

Female Entrepreneurs' Meetings in the Baltic Sea Region (FEM)

FEM was a Baltic Sea Region INTERREG III B project that was active from August 2004 till August 2007. Its network and actors participated in the Nordic project arranging the Nordic Conference on WRCs in Stockholm in Autumn 2007.

Main objective

The participation of women in the economy, politics and all other spheres of societies contributes to the social and economical wellbeing of Europe. The aim of the FEM project was to strengthen the local, regional, national and international structures that support women's entrepreneurship and participation in the project area. The main tool in FEM was the co-operation and exchange of knowledge and best practices. In the common vision created, the activities started and strengthened in FEM will lead to a well functioning structure for support of women's entrepreneurship and active participation in all levels of societies of the Baltic Sea Region in 2013.

Partnership

35 partners in 7 countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden, Norway and Finland). The Lead partner was the Ministry of Interior, Finland (1.1.2008 onwards Ministry of Employment and Economy)

Results

The partners have informed of good results on local, regional, national and international levels. There are benefits to and development of persons, organisations and programmes involved. The outside evaluation that was made during summer 2007 examines especially the results of thematic subwork made with womens resource centres (WRCs), network credit, internationalisation and also the successes and challenges in the implementation of the project (see: www.feminfo.net)

Resource centres and internationalisation :

As a result of the FEM activities there are new and strengthened WRCs: in Estonia 5, Latvia 5, Lithuania 6, Poland 5. The European network of WRCs is strengthened and widened (with the Baltic dimension) and this gives new possibilities for cooperation between advisors and entrepreneurs in Northern Europe. FEM has also contributed in the mainstreaming of gender equality, mainly through WRCs. The gender aspect has been taken more seriously into the future programmes and activities at regional, national and even international levels (ERDF, BSRInterreg). In the project the model for internationalisation of a micro entrepreneur was created: The Seven Steps of Internationalisation (see: www.feminfo.net). The networks of entrepreneurs and advisors were created and strengthened and the national policies influenced.

Mentoring:

The models of group and pair mentoring were further developed and mentoring activity taken into active use in new areas and organisations. The development was done in 20 mentoring groups and 20 mentor-actor –pairs in Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania and Sweden. Especially in Latvia and in Sweden the project has given a big positive impulse on the mentoring model.

Network credit:

The loan conditions for women entrepreneurs were improved, the interest in the banks towards small loans has risen. In the project there were 6 groups in Estonia, 15 groups in Latvia and 10 groups in Sweden.

Recommendations as preconditions to a successful project:

- Strong transnational network between institutions and organisations in many different countries is more likely to be achieved by forming networks between the corresponding bodies. This means that either the same level of organisations, local, regional, national or international- or the same type of organisations – authorities or NGOs/enterprises should be integrated. In FEM the heterogeneity of participants produced innovations and fresh cooperation, but it also meant that there were different expectations about the concrete activities, strategies, main beneficiaries etc of the project.
- Building a structure, where overall objectives, results and measures would logically support each other, on different levels, would help the participants of the projects to recognise their own roles and expectations targeted to them in the project
- A network project with large geographical stretch and multiple substantial contents should have adequate administrative resources
- There should be possibilities to practical exchange of personnel, in national level especially. This enables the exchange of information, the transfer of models and could impact national politics with examples from other countries

Possible future focuses:

- Enhancement of gender equality will easily suffer from the lack of resources, competencies, political or administrative weight or knowledge. To have further joint projects with Nordic countries definitely helps the Baltic states and Poland to carry on with the gender equality aspects. Gender issues are often considered as marginal but they have to be kept high not to lose the result achieved by now.
- The group to most emphasize with in the future is the decision makers. A straight continuation project of FEM would have to expand the forum of activities from the women entrepreneurs to the decision makers and administrative level.
- Affecting those would mean that some measures should be tailored into this purpose. Training, networking, workshop groups could take place. Transferring models and maybe impacting national politics with examples from other countries could also take place.
- Having systematic research on the experiences and results of e.g. developing women's entrepreneurship and participation would be important. The research and evaluations would enable the mainstreaming of the results to the use of administration and decision making.