



EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT



FUND INTERREG IIIB

Community Initiative concerning Transnational
Co-operation on Spatial Development 2000 – 2006

ICT for SMEs

Germany – The Netherlands – Denmark – UK – Sweden – Belgium – Norway

<http://ictsmes.rkk.no>

Region Rogaland

Interim Report

Period: Start of Project until 12 / 2005

1. Implementation of the project

1.1 Local

The following are involved at the local/regional level:

- NHO confederation of trade & industry
- Innovation Norway
- Rogaland knowledge park
- Haugaland Vekst
- Sauda Vekst
- “ARNE”-group (the larger Stavanger region representing 14 municipalities)

Before start-up of the project, these experiences existed:

- Rogaland region is one of the most industrialized and internationalized counties in Norway. This is both due to a local culture used to collaborate and international companies that have settled in the area.
- ICT ACCESS & USE
- All municipality centre and all industrial centre in the region have broadband access.
- In 1999 30% of the companies used internet. We expect that the number now is above 80%, and the number of companies using ICT also such as having at least a PC for some cause is above 90%
- In Petroleum, ICT, and other high tech industries, the number of people using ICT is close to 100%. In other more traditional trade oriented companies the number of ICT users will be only a few, often administrative, employees.
- Estimates are that 2/3 of homes in Stavanger- Sandnes area have Internet and use ICT to some degree. In the most rural areas 1/10 is an estimate.

- As far as we know all schools in the county are using ICT and internet from 1st grade to university. The amount of use depends on equipment available and teacher knowledge.

The existing connections and network were a very important basis for the project.

The main local / regional problems related to ICTs in SMEs were

- Time, competence, money have been mentioned.

Involvement local / regional stakeholders were done through

- Personal contact, distribution of brochures

The following types of stakeholders have been involved:

- Politicians, regional planners, SMEs

SMEs were involved through

- Letters, telephone, personal contact, workshop, Best practice conference, courses (Information Society and Sustainable Rural Development and Practical ICT for SMEs)

1.2 Transnational

The partner meetings have provided an opportunity to discuss common problems and learn from others. In particular the last partner meeting and the Best Practice Conference provided a good understanding of the variety practices and methods that the partners have chosen from a common framework which is the project goals and the interview guide and questionnaire. See also "11. Other outcomes".

2. SME support structure

2.1 Describe your local SME support structure / centre

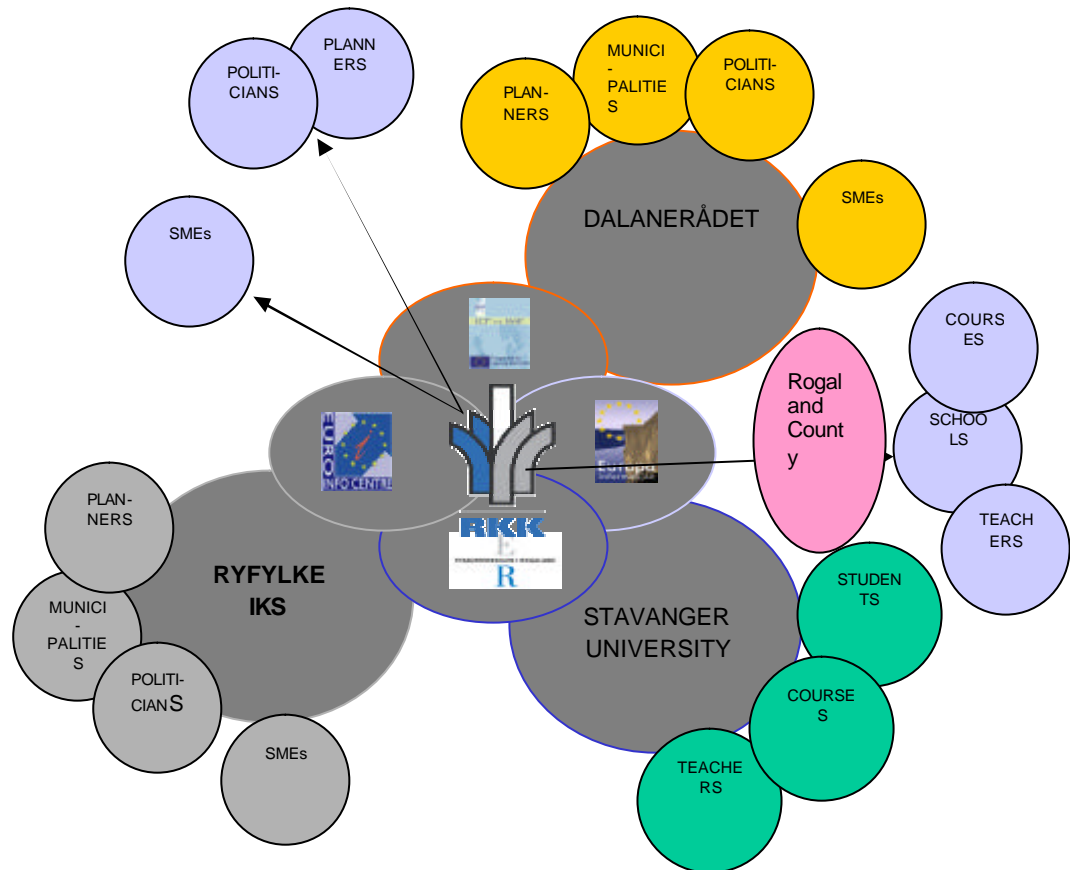
The support structure consists of a coordinated effort between the four sub-regions of Rogaland, representing rural areas surrounding the economically dominating Stavanger region (Dalane, Ryfylke, Sauda and Haugaland).

In each sub-region there is an inter-municipal structure organised as an IKS-enterprise or similar, which ensures the contact with local SMEs. The support structure is coordinated by RKK. In each of the regions we channel initiatives amongst them and

disseminate good practices and examples for ICT-use. RKK also facilitates concrete courses and awareness-rising activities related to improved ICT use towards local SMEs in close contact and collaboration with each sub-region.

Project activities are communicated to the support structure network and serves as a foundation for both recruitment and dissemination to concrete initiatives, e.g. courses free of charge the local SMEs may attend. The local bodies involve both public planners, policy makers and other local business development stakeholders. These bodies are in this project also supported by the county administration and the local university, so that the support structure has access to the use of region wide portals such as the "iRogaland.no" and the university's last-year students for elaboration of cases in each SME, as two concrete examples.

The project thus strongly enhances the degree of collaboration between regional and local level, and supports the SMEs on a close and tactical level, ensuring that there is an operational level working in the intersection between theoretical considerations and research based know-how at the one hand and offers being developed in what the SMEs claim they need in terms of practical skills and operational support.



RKK will, together with this support structure network, operate the virtual support centre now being established as a hub for various related initiatives in this field at irogaland.no in the shape of an online helpdesk early in 2006 (See below).

2.2 What are the first results of your local support structure?

The activities implemented in the project (workshop, conference, Transrural course and Practical ICT for SME), and the contact between the regional partners. The survey result which will be followed up with the individual SMEs.

A new local body has been formed in Haugaland where there was previously none (Haugaland Vekst IKS). This is not due to the project, but: HVIKS has been invited and has joined the support structure through collaboration agreements signed with RKK as coordinator with the aim to enhance the same topics on the local level. This is an example of this project contributing to synergies that enhances existing or originally non-related local initiatives.

An online tool has been elaborated and developed on paper, and has now been set in production.

2.3 What are the next steps to increase the support for the SMEs?

A Helpdesk to support SMEs is under development, and will be completed in February.

The selected SMEs will be connected with students who are finishing a Bachelor in Economics and Informatics. The students will base their talks with the SMEs on the results from the survey, and summarize their findings in a report. The partner will follow-up the findings based on the needs.

2.4 Specials of the support structure

In the Rogaland region, there is a strong tradition in the field of inter-municipal collaboration, grouping the local municipalities according to "sub-regions" by economic interest and geographic area. In Rogaland you will find several such regions in addition to the greater Stavanger region, and we have aimed to include the rural areas surrounding Stavanger: Dalane in the south of Rogaland and Ryfylke in the middle are formal partners of the project. In addition we have aimed to include the remaining areas of Rogaland by strengthening ties with the Sauda area in the north and Haugaland in the west.

Very often business and economic development is one of the focus areas for such inter-municipal organisations, and they are the primary contact between regional development stakeholders and the SMEs in each region. It has therefore been crucial in order to recruit to, disseminate information about and organize activities by communicating through these bodies. It would also be considered tactless to by pass them given the topics for this project. We are therefore happy that the ICT for SMEs project in a very concrete way has improved contact between similar structures in the various districts.

RKK as coordinating partner for Norway has been able to draw attention to the resource centre model and use of local colleges as an arena for practical improvement of not just the ICT skills in local SMEs but also the increasing competence development taking place locally and virtually online through the use of ICT.

2.5 Are there any PR materials of your support structure / centre

See attached brochures and articles.

3. Interview phase

3.1 Describe your approach of getting in contacts with interviewed SMEs

We selected 100 SMEs in two regions: Dalane and Ryfylke. They were all contacted by mail and by phone before we visited each one to conduct an interview. The questionnaire (in Norwegian) and the interview guide were used.

3.2 Results of interviews

101 SMEs were interviewed. Each interview took approximately 2 hours excluding travel.

3.3 Analysis interview phase (how)

The interviewers were well received. It was also a good introduction of the support structure (Ryfylke IKS and Dalane Næringsråd), and it created expectations to a follow-up.

3.4 Next steps as result of the interview phase

The criteria for selecting candidates for the audits were:

- Geographical distribution
- Motivation

4. Audit phase

4.1 Audit Design

30 SMEs were invited to a workshop in June 2005 with the purpose of presenting the results and have a dialogue on specific needs and follow-up measures – 13 participants. – see attachment.

The same SMEs were also invited to the Best Practice Conference in Egersund in December 2005.

Each company will be visited again during the spring of 2006 by students from Stavanger University. They will further explore what specific needs the SMEs have, and explore ways of meeting those needs. Based on their recommendation, we will further follow-up the SMEs

Arena Ryfylke has been established by Ryfylke iks as a meeting point for industry in the region. It deal with subjects related to marketing and facilitation for industry. Participants are mayors, chief officers, public industrial leaders and planners and business leaders from the six municipalities in Ryfylke.

A total of 30 participants meet twice a year. The forum initiates actions which are followed up by Ryfylke iks. It started in June 2005 and has had one workshop over two days and in December a meeting on ongoing projects.

In the December meeting the results from the survey were presented.

4.2 Implementation of the audits on local level

We had the first start of the audits June 2005t, however, not on an individual basis. The audit will be finished late spring 2006.

Initially students from Stavanger University will to carry out the audits?

4.3 Audit results

From the workshop these were the areas that the SMEs saw as their needs:

- ICT basic course
- ICT-support – help to develop a home page
- Sharing experiences
- Help in developing a strategy
- A support centre with access to IT competency at a reasonable price
- Web support centre for simple
- Network – local/regional and transnational

The first three items above were covered in Ryfylke through a spin-off of this project "Transrural" and "Practical ICT for SMEs". Several short courses were run during autumn 2005. The aim i to provide the SMEs with competence within a greater understanding of different areas within ICT, such as developing home pages, using search engines, using marketing campaigning tools, PowerPoint and other tools.

4.4 Evaluation of the audits - how?

To be decided.

5. Evaluation phase

5.1 Describe the evaluation process as planned at the moment

To be decided

5.2 Did you implement a local / regional action plan in the focus of the project?

Yes

5.3 Indicator System

See attachment

6. PR

6.1 Do you have a local / regional PR strategy?

Yes. The goal is to attract local and regional attention and interest for the project, so that the target groups are familiar with the content and purpose.

6.2 What actions/events were done?

- Best Practice Conference December 1, 2005 – see attachment
- Articles – see attachment
- Brochures – see attachment
- Presentations at conferences

6.3 Which effect had the PR?

Invitation to present the project in other networks (i.e. Næringforening, Innovasjon Rogaland, Innovasjon Norge, Arena Ryfylke).

6.4 Implementation of the project on the local /regional website

See attachment

6.5 How would you disseminate the results of the project after ending of the project?

We will use:

- Conferences
- Web pages
- Forum with specific theme
- Report and a press release to follow up

6.6 Is the project name implemented as brand in your region?

Yes – although mostly in Norwegian (IKT for SMB).

Are there/were there any problems with handling the project via the press

The press is normally only interested in news – i.e.

7. Best practises

7.1 How would you define "best practice"

It's difficult to define "best practice" if you don't have criteria to measure against. We have agreed to focus on "good practice" in stead.

7.2 How will you identify best practices in you region

We will use the results from the survey and the audit to identify best practices in the spring.

7.3 What is the workflow from the beginning of identification of best practice to the implementation into the best practice portfolio

According to project plan.

How will you disseminate best practice for the different target groups?

The SMEs involved in the project were invited to the Best Practice conference. Although only a few of them participated, it was an opportunity to give them more information about some of the results.

Politicians in the Dalane and Ryfylke regions have been keep informed about the project. Several brochures have been printed and widely distributed.

8. Study trips

8.1 What study trips have you done as visitor

We participated in the study trip to the company called PAJ in Sønderborg. It was well worth the time, and as a result the managing director of PAJ was invited to speak on the Best Practice Conference.

8.2 Which study trips have you arranged as host?

During the kick-off meeting in Norway, RKK arranged a presentation of the fish farming industry in Norway for all the steering groups partners present and showed them how technology is used to communicate on and from the in-shore fish farms, and to train and to educated professionals at all levels. The training is performed by Rygjabø vocational college and the target groups were visited by a visit to one of the fish farms belonging to Grieg Seafood. The use of video, web platforms and laptops were demonstrated. The study visit aimed to show how the use of ICT technology supported the local industry to be more competitive through better access to flexible training schemes, and also how a local college previously threatened by close-down and centralization turned into one of the best performing training facilities in their field, and how they managed by the use of ICT creatively, now runs several training centres and online courses at the national level.

Following the Best Practice Conference, a study trip to three different companies was arranged.

Company-visits December 2nd 2005 in Dalane

The first visit was at C-map in Eigersund. This is a company which produces electronic maritime maps. Their customers are boat owners in the widest range of the expression (from small boats to large ships). They presented how they work in international projects to develop their company.

The second visit was at Dalane Breiband in Eigersund, a local broadband supplier. They presented an interesting product concept based on an unique owner-structure. Dalane Broadband is an important supplier of ICT-infrastructure in Dalane, but also in other parts of Norway and abroad.

The last visit was at Titania in Sokndal. Titania is a large mining-company with app. 200 employees. After visiting the breath-taking mine we were show around at the production plant.

9. Sustainability

9.1 How will the material investments support the targets of the project after the end of it

Helpdesk will be used support SMEs in the future

9.2 How would you concentrate on the targets of project in the future

9.3 How has the project influenced the regional development

A goal for Rogaland county is:

- Norway's best infrastructure for the business community; Utilise e-trade and other technologies for information exchange and communications when dealing with local businesses; Utilise and develop the technological infrastructure for information and communication, both wired and wireless.

The project has expanded existing and generated new project on related subjects – i.e. Interreg Rural Broadband. It has also revealed further measures needed.

Furthermore, the project has raised the level of consciousness regarding internationalisation and European co-operation programs.

The regional partnership is a platform for future projects.

9.4 Are there any business plans or local strategy plans for the continuing work of the support structure?

Yes. The local support structure represented by each of the sub-regions has been invited by RKK to discuss the continuation of the support structure. The work performed has been presented locally in each sub-region by RKK and/or each partner, and has generally gained strong support and positive feedback on both strategic (e.g. how to continue the collaboration?) and tactical (e.g. how do we promote similar activities at the local level?).

As one concrete response there will be set up a new network aimed at the continuation of the efforts made between the partnership. This will be aimed at the same stakeholders (i.e. public economic developers and SMEs) and also involving increased European collaboration and international business orientation called "EU Network Rogaland". Steps are now being taken to ensure that this continuation work is in alignment with the regional authorities regional development plan and anchored with Innovation Norway as a stakeholder in this field. Coordination will be done by RKK as a continuation of this project.

A data system for Helpdesk has been ordered, based on adjusted specifications. Cost NOK 100000 + VAT. It will be used to support the SMEs.

9.5 What is about involvement of politicians and awareness rising of stakeholders (see application)

In the Best Practice Conference the mayors from three municipalities in the Dalane Region participated. The mayor of Egersund opened the conference, and the other two participated during the whole conference.

Politicians are on the board of directors both in RKK, Ryfylke IKS and Dalanerådet, and they are regularly updated there.

Arena Ryfylke has meeting twice a year, and in the December meeting there was a presentation of the results of the survey.

10. Material investments

Please describe which investments were done, where they are located and what will be the outcome and need of the materials for the project targets

Material description	Description of use for the project activities	Location, partner
2 Web Cam, 5 Computers, 5 Laptops, 1 Projector	For the videoconferenc/ICT-room, to be used for the support structure. For training and courses of the SMEs.	Rogaland, Norway at Rogaland Training and Education Centre
1 Web Cam, 1 Computer, 3 LCD screen	For the ICT-room, used for the support structure.	Rogaland, Norway at Dalanerådet
1 Web Cam, 1 Computer	For the ICT-room, to be used for the support structure.	Rogaland, Norway at Ryfylke IKS

Firstly, the support structure, i.e. the project partnership and associated partners, has been using the video equipment to conduct practical communication with the aim to reduce travel, thus gaining first-hand practical experience in the use of such technology.

Secondly, this first-hand experience has thus supported the use of this equipment for further demonstration purposes to a wider audience, where target groups (i.e. the SMEs) have been shown how this technology works during conferences and seminars. This is according to the idea of “seeing-is-believing” and is part of our awareness-raising strategy, demonstrating in real life how video, audio and data in real time can reduce travel costs and increased use of digital data. This is also in accordance with the overall project aim to show, through good practice, how traffic and commuting can be reduced by the use of ICT.

Thirdly, the equipment has been set up in RKK course premises, in order to provide training and seminars free of charge towards SMEs. These courses have aimed both at showing how to use the equipment and what is to be gained in terms of reduced travel cost and better general ICT-skills.

RKK originally planned for the purchase of ten personal web cameras for enabling communication in combination with data sharing inside the support structure, i.e. between the project partners and local contact points towards the local SMEs.

This smaller video equipment (Via Video) was for some reason purchased and paid for by each of the partners, thus relieving RKK the costs. The RKK budget remained however. At the same time, the need for more general and costly ICT-equipment (computers and projector) was identified as more relevant and a change in the budget was applied for without any specific statement regarding the web cameras. This is most likely due to the fact that most of these cameras were handed out during the kick-off and invoiced separately by the supplier afterwards. As a result, an increase in the amount allocated for material investments has taken place along with a shift towards other types of equipment, such as stationary computers and mobile equipment.

11. Other outcomes

As a consequence of the collaboration and the themes embedded in this project, RKK has set up courses called “practical ICT for ...” and then aimed and focused them towards local, rural SMEs. For political reasons, it is difficult to argue that one should exclude companies in one region when public funding is involved, and also to ensure proper recruitment, we

launched the “Practical ICT for Enterprises” in Ryfylke and decided to open them up to every company interested. They have proven successful in terms of two extra seminars called for. This concept of “open evenings” is a similar concept as promoted by the Belgian partner in this project. In addition to being a trans-regional spin-off it also shows that SMEs originally not selected for auditing by the partnership still manage to benefit from the project activities.

12. Attachments

PR Strategy

Articles

Ole Imsland

Dalane Tidende

Brochures

RKK

RKK and ICT

Ryfylke – the good life

Action Plan Ryfylke iks

Workshop

Invitation

Discussion

Project indicators January 2006

Support Structure Ryfylke and Dalane

Best Practice Conference presentations

Brugge presentation

Edinburgh presentation

Groningen presentation

Schleswig-Holstein part 1 presentation

Schleswig-Holstein part 2 presentation

Aabenraa presentation

Infrastructure around a Silicon Valley company

Presentation of Survey results

Course information Sustainable Rural Development

Course Information Practical ICT for SMEs

Screendumps