What a "Hub" Really Is in SIRR: Organisations, Networks, and the Places in Between

If you've worked with "hubs," you'll know the word can describe a building, a team, or a whole web of partners. In SIRR, we encounter all three—often at once. That's not a flaw; it's a strength. Our hubs are instruments for local problem-solving and shared learning, spanning local administrations, businesses, universities, associations, and community anchors. Here's what we've learned so far about what a hub really is—and why that matters.

Two ways to see a hub (and why the difference matters)

In the **narrow sense**, a hub is the organisation with a mandate, budget line, and governance. That might be a **municipal department** (Communauté de Communes du Pays de Lumbres, Lysekil, Sotenäs Centre of Symbiosis), a **university team** (TrENDi Entrepreneurship Service, University West's Societal Impact Hub), or an **association/foundation** (Stenvad Mosebrug, Læsø Tourist & Business Association, Skagen Education Centre).

In the **wider sense**, a hub also means the **network of partners and users** that give it power: local SMEs and associations, schools and universities, public services and volunteers, citizens and visitors. Sotenäs shows how a municipal innovation department can convene industry, academia, and civil society around industrial and social symbiosis. TrENDi and University West's Hub demonstrate what happens when you orient a hub around **knowledge-to-practice flows**—students, researchers, and local stakeholders collaborating on real problems.

This dual view matters because **operational models** have an influence on possible outcomes. In-house municipal hubs bring **stronger legitimacy** and alignment with policy. University hubs carry **methods, international links, and talent**. Independent associations bring **agility** and entrepreneurial energy. SIRR, as an Interreg North Sea European Project, benefits by having the mix—the hubs can compare pros and cons, learn from each other, and contribute to build up territorial resilience.

Place matters—but the hub is also a method

Some hubs are clearly **places you can visit and use**. **L'Arobase,** in the French Town of **Louvigné du Désert,** turned a former medical practice into a co-working and cultural third place; the building lowers barriers, sparks serendipity, and gives sceptics of rural innovativeness something tangible. **Stenvad Mosebrug's** identity is inseparable from its setting—a former peat plant, railway, and green spaces provide a historical backbone and sense of belonging for local population. **TrENDi's** on-campus "Box" is able to improve student engagement compared with its earlier off-campus set-up.

Others are **conceptual first, spatial second**. **CCPL's** "CCPL-touch" – as they put it – is a way of doing public administration creatively, thinking out of the box together with local stakeholders. **Lysekil's Hub** operates as a strategic initiative to rebuild trust through dialogue and place branding. **Sotenäs** functions as a municipal development unit that coordinates, challenges, and connects partners and users within the hub more than it hosts.

The sweet spot we see in SIRR is where **place and method reinforce each other**: the room confers legitimacy, inclusion and space for positive change; the method ensures territorial stakeholders get together and spark innovation and collaboration.

A short history: how origin stories shape today's hubs

Hubs arrive by different routes. Some are **mature organisations** that have pivoted over time:

- **Skagen Education Centre (SUCSKA)** (est. 1988) evolved from adult education into a project-savvy broker with a reputation as a "funding radar."
- **Communauté de Communes du Pays de Lumbres (CCPL)** (since 1997 → 36 municipalities today) embodies the long arc of inter-municipal cooperation, pairing service delivery with inventive public engagement.
- **Sotenäs Centre of Symbiosis** (2015) shifted from stakeholder-led governance to a municipal department model—boosting internal coordination but risking weaker external steering and influence.
- **Læsø Tourist & Business Association** (2017): based at Vesterø harbour, but chiefly a **distributed programme and network**—bridging tourism, business, and community via contracts, partnerships, volunteers, and digital channels (e.g., VisitLæsø.dk), not a single room.

Others are **newcomers or reboots** born of political will and renewal:

- **Stenvad Mosebrug** refounded in 2022 to expand beyond a seasonally run heritage museum, is now a year-round cultural centre, museum and meeting

place – the "Mosebrugscenter" – with a comprehensive sustainability programming, hosted within the.

- **L'Arobase** (2024) emerged from a decade-old ambition to support local enterprise, now proving its value through co-working usage, community meetings and cultural footfall.
- **Lysekil's Hub** launched to counter population decline and rebuild administrative trust culture.
- **TrENDi Entrepreneurship Service** (2020) and **HV Societal Impact Hub** (2025, relaunch) reflect a university push to turn knowledge and methods into societal impact.

Each path leaves a mark and is affected by adverse or favourable conditions: **election cycles** and municipal reforms mould public hubs; **funding regimes and academic calendars** shape university hubs; **associations** navigate legitimacy via relationships, delivery, and steady outcomes. Finally, the role of entrepreneurial and committed individuals pop up repeatedly along the way.

Identities: diverse on the surface, common at the core

Across SIRR, hubs describe themselves in different ways: **innovation department** (Sotenäs), **civic/strategic initiative** (Lysekil), **third place** (L'Arobase, Stenvad Mosebrug), **island intermediary** (LTE), **skills/project broker** (SUCSKA), **university entrepreneurship/impact platform** (TrENDi, UW SI-Hub).

In practice, the hubs share a **common DNA**: a commitment to **stakeholder connection and convening**—creating contexts where both usual and unusual suspects can exchange ideas and, at best, work together for the future of their territory. They show a clear bias towards **experimentation and learning**—pilots, workshops, policy prototypes, and out-of-the-box formats—paired with a sustained focus on **capacity-building**, from entrepreneurial skills to organisational development and civic dialogue. A **throughline of sustainability** ties the work together, spanning industrial symbiosis, education for sustainable development, and green tourism. Above all, each hub is **anchored in its territory**: its mission is to help the place become fit for the future by **increasing transformative capacity and resilience** on the journey towards sustainability.
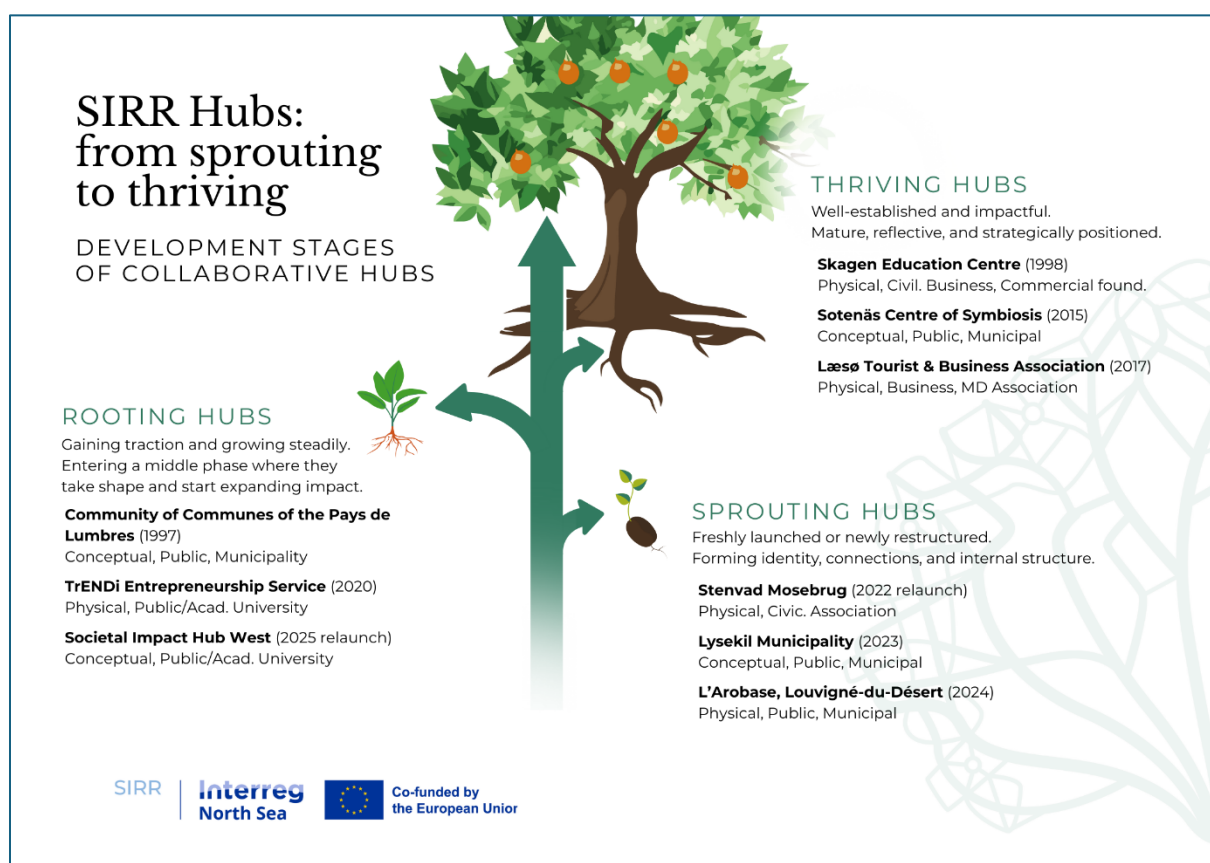
Thematic focus areas & expertise (at a glance)

- **Sustainability, resilience and circularity:** CCPL's climate planning (PCAET); Sotenäs' industrial and social symbiosis; Stenvad Mosebrug's heritage and green tourism.
- **Civic dialogue and place reputation:** Lysekil's listening-first approach and place branding; CCPL's participatory formats.

- **Entrepreneurship and skills:** TrENDi's entrepreneurship as a life skill; SUCSKA's upskilling and organisational development; LTE's entrepreneur support and labour attraction; L'Arobase's co-working + light incubation.
- **Culture and community cohesion:** Stenvad Mosebrug's workshops and schools programming; L'Arobase's Micro-Folie and community use; CCPL's cultural and sports seasons.
- **Academia-to-practice bridges:** Uni. West SIHW Hub's think tanks (e.g., Future Healthcare) and student engagement; TrENDi's regional/EU projects and internationalisation.

A working typology of SIRR hubs

This typology was developed from the analysis above and from **short interviews** with hub representatives, using an **organisational diagnosis tool** to surface patterns in mandate, maturity, partnerships, governance, and capabilities. It's a snapshot for learning and peer exchange. The following infographic summarises main characteristics of the different hub types.

SIRR Hubs: from sprouting to thriving

DEVELOPMENT STAGES OF COLLABORATIVE HUBS

THRIVING HUBS
Well-established and impactful.
Mature, reflective, and strategically positioned.

Skagen Education Centre (1998)
Physical, Civil. Business, Commercial found.

Sotenäs Centre of Symbiosis (2015)
Conceptual, Public, Municipal

Læsø Tourist & Business Association (2017)
Physical, Business, MD Association

ROOTING HUBS
Gaining traction and growing steadily.
Entering a middle phase where they
take shape and start expanding impact.

Community of Communes of the Pays de Lumbres (1997)
Conceptual, Public, Municipality

TrENDi Entrepreneurship Service (2020)
Physical, Public/Acad. University

Societal Impact Hub West (2025 relaunch)
Conceptual, Public/Acad. University

SPROUTING HUBS
Freshly launched or newly restructured.
Forming identity, connections, and internal structure.

Stenvad Mosebrug (2022 relaunch)
Physical, Civic. Association

Lysekil Municipality (2023)
Conceptual, Public, Municipal

L'Arobase, Louvigné-du-Désert (2024)
Physical, Public, Municipal

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🌱 **Sprouting Hubs** (freshly launched or newly restructured)

These hubs are still **forming identity, relationships, and routines**. Visibility is emerging, teams are highly motivated, and **experimentation is intense**—pilots, pop-ups, and quick tests to find fit. Organisational scaffolding is **deliberately light**, with a **narrow activity scope** while trust with users and local/regional partners is built.

🌿 Rooting Hubs (gaining traction and growing steadily)

Here hubs **consolidate strategy and strengthen identity**, while **expanding activities** that worked in the first phase. Procedures and internal workflows are being **codified**, partnerships deepen, and **more ambitious projects** start. Public presence and credibility rise as offers become clearer.

🌳 Thriving Hubs (well established and impactful)

Mature hubs **reflect strategically** on their value proposition and **track societal impact**. Governance is strengthened for **alignment and transparency**, programmes diversify, and ecosystem configurations (multi-helix) are reassessed. The work shifts toward **stewarding complex networks** and actively shaping a coherent public narrative.

The SIRR Hub Matrix: Type, Operating Model & Helix at a Glance

The infographic below positions hubs across **three maturity stages**— 🌱 Sprouting, 🌿 Rooting, and 🌳 Thriving—and shows, for each, the **type of hub** (physical third place or conceptual platform), **ownership and operational model** (e.g., municipal/public, university/public–academic, civic/non-profit, or business/association, including legal form), and **identity features** (e.g., dialogue platform, third place, innovation department, entrepreneurship education service, development catalyst).
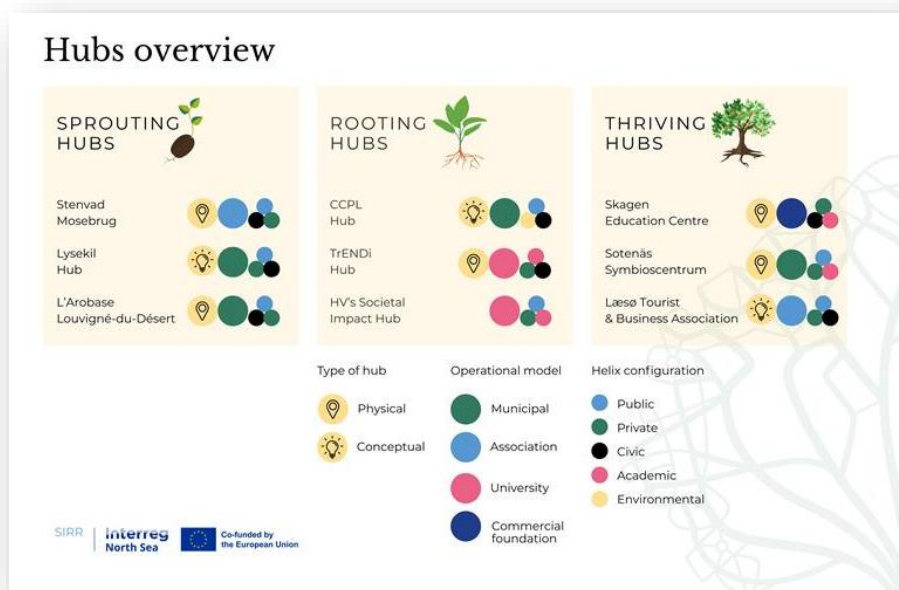
It also highlights each hub's **main thematic focus** (from dialogue and place branding to industrial/social symbiosis, skills development, and tourism/business services) and the **multiple-helix configuration**, indicating the relative weight of key actor groups (e.g., public–private–civic or academic–private–civic).

Final reflections and what's next

Across SIRR, diverse hub models can be considered a strength to learn from—but they also bring trade-offs that need dealing with.

Funding fragility: projectisation fuels innovation yet makes planning brittle. **So, how to counteract this fact?** Try to braid grants with anchor revenues (service contracts, memberships, fee-for-service) and modest reserves to steady core teams, the real drivers of the Hubs. **People dependence:** new or relaunched hubs often hinge on a few champions. **This can barely be avoided, but:** How about, spreading leadership, documenting play- and guidebooks, and planning succession in advance to avoid single-point failure. **Expectation mismatches:** for example, university-based hubs focused on capacity-building can maybe be (miss-)judged on short-term start-up counts, leading to a misinterpretation of their impact and success. **How to prevent this?** It is necessary to align expectations with, e.g.: dual-track KPIs—delivery metrics alongside capability and more systemic indicators, that reflect impact. **Governance shifts:** technocratic steering streamlines internal coordination but can mute external voice. So, how to implement the multiple-helix principle in the steering of organisations? By designing hybrids—clear internal decisions plus external advisory forums and open network rituals. **Legitimacy in small places:** neutrality and trust are strategic assets. **How to protect such a fragile intangible asset?** With transparent communication, inclusive convening, clear conflict-of-interest rules, and a "no surprises" ethos.

Outlook: We'll **continue to learn from each other within SIRR**, turning cross-hub exchanges into shared knowledge and **practical guidelines for the multiple-helix approach to territorial development**. We'll braid funding, install co-leads and succession maps, adopt dual-track KPIs, and tune governance with external advisers. Most of all, we'll keep advancing the **hub-as-method**—codifying facilitation, partnership-building, and measurement so effective practices travel and scale across places. Finally, we are committed to sharing our insights and spread the word to create an even greater impact toward our vision "*All onboard in rural societies for a fair future!*".