Interreg
Baltic Sea Region

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CIRCULAR ECONOMY
KISMET

A Co-Creation Model for Regional Development in the Food Sector

Introduction

The food sector plays a key role in regional development by boosting the local economy, creating jobs, and enhancing community well-being. Strategic initiatives, such as supporting local producers, promoting sustainable agriculture, and fostering shorter supply chains, contribute to regional self-sufficiency and economic vitality. These efforts also attract tourists and new residents while stimulating innovation and entrepreneurship and driving economic growth and resilience.

Co-creation in regional development unites diverse stakeholders—residents, businesses, government, and NGOs—to address local needs and opportunities collaboratively. This participatory approach enhances project adaptability, fosters innovation, and strengthens community commitment, leading to sustainable outcomes with impact. This presentation describes the step-by-step implementation of co-creation development.

The objective of the KISMET project is to develop sustainable local-level food production with an increased focus on utilising circular economy principles. The project is led by the South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences in collaboration with 13 international partners to create more sustainable food environments. The Enabling Programme for Sustainable Food Environments will also be developed as a result of the project. This programme includes a set of tools to promote sustainability from the perspectives of governance, demand, and production. Co-creation has been utilised in the activities of the KISMET project.

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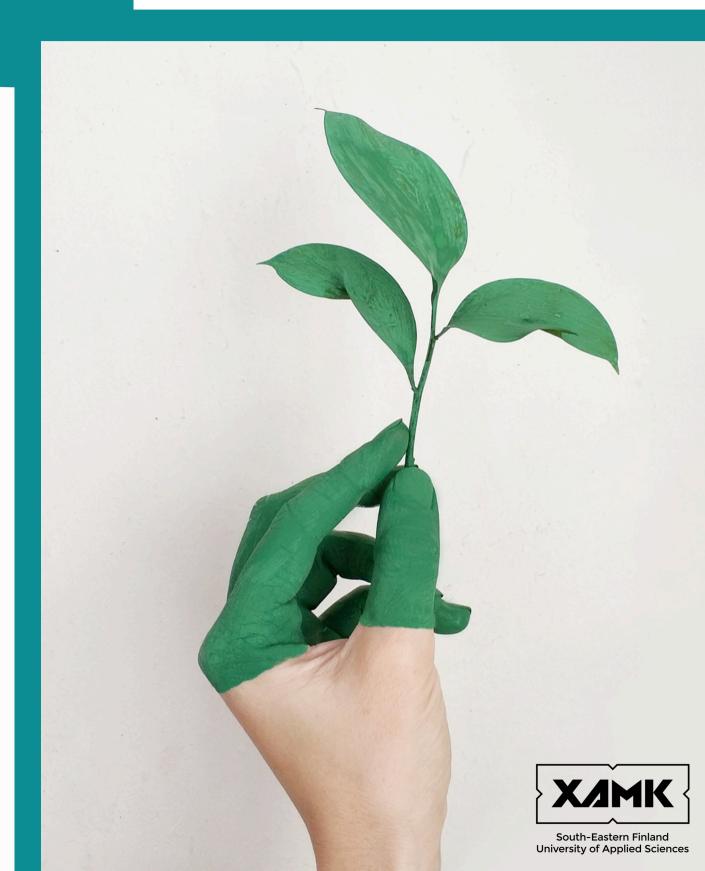
Overview

- Co-creation in regional development
- Co-creation methods
- Mapping and analysis
- Reviewing the current situation
- Setting objectives
- Planning measures
- Measurement and evaluation
- Stakeholder collaboration and communication
- Sources

Co-creation in regional development

Co-creation involves the active participation of various stakeholders in the development process, such as residents, businesses, the public sector, and organisations.

In regional development, co-creation ensures that development projects align with the needs and aspirations of local communities.

Co-creation fosters innovative solutions, increases engagement, and enhances the acceptance of development initiatives, leading to more sustainable and effective outcomes.

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Co-creation fosters innovative solutions and enhances stakeholders' commitment to the development work.

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Co-creation methods

There are several methods for co-creation that can be applied in regional development.

Workshops & working groups:
Stakeholders come together to collaboratively develop ideas and solutions to specific problems.

Surveys & interviews:
Surveys and interviews gather information from a large number of people, helping to understand their needs and perspectives.

Forums & discussion events:
Open events where people can share their opinions and discuss with other participants.

Pilots & experiments:
Practical trials where new ideas or services are tested on a small scale before broader implementation.

Digital engagement platforms:
Online tools and platforms used to collect development ideas and facilitate discussions.

Future workshops & scenario planning:
Participants collaboratively envision the future and develop scenarios to explore how various actions might impact regional development.

Hackathons & innovation competitions:
Events where participants collaboratively create new solutions through intensive teamwork.

Mapping and analysis

Mapping of the initial situation

The purpose of mapping the initial situation is to create an overview of the region's current state, strengths, development areas, and opportunities. The analysis includes so-called hard regional data and numerical values, which can be found, for example, from Statistics Finland or other official websites.

Gather information about the local food sector across various food-related industries using different methods:

- Surveys
- Interviews
- Workshops
- Online research
- Regional and city strategies
- Smart specialisation strategies
- Innovation activity assessments
- Growth outlooks or forecasts
- Analysis of the food chain and stakeholders

Analysis of the initial situation

Analyse the information gathered by addressing the following questions:

- What is unique about the region?
- Which aspects of services and operations work well and are functional?
- What specific expertise can the region offer?
- What potential remains underutilised?
- Where has the region succeeded?
- What areas are prioritised for further development?
- What strengths will serve as the foundation for building the region's future?
- What kind of networks exist among regional actors in this field, and how do they operate?

Reviewing the current situation

Write down and visualise an overview of the current situation in an easily understandable form. In the presentation, include a summary of the data and information gathered from the initial mapping.

Write down information about the region:

- Strengths
- Differentiation factors
- Strategic priorities
- Development needs
- Stakeholders and networks

Problem identification: Identify the most significant challenges and weaknesses in the food system of the city or region.

Stakeholder mapping: Find out who the key stakeholders are, such as local producers, retailers, schools, health professionals, and NGOs.

Setting objectives

Create a vision based on the background information and development prospects. Ask yourself what you want to achieve.

Determine long-term objectives:
- Set clear, measurable and realistic objectives that support the region's strategy.
- Set a timeline for objectives.

Set short-term objectives:
- Break down the long-term objectives into smaller, concrete measures.
- Schedule the timeline for the realisation of the measures and objectives.

Setting a vision and objectives for the activities is best done through co-creation with the network.

Co-creation can be carried out, for example, in a workshop.

It is important to involve all parties who participate in the development activities and those who will be affected by them.
In co-creation, stakeholders have the opportunity to influence the measures and objectives, which in turn helps them commit more effectively to the development work.

Planning measures

Define in detail:
- What measures will be taken?
- Who is responsible?
- When and how will they be implemented?

Resource allocation:
- Identify the resources needed (e.g., funding, personnel, facilities).
- Determine where these resources will come from.

Scheduling:
- Create a schedule with clearly defined start and end dates for the measures.

Create a comprehensive action plan for the measures and strategy, covering all available information:
- Present the information in an easily understandable format whenever possible.
- Communicate the plan to all stakeholders.
- Request feedback and refine the plan if any perspectives are missing.
- Monitor the implementation of the plan.

Measurement and evaluation

Set mutually agreed-upon metrics for the implementation of the strategy and measurement of the results.

- Examples of metrics could include:
  - The number of participating individuals/companies,
  - Growth in the range of services/products,
  - Business growth,
  - Customer feedback and surveys,
  - Any other numerical measurement that is suitable.

- Establish a timeline for the measurement and evaluation of the results and development activities.

- A development action plan rarely goes exactly as planned. Evaluate the effectiveness of the activities regularly and adjust them as needed.

- Experimentation helps identify the most effective way to operate.

- Request feedback and suggestions for improvements from customers/users about the activities and make any needed changes based on the feedback.

Stakeholder collaboration and communication

Building networks:

- Establish collaborative networks between different stakeholders.

Engaging stakeholders:

- Keep stakeholders informed and involve them in planning and implementation.

Communication:

- Develop a communication plan to keep all parties updated on progress and changes.
- Communicate openly and accessibly.

Reporting:

- Keep the stakeholders up-to-date about the progress of the measures and objectives.

Sources

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