the regional innovation eco-system
- Best Practises of Multi-Helix inclusion

Photo: Annual Partnership Conference in Stenvad, Denmark 2024



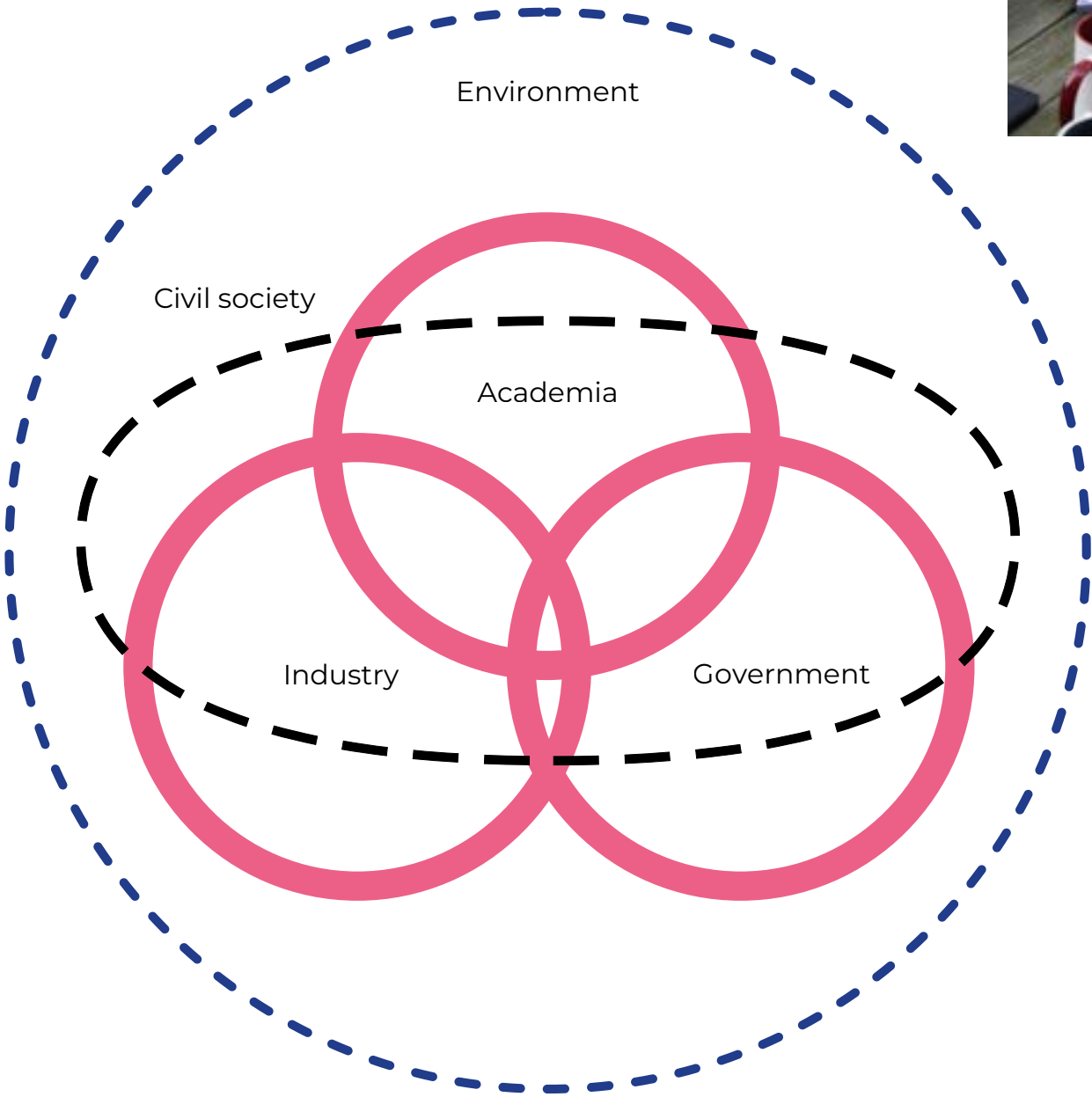
Multiple Helix

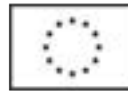
Solving complex rural and coastal challenges often seems impossible, but the Multiple Helix approach to local and regional development, as practiced in SIRR, promises short-term stakeholder involvement and long-term impact. Rooted in helix innovation theory from the turn of the millennium, it moves beyond a fixed configuration of three or more helixes (e.g. university-industry-government). In SIRR, Hubs manage multiple configurations of sectors and stakeholders based on the issue at hand.

Civil society's creativity and the preservation and regeneration of natural resources as well as the environment play a stronger role in developing smart, sustainable solutions.

Rather than working in isolation, by bringing together diverse stakeholders with unique perspectives and expertise, more innovative and effective solutions can be developed. This remains challenging, especially when engaging civil society, which often relies on external funding or unpaid involvement.

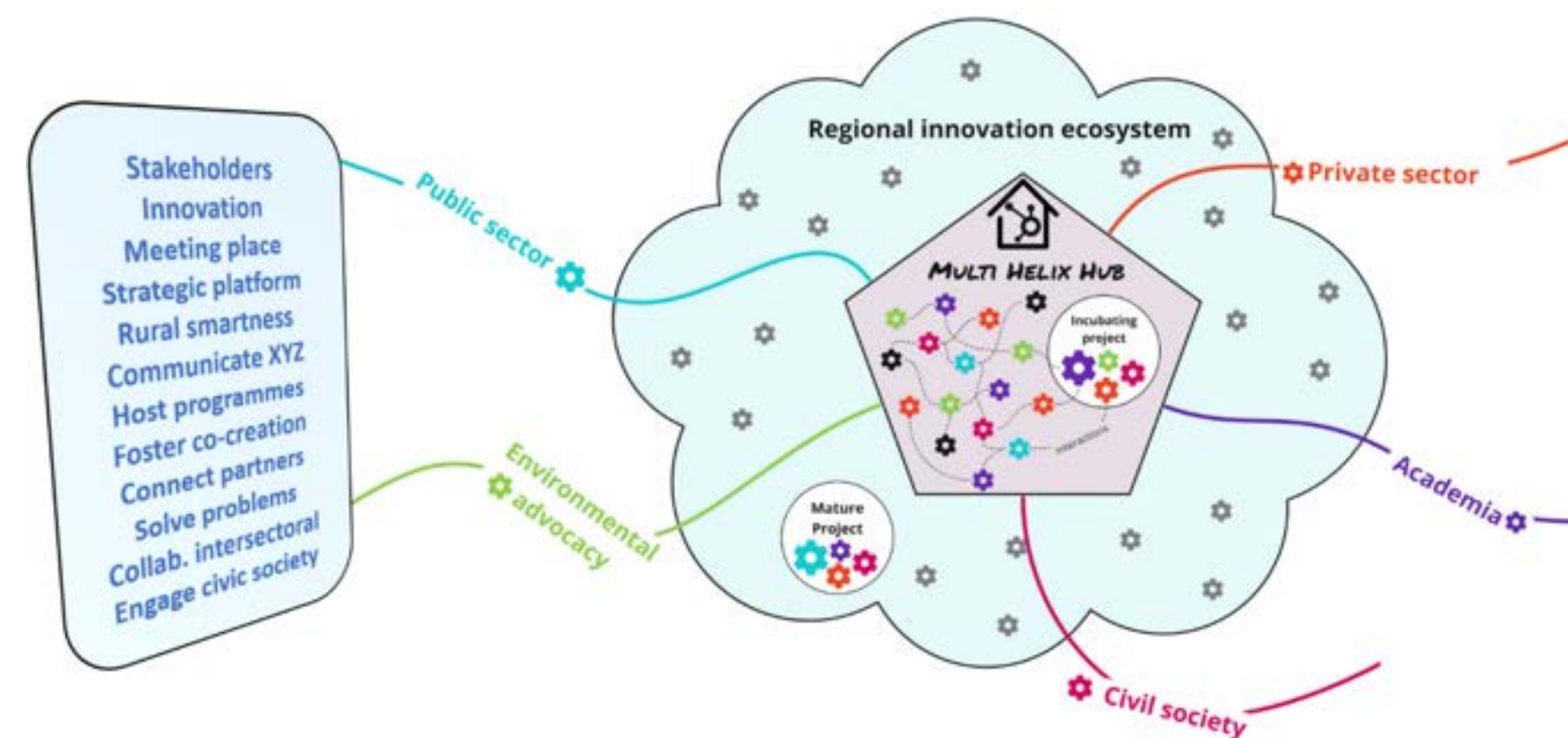
Photo: Working session in Vechta





Multiple Helix...

- is a **main approach** and working method in the project.
- aim to **connect and form** partnerships between municipalities, academia and knowledge institutions, local business, and civil society.
- is a **collaborative approach to problem-solving** that involves stakeholders from different sectors working together towards a common goal.
- is based on the belief that by **bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders**, each with their unique perspectives and expertise, it is possible to develop more innovative and effective solutions than by working in isolation.
- is vital for **solving complex problems**, but it can also be complex, particularly when engaging civil society, which often relies on external funding or unpaid involvement.



Pilot Hubs

The Pilot Hubs focus on strengthening communication through history, storytelling, and enhanced strategies for both internal and external engagement.

Leveraging local meeting venues tailored to diverse target groups is a key priority, as is identifying shared values among stakeholders to foster collaboration and shape long-term visions. By integrating history and culture, the hubs aim to build local cohesion and resilience in rural areas. Networking remains central, with participants highlighting the importance of collective efforts for lasting community benefits.

What unites all the Hubs is their strong commitment to fostering development and engaging all actors in their rural and coastal areas to address local challenges - *All onboard in rural societies for a fair future!*

The Hubs will implement Multi-Helix pilots, collaboratively developed with the support of the project’s knowledge partners.



Hub Aims

- Redesign their structures to support long-term Multi-Helix collaboration
- Establish connections with regional innovation ecosystems, enhancing their resilience and capacity to drive innovation and the green transition
- Communicate strategically with regional innovation ecosystems, creating structured and effective links
- Initiate several Multi-Helix innovation networks, working groups, and stakeholder collaborations, while developing action plans for implementation and engagement
- Establish connections between the project Hubs to promote exchange
- Contributing to the Green Transition and EU Green Deal



Photo: Vechta, Germany

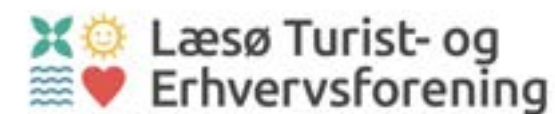
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STENVAD
MOSEBRUG





The Association Stenvad Mosebrug

PILOT HUB

Setting: Rural area located in Central Jutland Region and belongs to Norddjurs Municipality.

Main regional business: Agriculture. Tourism.

Challenges in focus: Housing problems. Citizens still identify the hub with its previous role (museum, old factory). Issues with engaging young citizens. Limited resources. Local history as a development driver and strengthening of the local area - local identity. Bio-diversity, nature accessibility and sustainable tourism – the green profile – activation of the surrounding nature.

Current focus and activities in focus:

- Prioritisation of focus areas and offers
- Networks and partnerships
- Involvement and everyday life
- Evolution - a sustainable meeting place, museum, cultural center and Hub

Photo 1: Bønnerup harbour

Photo 2: Accordion players

Photo 3: Beautiful, peaceful and green

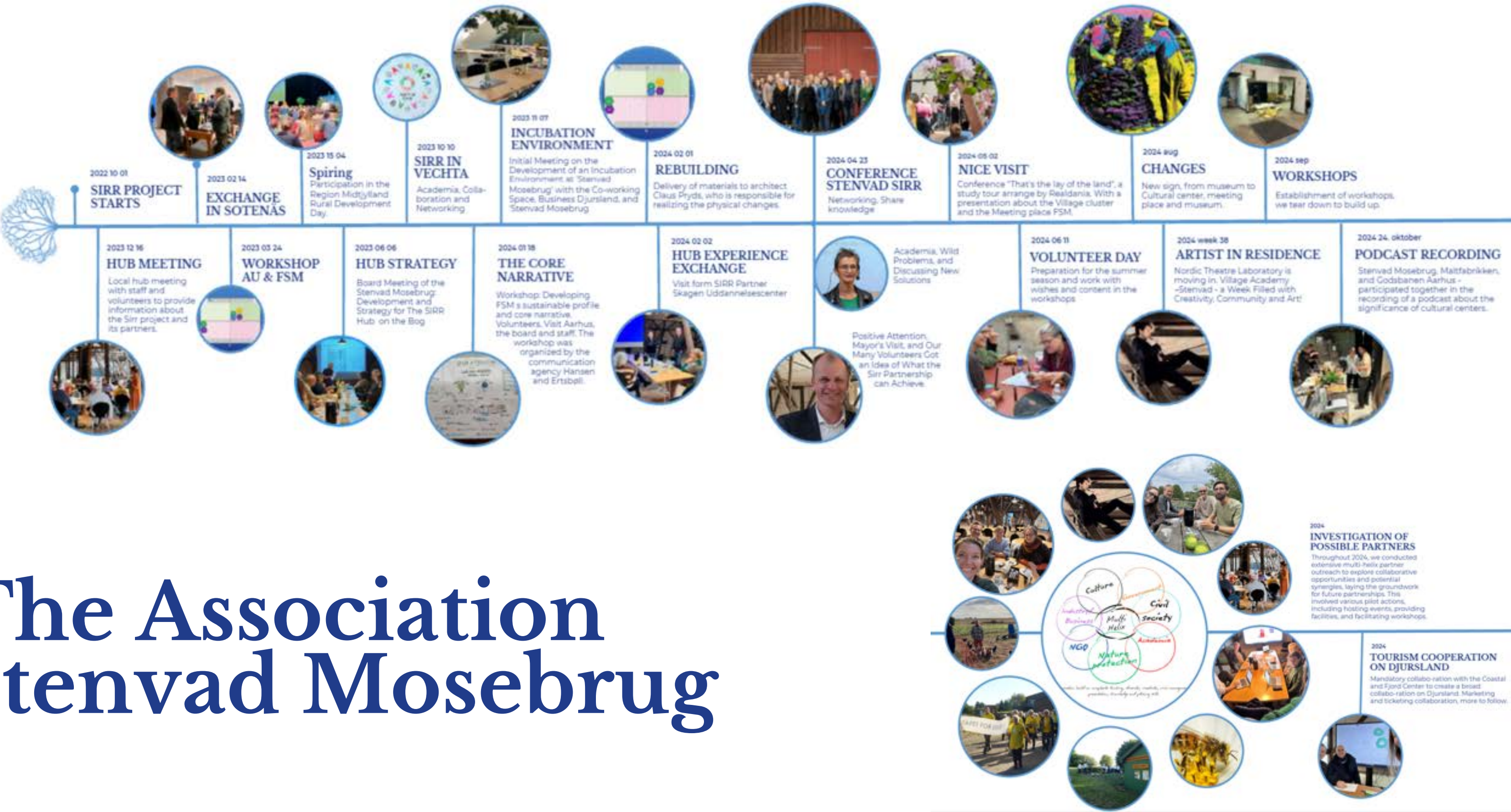
Our milestones and insights

Hub Development & Strategic Progress: For Stenvad it has been challenging to land the right organisation. The board and management are smaller today, but very committed, working together to develop the organisation necessary to balance the development of the local innovation Hub and the daily operations. A robust organisation that is ready to handle the challenges and opportunities of the future.

Key Contributions & Learnings: The foundation for a core narrative that will support the Hub transformation have been established and will guide future communication and strategies. As part of the strategic development of Stenvad Mosebrug Hub, they have focused on structuring governance and staffing for the association's board, the cultural center, and the meeting place. This has included mapping potential business areas, identifying key stakeholders, and conducting extensive meetings with potential collaborators, including individuals, NGOs, businesses, and associations. A strategic plan has been established to guide the Hub's long-term development and define stable as well as flexible partnerships. As of early 2025, efforts have commenced to formalise collaborations further.

Photo: Stenvad Mosebrug, Annual Partnership Conference 2024





The Association Stenvad Mosebrug

Louvigné du Désert - Arobase

PILOT HUB

Setting: Rural area in the Ille-et-Vilaine department in Brittany in northwestern France. Located on the Cadomian chain.

Main regional business: The exploitation of granite. Manufacturing.



Challenges in focus: Lacking academic support. Issues with engaging young citizens. Boost the economy of the rural areas. Support the ecological transition of the territories and limit the urban sprawl. Encouraging innovation and the emergence of entrepreneurship.

Photo 1: The town has a long history
Photo 2: The river of Fougères
Photo 3: The fortress of Saint Malo



Our milestones and insights

Hub Development & Strategic Progress: L'Arobase, Louvigné du Désert's (LDD) Hub Arobase, officially opened in March 2024. Municipal authorities carefully planned this initiative, highlighting a process rooted in collaborative development. The conceptualisation of Arobase was a joint effort, with future users - including local businesses, educational institutions, associations, and residents - actively participating in a dedicated user committee. For the year preceding its opening, this committee was consulted regularly, ensuring the Hub's programme was tailored to meet community expectations and needs. One year post-inauguration, Arobase has demonstrated significant success. The user committee remains an active and integral component of the Hub's ongoing development, continually contributing to its evolution. Furthermore, attendance figures are highly encouraging, particularly for the digital museum sessions.

Key Contributions & Learnings: Despite the positive outcomes, the strategic positioning of Arobase within the local geography remains a priority. Housed within a former medical practice, the Hub aims to solidify its identity as a central resource that fosters innovation. The objective is for Arobase to be recognised as an indispensable local landmark, fostering knowledge exchange, community connection, and opportunities for growth within LDD.

LDD is fully committing to the SIRR project's activities with this objective firmly in mind. They believe that reviewing the best practices of SIRR partners, alongside engaging in productive peer-to-peer workshops, will effectively chart a clear path forward for the Hub. A key focus, central to our expectations for the Hub's second year of operation, is the development of a robust storytelling strategy. This will be crucial in effectively communicating our impact and values.

Photo: Arobase Hub in Louvigné du Désert



Photo: Arobase Hub in Louvigné du Désert



Louvigné du Désert - Arobase



Laesoe Tourist & Business Association

PILOT HUB

Setting: The largest island in the North Sea Bay of Kattegat (Denmark).

Main regional business: Fishing languistine. Tourism.

Challenges in focus: Limited workforce. Environmental challenges e.g. dependence on weather, the location of the island isolates it from the mainland. Housing problems for renting and for seasonal workers. Enhancing the business development on Læsø with a focus on innovation, growth, and employment in the rural area.

Photo 1: Læsø Saltsyderi Photo 2: Østerby Harbour (photographer: Jack Fridthjof)





Our milestones and insights

Hub Development and Strategic Progress: Laesø Tourist and Business Association (LTE) aims to achieve stronger regional and international networks and relations - to knowledge institutions outside the hub in particular - and to gain tools to improve innovation, sustainability and resilience in the hub. This includes methods to strengthen the networks and relationships between LTE and its stakeholders, as well as methods to improve collaboration between the stakeholders themselves; especially focused on the members of the association, for a stronger, more resilient year-round community.

Key Contributions and Learnings: The launch of a communication platform for LTE, stakeholders and potential stakeholders; Laesøerhverv.dk. This platform will work to strengthen communication with LTE's main stakeholders, as well as keep potential future stakeholders interested, and up to date through newsletters and more.

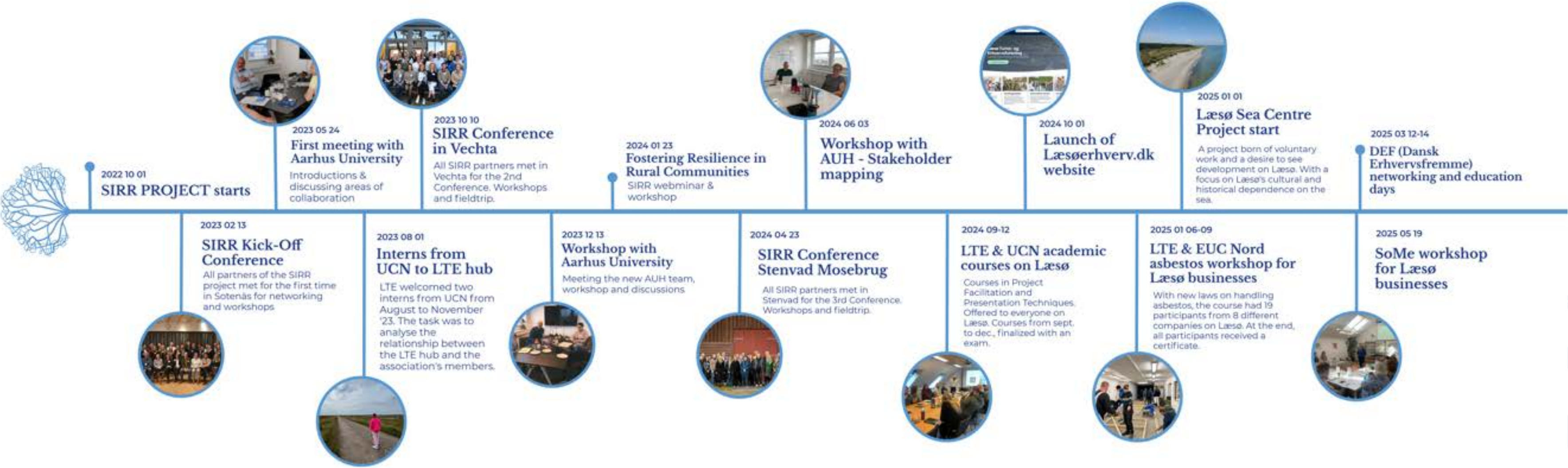
The stakeholder mapping tool, made in collaboration with SIRR partners is very useful and will be useful in years to come, as the Læsø hub develops and grows stronger.

Læsø Sea Centre project recently kicked off in January 2025. The project is based on voluntary efforts by local stakeholders, including part-time islanders and local businesses. Based on Læsø's historical and cultural ties to the sea, what began as a small group of people sharing ideas for development on Læsø, has now become a project - and a small hub - in itself. This is an example of how to "activate" stakeholders in a hub, while expanding the network to relevant actors on a national level.

Photo: Hvidebakker



Laesoe Tourist & Business Association



TrENDi

PILOT HUB

TrENDi at the University of Vechta is the central contact point for "Entrepreneurship Education". We support the implementation of projects of different kinds - from start-ups to student initiatives and societal ideas and innovation.



Setting: Rural area, located in Lower Saxony, Germany.

Main regional business: Agriculture and Agricultural services.

Challenges in focus: : Ecological degradation due to agricultural practices, fostering ‘green’ skills in key industries, entrepreneurship education within the University of Vechta.

Photo 1: Agricultural and food industry is strong in this region, Strawberry farming
Photo 2: Grazing cattle in the surroundings of Vechta
Photo 3: Beautiful hiking



Our milestones and insights

Hub Development & Strategic Progress: The TrENDi Hub at the University of Vechta was able to accelerate its regional stakeholder collaboration in various sectors. Communication efforts and strategy meetings with key stakeholders in the domains of politics, administration, economy, academia and education are culminating in regional innovation workshops through which new action plans and visions are emerging. Yet, at the same time, SIRR strategy workshops and stakeholder surveys have shown that there is room for improvement in TrENDi's multi-helix-approaches. These findings are taken into account in a current process of internal and external realignment of the TrENDi hub within the University of Vechta itself and the wider region.

Key Contributions & Learnings: Over time, TrENDi strengthened its collaboration within the SIRR consortium. In June 2024, two new thematic working groups were initiated, with TrENDi, Skagen, and Sotenäs Centre of Symbiosis working closely on new formats of hub collaboration, to be implemented in digital seminars and workshops. Specifically, up to now, two digital seminars were implemented that focuses on digital tools developed as part of European projects to manage complex regional challenges and foster stakeholder engagement. In the future, TrENDi wishes to further follow-up on this by conducting workshops with other hub partners on the usage of collaborative tools to tackle individual and shared challenges. At the same time, TrENDi aims to involve its regional and international partners more thoroughly in the activities of the SIRR project.

Photo: University of Vechta, Friedrich Schmidt



TrENDi





Sotenäs Centre of Symbiosis

PILOT HUB

Setting: Rural and coastal, area in the Västra Götaland County, Sweden, located by the North Sea.

Main regional business: Maritime activities, tourism, fishing, granite, symbiosis businesses

Challenges in focus: Lacking connections to civil society. Excessive emphasis on individual-level collaboration with specific representatives of the organisation rather than fostering a broader organisational engagement. Issues with engaging young citizens. Housing problem.

Current focus and activities in focus: Engaging youth, storymaking and communication, collaboration with the innovation eco-system, organisational structures, attract competence, identity and positioning.

Photo 1: High winds
Photo 2: The fishing industry
Photo 3: The community of Bohus-Malmön



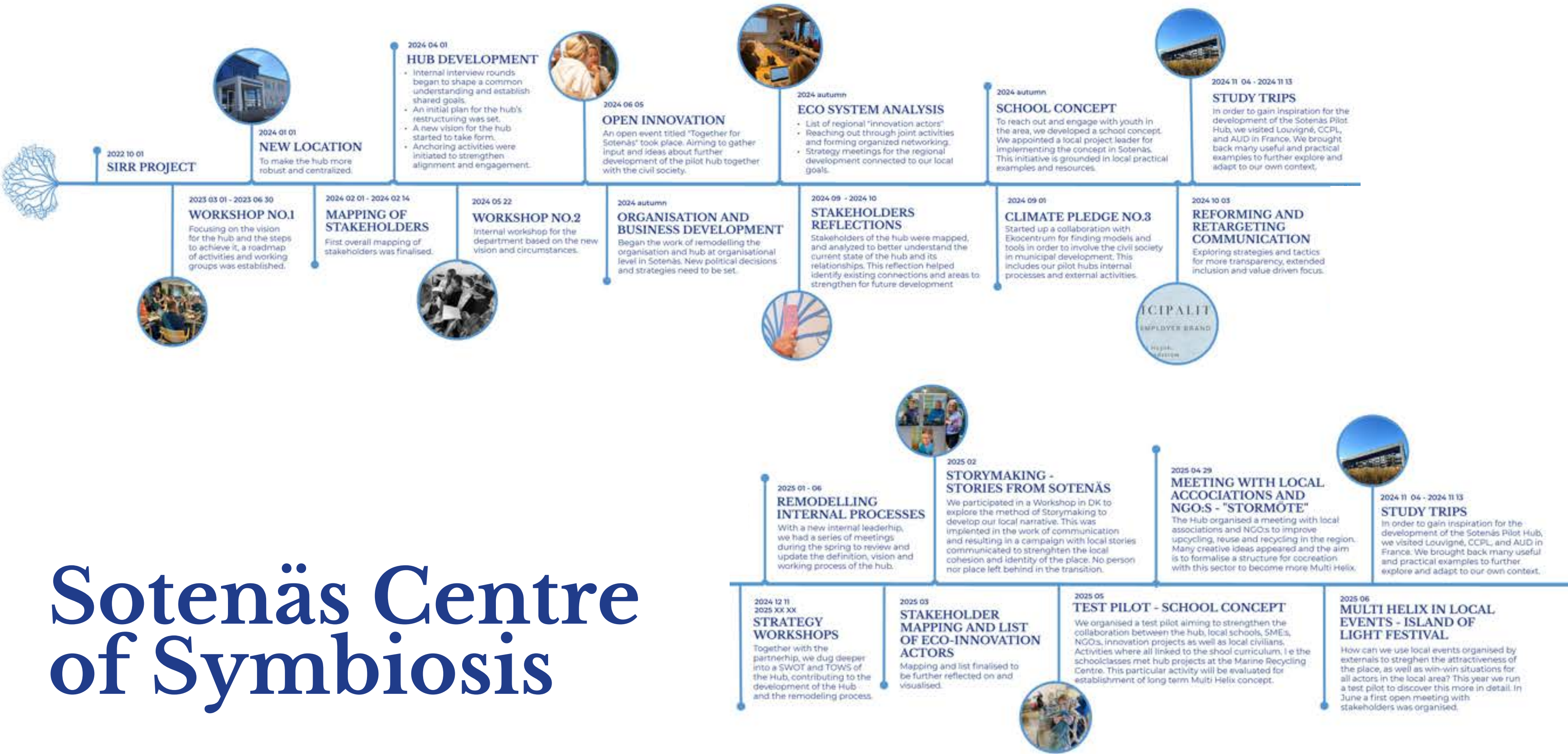
Our milestones and insights

Hub Development & Strategic Progress: Sotenäs is progressing towards a Multi-Helix Hub by analysing, connecting, and addressing key barriers. While they have a strong foundation and insights from previous workshops, the SIRR project has highlighted areas for improvement. By drawing on best practices, they explore and test new models to refine other hub's development. The SIRR project has been instrumental in testing collaboration approaches, particularly in collaborating with local schools, associations and strengthening stakeholder relationships.

Key Contributions & Learnings: While some stakeholders naturally align with their role, Sotenäs actively works to strengthen less established relationships through new methods. Existing partnerships have deepened via strategic meetings and collaborations. Engaging with students and learning from other Hubs has provided valuable insights tailored to Sotenäs local conditions. These efforts enhance their resilience, leveraging shared knowledge to address challenges and build on strengths to boost the resilience of the rural area. Their interconnected network reinforces progress and shared momentum.

Photo: A fruitful SIRR event, open innovation





Sotenäs Centre of Symbiosis

Setting: Rural area consisting of 36 municipalities in the northern part of France.

Main regional business: Agriculture. Service and trade. Concrete, paper and glass industry. Tourism.

Challenges in focus: Territorial urban planning. Issues with national law. Implementing ecological transitions. Approaching young people. Lacking academic support. Environmental challenges (e.g. floods). Housing problems. Not too much experience with working with economic.



Photo 1: The mills have a high cultural and historical value
Photo 2: The Pays de Lumbres Services Centre
Photo 3: Green and growing



Pays de Lumbres

PILOT HUB

Our milestones and insights

Hub Development & Strategic Progress: By sharing knowledge and experience in the SIRR project, Lumbred CCPL Hub are experimenting with different approaches to consultation and developing the CCPL's relationships with all stakeholders. Thus, by integrating new partners and new working methods, they are moving towards a more multi-propeller Hub.

Key Contributions & Learnings: CCPL is becoming increasingly aware of the power of partnerships to develop the region and the importance of including all stakeholders, even those with whom they collaborate less naturally. CCPL are therefore learning to change their approaches to collaborate with new types of audiences, such as educational institutions, for example, with whom they historically have fewer ties and working habits. They are also strengthening certain existing partnerships that were not formalized or were underdeveloped by working on specific and shared issues.



Photo1 : CCPL Pilot Hub

Photo 2: Curious and creative minds

Photo 3: Rural area



Pays de Lumbres



Societal Impact Hub West

PILOT HUB

The world of today is confronted with numerous complex challenges. To build a sustainable society for the future, innovative co-creative collaborations between academia, the public sector, business, and civil society is imperative. Societal Impact Hub West was established to facilitate such collaborations.



Setting: Co-creative collaboration with public and private entities in Västra Götaland County, Sweden, located by the North Sea.

Main regional business: Societal Development

Challenges in focus: Strengthen collaboration between research and practice, through close involvement of regional and local stakeholders.

Current focus and activities in focus: Develop collaborative structures to identify main regional societal challenges to be in focus.



Photo: University West, Trollhättan, Sweden





Our milestones and insights

Hub Development & Strategic Progress: The Societal Impact Hub West has recently undergone a restructuring process, and is now scaling up its activities, for which the SIRR project is a main partner. The Hub focuses on co-creative knowledge production and skills development, structured around the Multi-Helix approach, fostering sustainable, innovative, and competitive local areas, which align with the SIRR project's goals. There is significant interest in further developing the Hub to become a platform that contributes to more sustainable, resilient, and innovative rural and coastal communities.

Key Contributions & Learnings: Societal Impact Hub West will through connections with private and public stakeholders establish and progressively strengthen collaboration and networks that through co-creative efforts can develop new and innovative pathways and solutions for sound and resilient local development practices.

Photo: University West, Trollhättan, Sweden



Lysekil

PILOT HUB

Setting: Rural and coastal area in the Västra Götaland County, Sweden, located by the North Sea.

Main regional business: Manufacturing, construction, tourism, fishing/agriculture/ forestry, consulting firms.

Challenges in focus: Decreased population with fewer children and an increasing number of elderly. Housing problems, climate change, major decisions such as the development of offshore wind farms and infrastructure supply .

Current focus and activities in focus: The goal is to increase the trust in the municipality and foster pride in the place among those who live, work and visit. They will develop the meeting places created during the fall of 2024. And will also explore the image of Lysekil from a Multi-Helix perspective to create a strong brand under the concept "Pride for the place".

Photo 1: The magnificent church
Photo 2: A vibrant city centre
Photo 3: Waterfront walk in Grundsund





Our milestones and insights

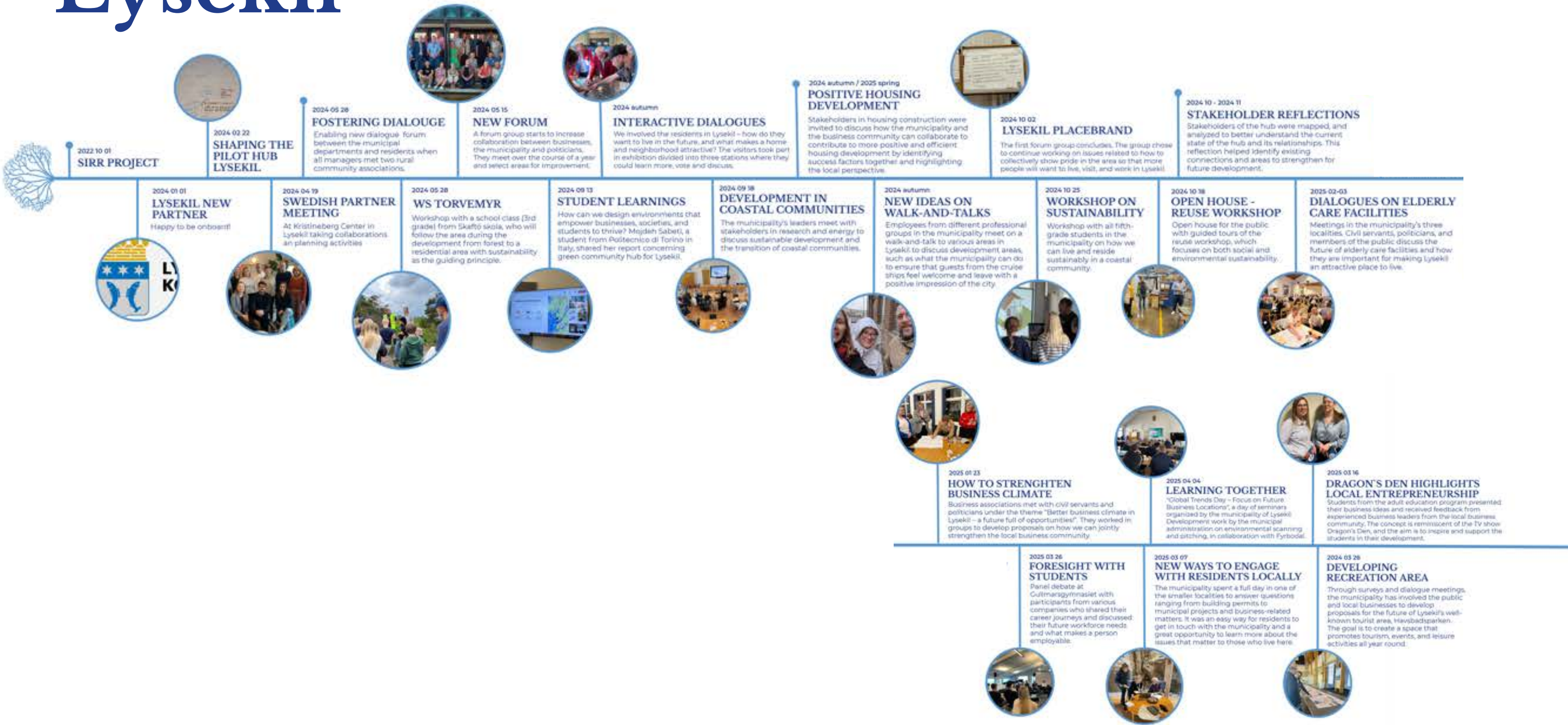
Hub Development & Strategic Progress: Over the past year, Lysekil Municipality has restructured its local project management. Lysekil has invested significant time and effort into gaining a deeper understanding of our success factors: increasing trust in the municipality as a partner and fostering pride in the area among residents, businesses, and visitors. During autumn 2025, a project aimed at strengthening pride in Lysekil among residents, the business community, employees, and other stakeholders will be launched. Together, they can shape the image of Lysekil as a place where people want to live, work, and visit. This benefits not only the Hub and municipality but also local businesses and the community as a whole.

Key Contributions & Learnings: Lysekil has explored new ways to engage with our various target groups, for example through dialogue meetings, reference groups, and by visiting new venues in different parts of the municipality. They have also gained valuable insights from the experiences of the project partners. During spring 2025, a stronger bond with the neighboring municipality, which is facing similar challenges, was formed. This collaboration will be valuable in many areas moving forward. Lysekil Municipality's participation in SIRR is raising awareness within the organisation and throughout the municipality about the challenges we face together in order to create stronger, more resilient, sustainable and attractive rural areas.

Photo: Sunset walk by Skäddhålan in Lysekil



Lysekil



Setting: Rural and coastal area in the region of North Jutland, Frederikshavn municipality, Denmark. Located on the border of the North Sea and the Baltic Sea.

Main regional business: Fishing. Tourism.

Challenges in focus: Engaging public authorities; reconsidering the label “*Skagen Education Center*”. Skagen Hub aspires to become the first point of contact for anyone wanting to create change in Skagen - an approachable, friendly, and proactive organisation. Demographic shifts are creating recruitment challenges, including issues related to “grey gentrification” and housing availability.



Current focus and activities in focus: Map and describe how systemic wicked challenges constitute meta-issues that cut across most of the challenges the Hub encounters: demographic shifts with a declining and ageing population, skills and recruitment difficulties, housing and settlement, the co-existence of diverse local identities, and the creation of new, positive narratives.

Photo 1: A historic summer villa in Skagen
Photo 2: Kattegat coast of Skagen
Photo 3: A sunny evening

Skagen Education Centre

PILOT HUB



Our milestones and insights

Hub Development & Strategic Progress: Skagen Hub has made significant progress in strengthening stakeholder collaboration, knowledge exchange and local engagement. Their work so far has focused on building strong networks, mapping resources, and enhancing storytelling and communication strategies to support long-term, sustainable development. The identification and facilitation of local networks remain central to their work. Previously established networks have been strengthened and sustained, while new networks have emerged to address pressing community challenges.

Key Contributions & Learnings: Through their efforts the Skagen Hub has established stronger connections with key stakeholders, including businesses, research institutions, public authorities and civil society organisations. Their work so far highlights the importance of Multi-Helix collaboration, which requires building trust, establishing mutual understanding, and demonstrating success through specific cases.

These efforts have led to:

- Stronger knowledge exchange between local and regional actors
- Enhanced visibility and credibility within the broader innovation landscape

Photo: Skagen lighthouse was built in 1858





Skagen Education Centre

Common hub progress

SIRR is about long-term processes developing strategies. The long-lasting impact and effects of SIRR will appear after 10-20 years, building on experiences, learnings and local effects - continuously moving towards capitalisation.

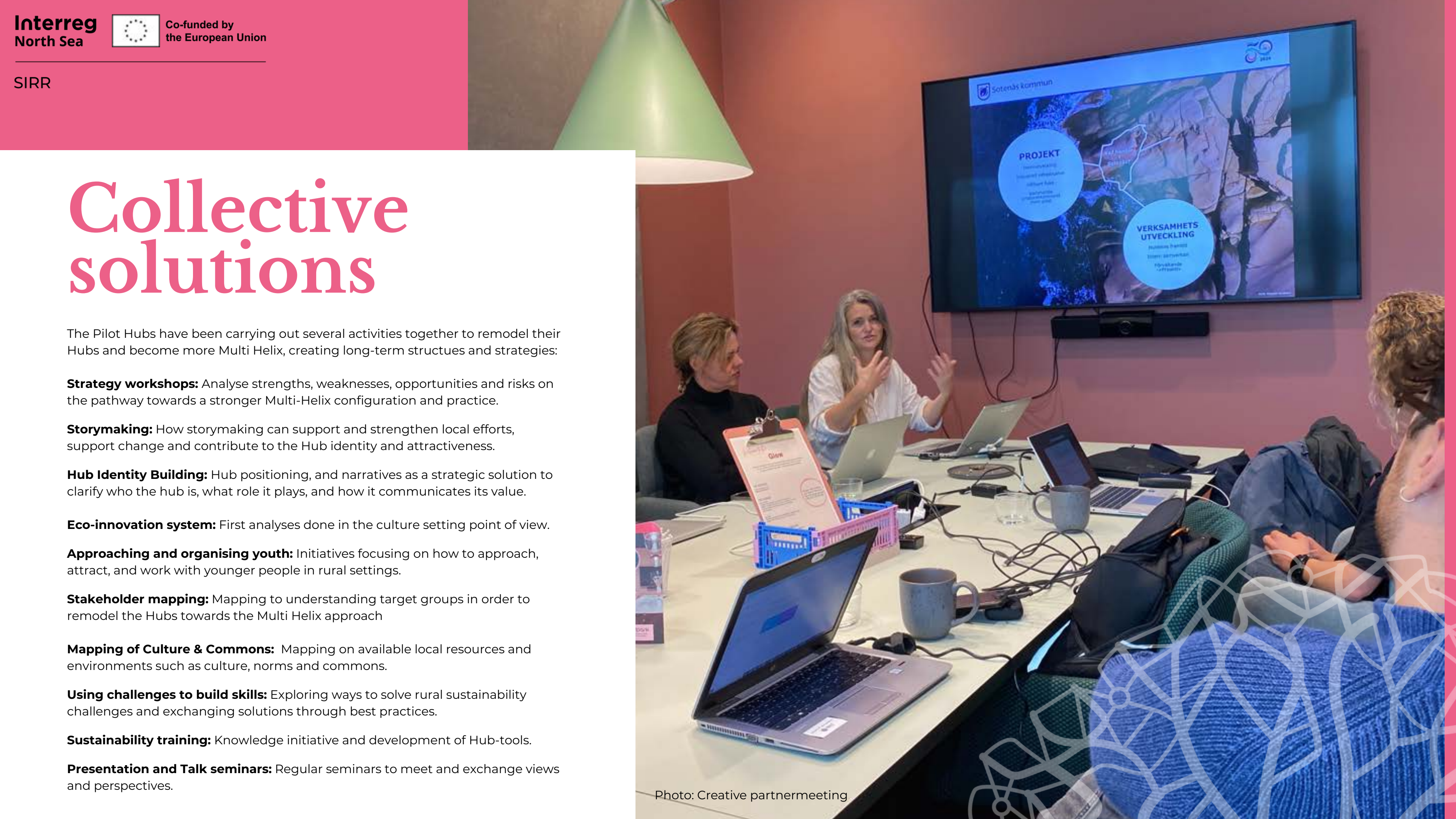
We already now recognise the value of the Multiple Helix approach, and the Pilot Hubs have gained greater knowledge about their key as well as potential stakeholders to further improve cooperation and constitute pathways to more sustainable, innovative and resilient communities.

We continuously work to involve as many takers and end users as possible. Example, there have been situations where the project Pilot Hubs have been contacted by the end users - the local community - to tackle local challenges via co-cooperative initiatives facilitated by the Hubs. A step towards one of the aims of the project is when the Hubs act as facilitators to Multi Helix innovation networks and stakeholder collaborations.

All Hubs are making progress to become more Multiple Helix!

Photo: Walk and talk in Sotenäs, Sweden





Collective solutions

The Pilot Hubs have been carrying out several activities together to remodel their Hubs and become more Multi Helix, creating long-term structures and strategies:

- Strategy workshops:** Analyse strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and risks on the pathway towards a stronger Multi-Helix configuration and practice.
- Storymaking:** How storymaking can support and strengthen local efforts, support change and contribute to the Hub identity and attractiveness.
- Hub Identity Building:** Hub positioning, and narratives as a strategic solution to clarify who the hub is, what role it plays, and how it communicates its value.
- Eco-innovation system:** First analyses done in the culture setting point of view.
- Approaching and organising youth:** Initiatives focusing on how to approach, attract, and work with younger people in rural settings.
- Stakeholder mapping:** Mapping to understanding target groups in order to remodel the Hubs towards the Multi Helix approach
- Mapping of Culture & Commons:** Mapping on available local resources and environments such as culture, norms and commons.
- Using challenges to build skills:** Exploring ways to solve rural sustainability challenges and exchanging solutions through best practices.
- Sustainability training:** Knowledge initiative and development of Hub-tools.
- Presentation and Talk seminars:** Regular seminars to meet and exchange views and perspectives.

Photo: Creative partnermeeting



Photo: From the left, Dr. Alistair Adam Hernández, Michael Ax, Charlotte Berg, Prof. Karl Martin Born

WP Leaders’ insights

“ We have a good understanding of what the Hub's are involved in, how their stakeholder networks look like, what their current and future challenges are. And we have been able to support them in terms of strategic development. Now we are planning to dig deeper into the hub's capacity to shape pathways of local and regional development. ”

- Dr. Alistair Adam Hernández, WP3

“ The connection between the hubs are developing into more organic relationships, but we still need a lot of facilitating through ongoing discussions and workshops. That allows us WP leaders to design knowledge forums and targeted activities to support each hub's development. ”

- Charlotte Berg, WP1

“ Sometimes you have small surprises, and it can be difficult to assess the progress of such. But I think the most important is the feeling of actually getting somewhere and having activities. ”

- Michael Ax, WP2

“ We are dealing with different Hubs which have different structures and organisational backgrounds. So we're trying to find out what kind of effects their structural background can have. But it's not only as a structure. If you look at the Hubs, it is also the changes within the Hubs, and we can notice that all the Hubs have totally different degrees of matureness. ”

- Prof. Karl Martin Born, WP3



Knowledge partners

The knowledge partners in the SIRR project, focus on analysing and comparing the Multi-Helix Pilot Hubs to support sustainable rural development. Their work bridges science and practice, emphasising collaboration and transformation in rural and coastal areas.





SIRR

AUD Saint-Omer Flandre intérieure

The Agency supports the CCPL in developing a hub located at the Maison France Services in Lumbres and in the implementation of their actions.

The Agency provided expertise for workshops on the French Climate and Resilience Law, particularly the ZAN objective (Zero Net Land Artificialisation), which aims to halve land consumption compared to 2011–2020 levels. These workshops informed local elected representatives on the law's implications for land use planning.



Photo 1: Public Gardens of Saint-Omer
Photo 2: The theatre is nicknamed “the Coffee Mill” because of its architecture
Photo 3: Historic streets of Saint-Omer



Our milestones and insights

The Agency will continue to support the CCPL and the implementation of the actions in the European partnership. The aim is to build the resilience Plan and the other actions with all the stakeholders in implementing the SIRR methodology and to share with the partners our results.

The Agency continues to assist with a consultation process on land use reduction and engaged in a broader ecological strategy with CCPL and CAPSO (a neighboring inter-municipality). This included raising awareness among businesses about climate challenges and fostering collective solutions.

After severe flooding in November 2023 and January 2024, the Agency helps to develop an inter-municipality Protection Plan to improve flood and risk management. She also starts working on a Resilience Plan with the other intermunicipality of the territory, focusing on coordination between public and private stakeholders and the population to increase the region's resilience.

“ The SIRR project is very useful for us: it enables to share vision and methodology to common stakeholders ! ”



AUD Saint-Omer Flandre intérieure



University of Vechta

Within SIRR, VISTRA acts as the lead partner for the project’s knowledge generation. In partnership, we aim to analyse and compare the participating multiple helix Hubs to identify possible supporting and hindering factors affecting the deepening process towards a consolidated Multi-Helix approach and questioning the efficiency of different pathways and structures towards it.

“ We consider continuous feedback with the hubs as well as their constant accompaniment together with our partners in SIRR key elements of transdisciplinary and transformational science. ”

- Prof. Karl Martin Born, Local Project Manager



Photo: SIRR Annual Partnership Conference in Vechta

Our milestones and insights

Since the launch of the SIRR project, VISTRA has played a central role in shaping the understanding of Multi Helix innovation Hubs in rural regions. Early efforts focused on developing a first typology of Hubs and a comparative framework to analyse their structures and dynamics. Through two comprehensive surveys and ongoing collaboration with knowledge partners, VISTRA gathered valuable insights into governance models, stakeholder engagement, and regional strategies.

Building on this foundation, VISTRA has designed and facilitated knowledge exchange formats during the SIRR annual partnership conferences, contributed to academic publications, and led strategic workshops with local Pilot Hubs. These workshops, grounded in a double SWOT-TOWS methodology, enabled the Hubs to co-develop actionable strategies. Currently, VISTRA is working on further empirical approaches to refine an analytical framework for territorial transformative capacity, which will offer guidance for Multi-Helix Hubs in and beyond SIRR.

VISTRA's transdisciplinary approach, in close collaboration with knowledge partners and reflecting knowledge on an equal footing with Hub practitioners, has significantly advanced the understanding and strategic development of Multi-Helix Hubs in rural innovation ecosystems.

Photo: SIRR Annual Partnership Conference in Louvigné



University of Vechta



University West

The research of University West (UW) focuses on developing theoretical models that integrate the Multi-Helix Model with Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) to enhance the understanding and facilitation of learning processes. Additionally, we conduct a longitudinal study on the qualitative mapping of knowledge development in participating hubs, examining their imple-mentation and interpretation of the Multi Helix Model, with a particular emphasis on learning and knowledge transfer.



UW has gained insights into how rural development can benefit from more flexible and locally adapted innovation models. Traditional approaches, such as the Triple and Quadruple Helix, often rely on predefined categories of stakeholders, which may not fully capture the complexity of rural communities. UW has started to look at the Multi-Helix model, which allows for greater adaptability, making it possible to engage a diverse range of stakeholders, including (but not being limited to) public institutions, academia, local businesses, and civil society. By fostering stronger connections between these groups, the model supports collaboration, knowledge sharing, and innovation tailored to local needs.



Photo: Creative meeting

Our milestones and insights

SIRR has highlighted not only the need to define the Multi-Helix approach but also the importance of flexible models for continuous innovation. This is especially crucial for smaller rural areas, where strengthening communities and counteracting urbanization trends are key.

A major milestone so far has been the development of a conceptual framework for the Multiple Helix model together with University of Vechta, designed to be adaptable to different local contexts based on specific needs and conditions. This flexibility enables collaboration and knowledge-sharing across various regions to a greater extent than already existing innovation models.

Additionally, University West has worked with students to explore the differences between collaboration, cooperation, and coordination in learning and knowledge creation within SIRR – relating to their expertise in Work-Integrated learning.

“ Through this project, we have not only tried to conceptualise the model but have also been inspired to continue refining the Multiple-Helix approach. Our goal is to develop it into a more practical and nuanced framework for fostering sustainable and resilient rural development. The collaboration that takes place when multiple actors co-create is vital, helping to drive meaningful and lasting change. ”

- Wilma Lundqvist Westin, University West



Photo: University West SIRR team

University West



Aarhus University

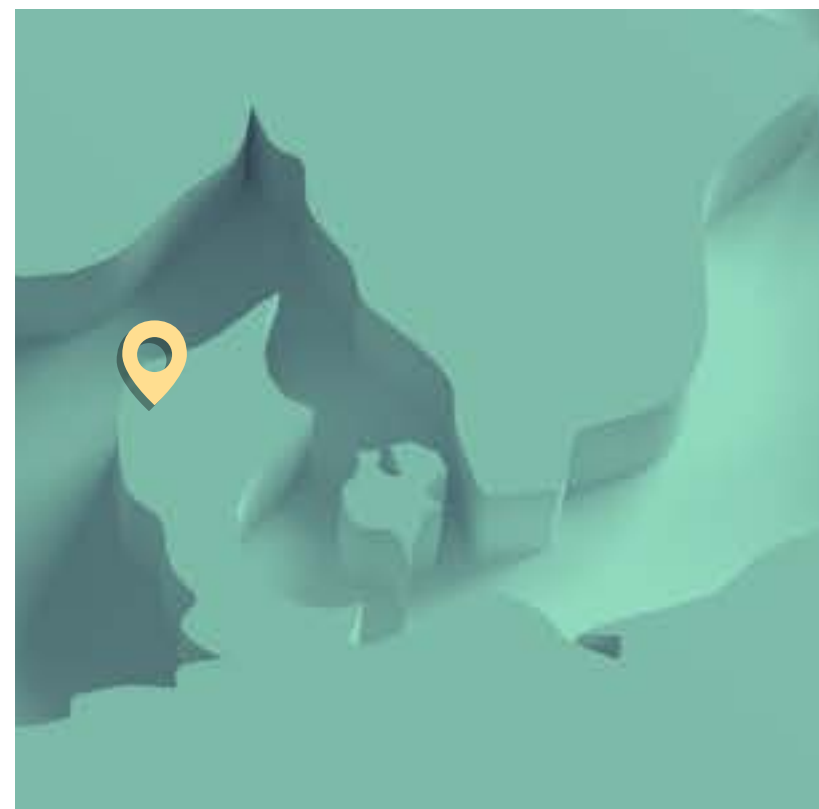
Aarhus University (AU) Herning has developed a general stakeholder mapping tool in collaboration with Laesoe Hub, Skagen Hub, Sotenäs Hub and University of Vechta. The tool is designed to be accessible and adaptable to the diverse needs of SIRR Pilot Hubs. In August 2024, AU Herning introduced the final Excel-based mapping tool in a webinar, demonstrating its functionality and providing an opportunity for discussion. We continue to offer support, including a stakeholder mapping workshop with Stenvad Mosebrug Hub.

Beyond stakeholder mapping, we are working with the Laesoe Hub and Stenvad Mosebrug Hub on business case projects, involving AU Herning students. These cases include student visits and collaboration with the Hubs. The assignment semester began in February 2025, with case presentations in late May/early June 2025. This initiative aims to establish a framework for future Hub-university collaborations.

Additionally, AU has played an active role in the development of the SIRR Youth Online Workshop (March 2024) and contributed to stakeholder surveys developed by University of Vechta.

AU Herning is dedicated to facilitating collaborative research and development in the ecosystem of companies, public organisations, and other stakeholders in the region.

Photo: Aarhus University



Our milestones and insights

AU Herning developed a general stakeholder mapping tool for the SIRR project, with the aim of creating a simple usable tool, easy to access and that meets different wishes and needs at the different hubs of the SIRR project. The tool was then introduced for the Pilot Hubs via a webinar, offering guidance and support. AU Herning has since been available for questions and help with using the Excel/mapping process in the sheet.

AU Herning has been collaborating with Laesoe and Stenvad Mosebrug Hubs on business cases, involving student visits and assignments, with presentations in May/June 2025. This collaboration aims to set a framework for future Hub-University cases, developed in collaboration between Higher Educational Institutions, the Hubs and their stakeholders. Additionally, contribute with knowledge to the other SIRR Hubs and for dissemination purposes aiming to reach a higher impact of the results. AU Herning also participated in and contributed to the SIRR Youth Online Workshop in March 2024.

The SIRR Surveys highlighted the communication challenges in transnational projects. There is a significant gap between researchers' terminology (e.g., English) and that of Hub employees and stakeholders (e.g., Danish). In Hub research, two forms of 'translation' are needed: subject terminology and national language. The first two surveys emphasized the importance of meeting respondents *"where they are"* and speaking their language, both national and subject specific.



Photo: Aarhus University front area



Aarhus University

HoloHouse

HoloHouse has made progress in developing and implementing sustainability-focused learning initiatives. Key milestones include piloting an e-learning course for businesses and municipalities, conducting an SDG assessment with KPIs, and launching a civil society e-learning platform. Additionally, they have started a bachelor thesis project and initiated the creation of an e-learning program. Through work-integrated learning, HoloHouse is generating sustainability reports that contribute to the project's knowledge base.

Activities carried out

- Piloted e-learning on sustainability for businesses and municipalities
- Assessed SDGs with measurable KPIs
- Prepared a civil society e-learning course
- Finalised translations and course releases
- Launched a bachelor thesis on sustainability
- Developed e-learning for grades 6-9
- Led a workshop on pitching e-learning
- Support the Hubs with student practises and internships

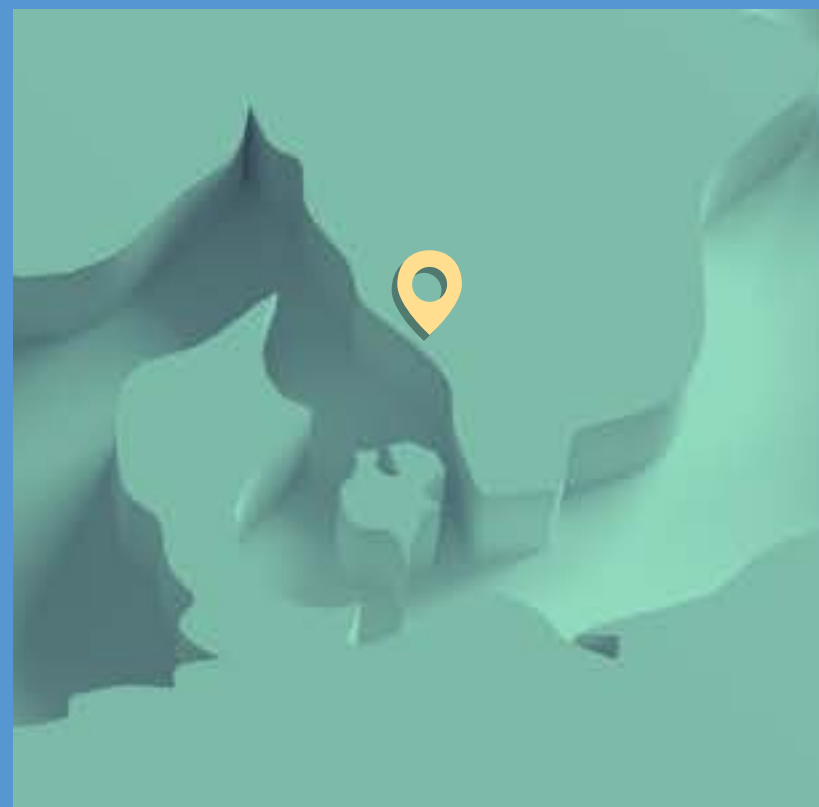


Photo: SIRR team at HoloHouse



Our milestones and insights

HoloHouse has gained valuable insights into stakeholder engagement in sustainability education. Work-integrated learning effectively enhances reports and student expertise. Collaboration with municipalities and businesses highlights the need for tailored sustainability training. Storytelling workshops reinforce the importance of clear, compelling narratives for sustainability initiatives.

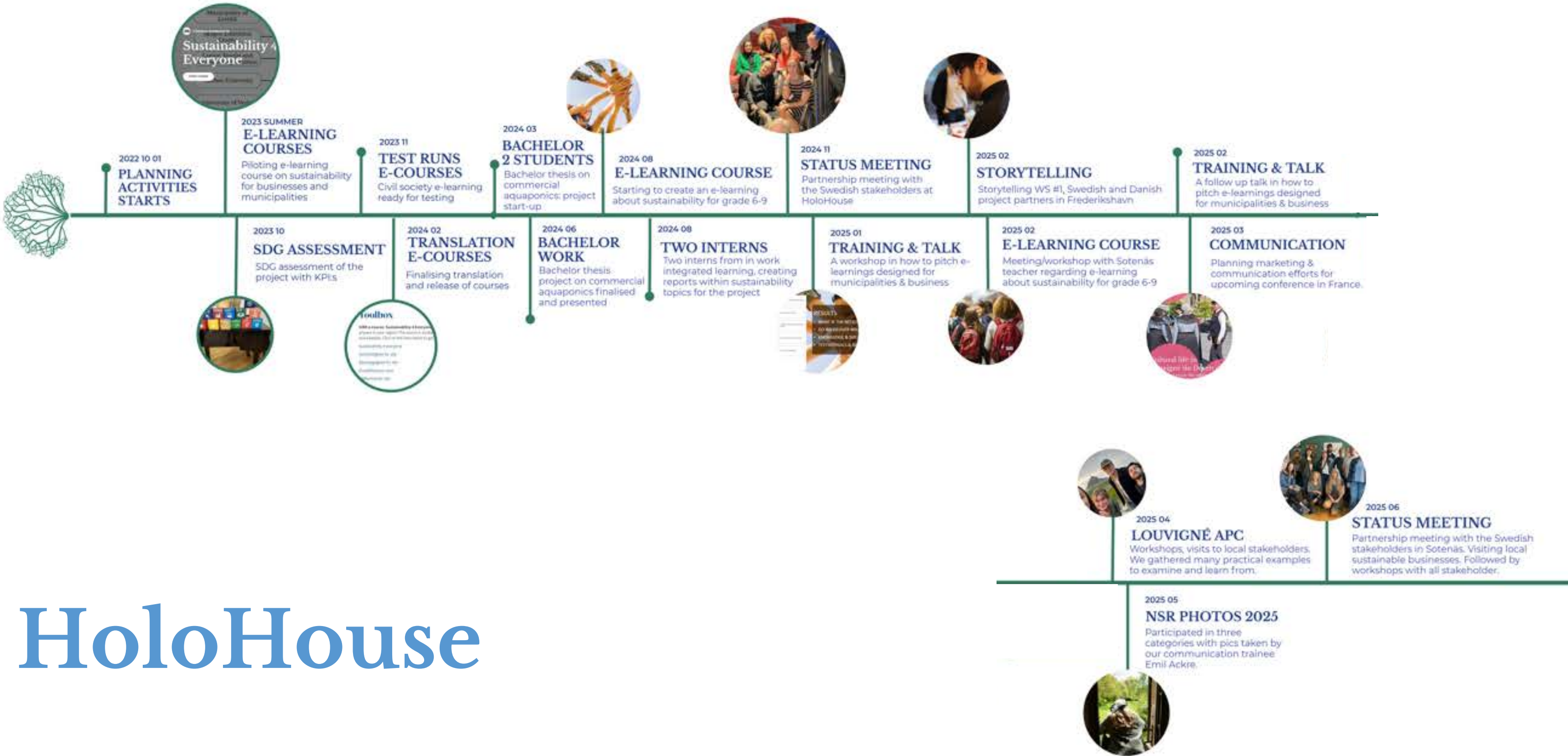
HoloHouse has developed and piloted multiple sustainability-focused e-learning courses for municipalities, businesses, and civil society while fostering strategic collaborations and knowledge sharing.

Current focus and activities

- Refining sustainability e-learning for businesses, municipalities and civil society
- Developing sustainability education for grades 6-9
- Expanding work-integrated learning and research
- Strengthening stakeholder engagement through meetings and workshops



Photo: Partnership meeting



HoloHouse



Project results and progress

The SIRR Hubs have undoubtedly gained new and valuable insights into diverse thematic fields, such as their hub configuration, goals, and interactions with stakeholders, thanks to research, knowledge and support activities. A powerful insight consists in recognising the notable differences between the Hubs, whilst simultaneously acknowledging common challenges in local/regional as well as Hub strategic development.

The increased capacity to enhance the Hubs' structures and practices has been recognised, and the neutral role of knowledge partners in providing insights that confirm or refute assumptions in a qualified and methodologically sound manner is highly valued.

A purposeful and theory-driven stakeholder mapping has led to greater awareness of the regional innovation ecosystem, its participants, dynamics, and their bilateral relationships with the Hubs. Moreover, the detailed analysis has provided a better understanding of their existing and potential Multi Helix configurations and the initial steps towards engaging with underrepresented helixes.

The importance of dedicated and professional communication is indispensable for successfully undertaking this task.

Altogether, the WP3 activities have enabled the Hubs to achieve greater clarity regarding what is particularly important for the strategic and future-oriented development towards a Multi Helix approach to local and regional development.



Photo: Communauté Communes Pays Lumbres, France



Project results and progress

Changes or adaption based on the support and insights

An important mindset change refers to the realisation that the partnership is an extremely capable and valuable group, rich in experience and expertise, and a source of mutual inspiration. The pronounced geographic and organisational differences, along with clear commonalities in terms of challenges and limitations, can be intelligently utilised for valuable collaboration and best practice exchange.

The issue of handcrafted communication, sensitive to stakeholder diversity in Multi Helix Hubs, has led to initial improvements in the Hub's communication strategies. This also relates to new arenas and formats, where Hubs now invite stakeholders to meet and collaborate. Both aspects stem from the awareness of the Multi Helix configuration. There is a stronger need to strategically orchestrate and benefit from synergies, which is on the Hub's agendas.

There is now a stronger focus on international collaboration, emphasising learning from others and integrating best practices. Digital seminars have been introduced to facilitate ongoing learning and development. Stakeholder mapping has been prioritised to ensure continuous improvement and adaptation to new challenges.

Different reflective frameworks offered have boosted internal discussions within the Hub teams and organisations regarding strategic development. SIRR provides validated data and neutral insights that help initiate reflective processes. Not least because of the strategic nature of SIRR, Hubs can “escape” from everyday tasks and dedicate time and resources to strategic reflection, analysis and planning.



Photo: Sotenäs, Sweden

Impact

What could be learned from us and what is the impact of the SIRR project in a greater context?

SIRR - All onboard in rural societies for a fair future. SIRR will apply the Multi Helix approach to local Hubs and make rural areas more resilient and prosperous through impacts:

- Increased local cohesion and inclusion
- Increased innovation and entrepreneurial skills with a focus on sustainability, green transition, circular economy and social values
- Retained talent and people in rural areas

SIRR is about long-term processes developing strategies. The long-lasting impact and effects will appear after 10-20 years, building on the already experiences, learnings and local effects - continuously moving towards capitalisation. Within the project, ten Pilot Hubs will undergo transformation and remodeling, and it is only after this phase that the long-term impacts will become fully apparent.



Photo: Partnership meeting Vechta 2023, Germany

Takers

SIRR - All onboard in rural societies for a fair future !

In SIRR we recognise that sustainable and fair development in rural and coastal areas is better with active participation from all sectors and actors of society.

Through a Multi-Helix approach, ensure that everyone has the possibility of becoming a taker — not in the sense of passive recipients, but as engaged actors who take responsibility, take part and take initiative together. Collaboration is key.

By aligning with the EU Green Deal, SIRR promotes inclusive development where no one is left behind. Everyone has a role to play in shaping resilient, thriving communities.

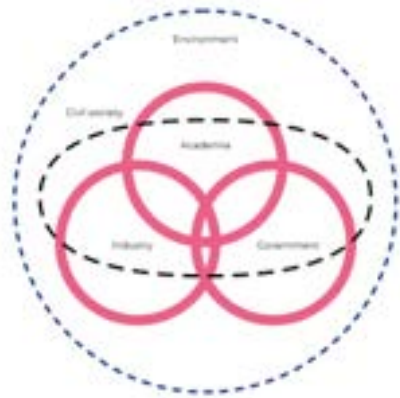


Photo: Partnership meeting Louvigné 2025, France

Photo 1: Planning meeting
Photo 2: Sandö in Sotenäs



WP Leaders’ insights

“ I have the impression that we are doing something very unique in terms of scale and let's say the geographical territorial level that we are addressing. There would be great potential in transferring the learnings to other rural localities that have the feeling helpless, not being able to shape their pathways of development. The Mutliple Helix approach and tools can help. ”

- Dr. Alistair Adam Hernández, WP3

“ Once partners begin to share openly, though, the similarities across contexts become very striking and provides a strong foundation for learning and collaboration, which I really beginning to see the fruit of in the project now. ”

- Charlotte Berg, WP1

“ I hope we can create stronger communities - even if you are far away from the larger urban centers. And also make rural areas and coastal areas more attractive for people that they want to actually stay there, live there and have a normal life all the way through, from birth to grave. ”

- Michael Ax, WP2

“ SIRR can have a big effect on other hubs as well as we deal with dealing in the world, sustainability with innovation networks. Resilience is also very important part. We can give any other regions important advice concerning dealing with these kinds of challenges because we just experience that more or less every day, that regions, especially rural regions, need to be resilient, against all external challenges. ”

- Prof. Karl Martin Born, WP3



A transnational collaboration

The transnational collaboration is to inspire and strengthen the shared European development of sustainable rural and coastal areas with focus on creating various models for growth throughout the project. The project is supported by the Interreg North Sea programme and runs for five years, with kick-off on October 1st 2022, and completion on September 30th 2027. The project has a total budget of EUR 5,659,435.

Follow developments in SIRR and our Pilot Hubs.



[Follow us on LinkedIn!](#) SIRR - Interreg NSR project



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[Learn more about the project!](#) SIRR - Interreg North Sea

All onboard in rural societies for a fair future!



Photo: Väjern harbour,
Sotenäs, Sweden

SIRR

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North Sea



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