



# Moving forward: from Research to Action in the SIM project

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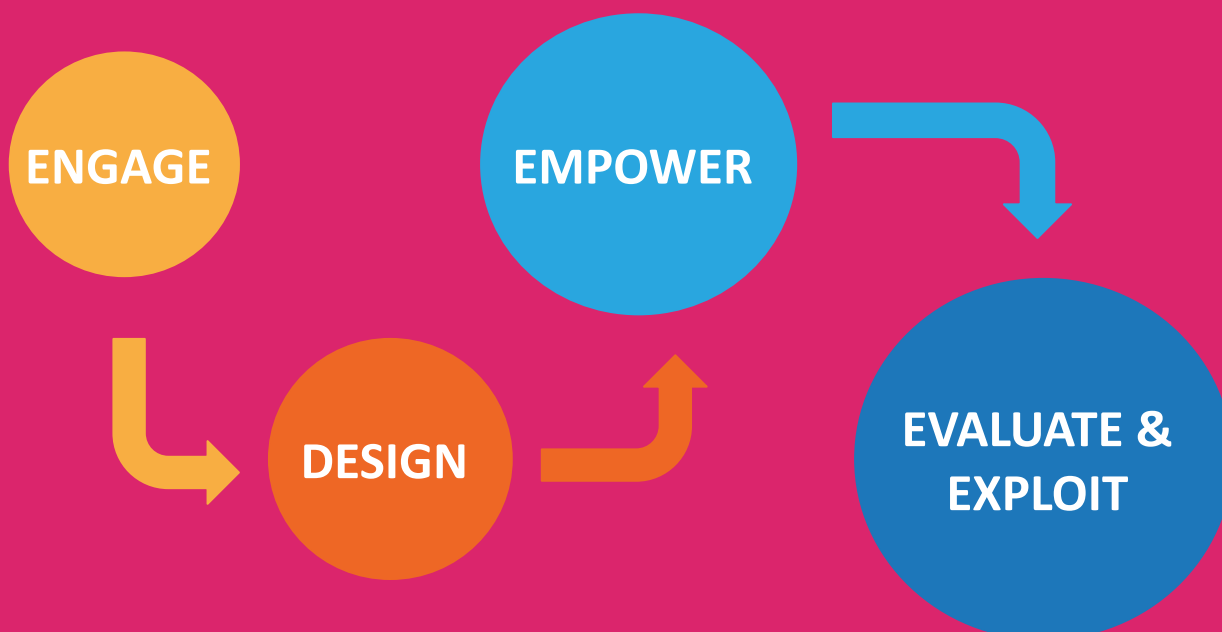
# PROJECT STATUS: TRANSITIONING FROM THE ENGAGE PHASE TO THE DESIGN PHASE

The SIM project introduces an innovative approach to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) that emphasises the social impact dimension of companies by seeking to strengthen their link with communities.

This initiative aims to cultivate a new profile of manager, the Social Impact Manager, equipped with a diverse set of skills essential for achieving not only financial growth but also social and environmental well-being in communities. The project unfolds in four phases: Engage, Design, Empower, and Evaluate & Exploit.

- **Engage Phase:** Conducting research to identify the specific needs of companies and local communities, forming the foundation for the Social Impact Manager's competencies.
- **Design Phase:** Creating the Social Impact Manager profile and an educational program to train future managers.
- **Empower Phase:** Launching this program in five target countries and supporting the development of Social Impact Managers.
- **Evaluate & Exploit Phase:** Promoting and evaluating the impact of the Social Impact Manager.

The project has now completed its Engage phase, which corresponds to the second Work Package, involving extensive research and analysis of company and community needs in Italy, Greece, France, Croatia, and Austria. The Final Report of Findings will soon be available on our website. Read the highlights of this report in the next section.



# ANALYSIS OF COMPANY AND LOCAL COMMUNITY NEEDS

Our consortium has embarked on a pivotal journey through Work Package 2 to map and assess the needs of companies and local communities across five partner countries. This initiative is aimed at creating a robust engagement strategy for Social Impact Management (SIM) networks at the local level, focusing on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) models and their impact on community development. The comprehensive research delved into various dimensions of CSR initiatives, exploring their integration with community development efforts, the roles of CSR managers, and the incorporation of CSR strategies within core business operations. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted across different company types in the target regions. Additionally, local area needs were examined to identify specific challenges and potential for community-company collaborations.

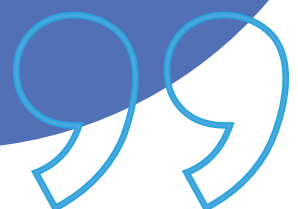
To facilitate this, engagement platforms were established in each implementing country, enlisting 10 companies per country.

These platforms act as mutual learning environments, enhancing companies' understanding of CSR and community development practices. Engagement criteria for companies included their operational area, CSR involvement, project commitment, and field of operation. For local communities, at least one city or region per country was targeted, selected based on factors like vulnerability, change processes, and company involvement. Engagement methods included surveys, interviews, focus groups, and participatory workshops, aimed at gathering comprehensive data on CSR tools, staff capacity, and community needs. The final output includes a detailed analysis of CSR and community development practices, highlighting trends, country-specific findings, and profiles of socially responsible companies.



A Social Impact Manager should be objective, possess strong analytical skills, demonstrate ethical behaviour, and have both personal and professional interest in social and environmental topics. A SIM should be proactive, innovative, open to discussions, and even prepared for arguments.

— Participant in a focus group in Croatia



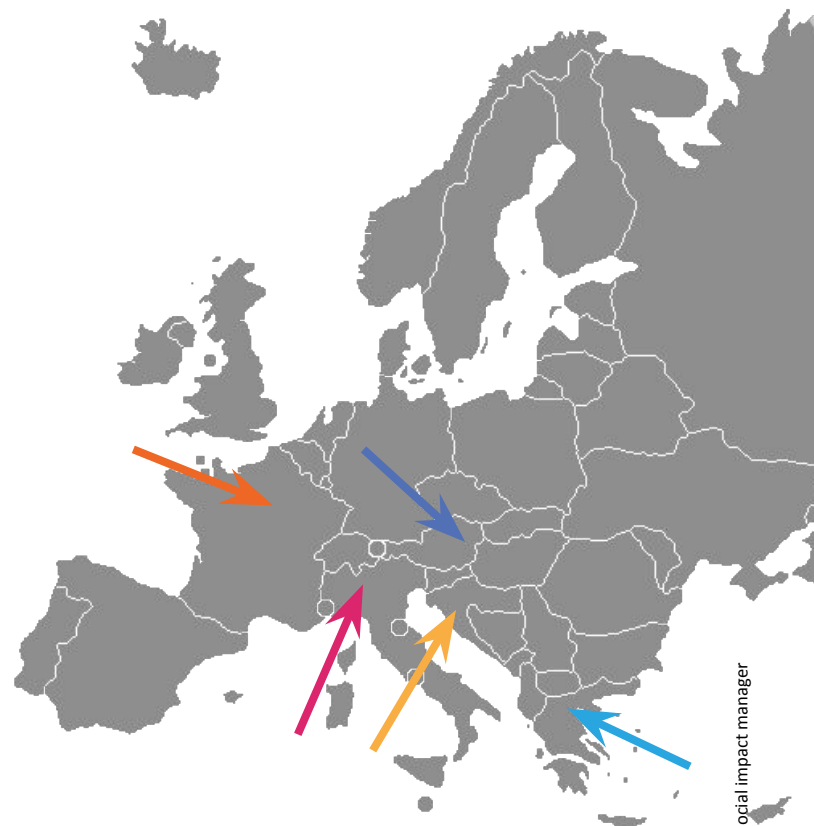


## MAIN RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

In the following pages the project's impact across **Italy**, **Greece**, **France**, **Croatia**, and **Austria** is encapsulated in individual country profiles.

These profiles synthesise extensive research insights, offering a vivid depiction of each region's social and local context.

This knowledge is vital for empowering stakeholders and fostering collaborative efforts to address local challenges.

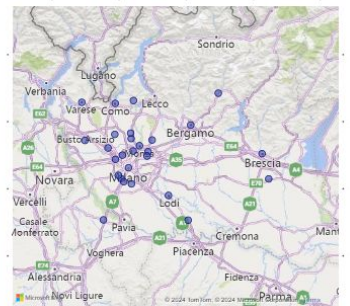


# ITALY

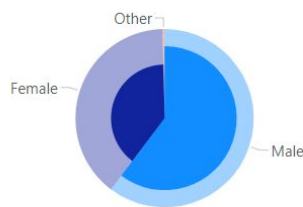
Research in Lombardy, Italy's economic hub, focused on companies and local communities, especially in Milan. Interviews with five companies highlighted a lack of CSR expertise, leading to strategic and interaction challenges. Surveys of 143 respondents revealed a male-dominated senior management. Focus groups stressed sustainability's importance but noted internal capacity issues and mistrust of NGOs. Local workshops identified communication gaps and funding constraints for social initiatives. Effective collaboration between businesses, NGOs, and local authorities is crucial for impactful CSR initiatives.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

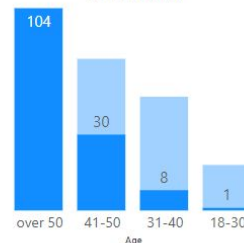
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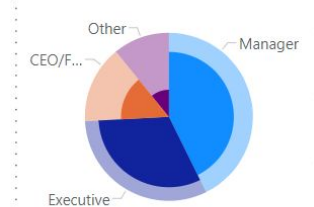
GENDER



AGE CLUSTER



ROLE



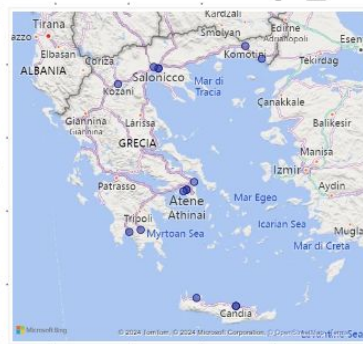
# GREECE

In Northern Greece, companies in Thessaloniki, Serres, and Komotini, spanning industries from environmental tech to agribusiness, actively engage in local community events and civic activities. Survey responses (33) revealed that despite the absence of dedicated CSR roles, these companies address environmental protection, sustainability, and social issues through various initiatives. A participatory workshop in Athens fostered collaboration among diverse stakeholders, resulting in strategic solutions like skills-to-work programs and public-private partnerships. Challenges include aligning values with NGOs, ensuring impactful partnerships, and navigating bureaucratic hurdles. Collaborative efforts and best practice sharing were emphasised for stronger community-business relations.

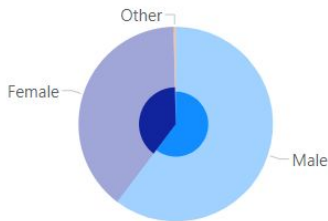


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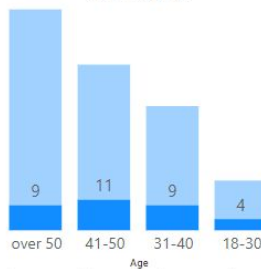
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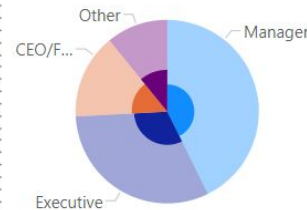
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AGE CLUSTER



ROLE



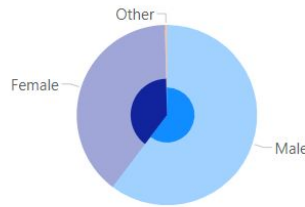


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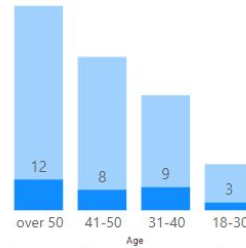
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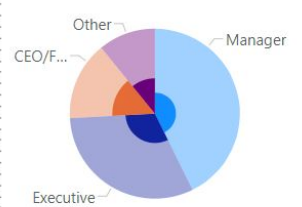
GENDER



AGE CLUSTER



ROLE



# FRANCE

ESS France represents the social economy in France, focusing on companies with democratic governance and limited profitability. The Île-de-France region, home to 20% of the French population, showcases social economy companies that make up 7% of local businesses and jobs. Responses received from 33 companies, show that the companies in this region engage in regional cooperation, forming partnerships with public and private sectors. CSR initiatives include waste reduction and energy efficiency. Challenges include integrating CSR into operations and addressing supply chain complexities. Local collaborations emphasise community engagement and economic cooperation.







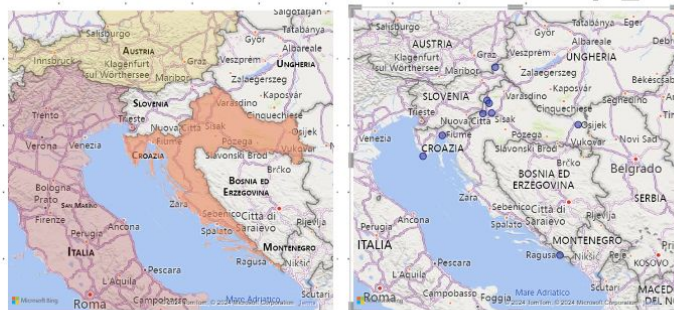
# CROATIA

The research in Croatia surveyed companies in Zagreb, Rijeka, Krk, and Kastav, revealing diverse CSR practices despite the absence of dedicated departments. Companies like E-Glas and Ponikve Eko Otok Krk show significant community engagement through innovative projects. Survey responses (34) indicated a notable female leadership presence and young, dynamic managers. Focus groups emphasised the importance of CSR, collaboration, and transparency. Local communities and workshops highlighted challenges in civic engagement, youth policies, and migrant integration, stressing the need for better communication and inclusive national policies.

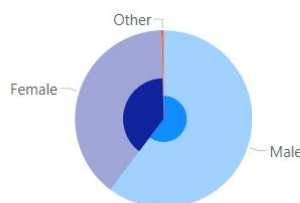


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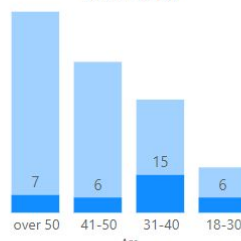
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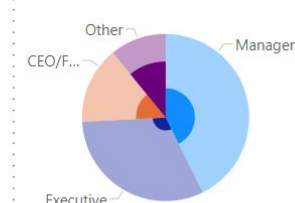
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AGE CLUSTER



ROLE



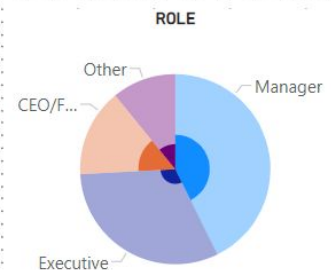
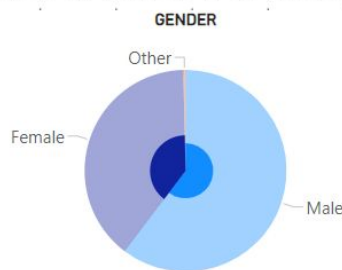
# AUSTRIA

The research in Vienna highlights Austria's economic hub with strong CSR and ESG commitments despite lacking dedicated CSR managers. Companies navigate complex EU regulations, encourage sustainability, and offer comprehensive CSR training. CSurvey responses (25) underscore challenges such as practical experience gaps and collaboration with partners. Local community integration, particularly for disadvantaged youths, requires mentoring and financial investment. Focus groups emphasise the importance of ESG over traditional CSR, advocating for transparency and stakeholder inclusion. Workshops reveal a need for long-term corporate-community cooperation and greater awareness of marginalised groups' needs.



## GENERAL INFORMATION

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# FINDINGS OF THE PRACTICAL RESEARCH

Overall, this analysis highlights the challenges of managing CSR programs in Italy, Croatia, France, Greece, and Austria. Common difficulties include the lack of dedicated CSR managers and internal expertise, slowing down strategic CSR actions. Notable findings show an overrepresentation of older male managers in CSR leadership, suggesting a need for gender and age diversity to foster innovative CSR strategies. Companies engage in superficial community partnerships, highlighting the need for long-term, meaningful engagements. Large multinationals dominate CSR, but SMEs are increasingly active.

The knowledge gained from this analysis will be crucial for empowering stakeholders and promoting horizontal relationships to address local challenges. The results of this Background Analysis on CSR and Community will allow us to lay the foundations for the development of the curriculum and the training path defined in the WP3 phase of the SIM project.



The Final Report is now available on our [website!](http://www.simproject.eu)

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## SECOND PROJECT MEETING IN CROATIA: LAUNCHING THE DESIGN PHASE

Marking the end of the Engage phase, on the 5th and 6th of June, the SIM consortium, formed by 14 partners from across Europe, met in Rijeka, Croatia. The Faculty of Economics of the University of Rijeka (EFRI UNIRI) hosted this significant event, which aimed to present the findings of the Engage phase and launch the Design phase.

The consortium includes partners from the VET, education, and business sectors from key countries where the project is developing its efforts: Austria, Greece, Croatia, Italy, and France. Partners Momentum and EUCEN are responsible for promoting and disseminating the project results. Representatives from all 14 partners attended the meeting, demonstrating the collaborative spirit and shared commitment to advancing CSR education.



# DAY 1: Research Analysis and Co-Design Workshop in Rijeka

During the first day, the final analysis of the Engage phase results was presented to the partners, highlighting crucial findings to be used in developing the Educational Programme. This analysis provided valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities within CSR management across the regions involved, emphasising the importance of strategic, inclusive, and impactful CSR initiatives.



After the presentation, partners engaged in a co-design session to draft the initial elements of the Social Impact Manager Educational Programme, to be further developed during the Design phase. This session was highly interactive, allowing participants to share their expertise and ideas, creating a collaborative atmosphere essential for the success of the programme.



Following lunch, the consortium visited the beautiful city of Rijeka. This excursion allowed participants to appreciate the local culture and history and served as a valuable networking opportunity, helping to form deeper connections among partners. The day concluded with a dinner where partners continued to network and discuss the project's future.



## DAY 2: Team Planning and CSR Insights at JGL

On the second day, the co-designing of the first draft of the Educational Programme continued. The partnership divided into country teams and assigned work for the upcoming months, ensuring a structured and coordinated approach to the next phase. Afterwards, the consortium held a meeting to discuss project-related issues and assess progress, reinforcing their commitment to achieving the project's goals.



A highlight of the day was a study visit to Jadran-Galenic Laboratory (JGL), a leading pharmaceutical company in Croatia. The visit was very informative, showcasing JGL's impressive work in CSR and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) practices. This visit provided a practical example of successful CSR implementation, inspiring the consortium members as they develop and design the elements of the education programme.



The SIM partnership is moving forward with a clear plan for the upcoming months. The next steps have been carefully drafted, ensuring that the project continues to run smoothly. The co-designed elements of the Educational Programme will now be developed further and refined during the summer, with a view to testing and implementation. The collaboration and shared commitment among partners have set a strong foundation for the project's success, promising impactful outcomes in CSR education.

# MEET THE CROATIAN PARTNERS: EFRI UNIRI

The Faculty of Economics and Business in Rijeka has a rich history and continues to be a vital institution in the region.

Founded in the early 1960s as a constituent member of the University of Zagreb, the faculty has played a pivotal role in shaping economic thought, business practices, and international studies in Croatia.

Historically, EFRI UNIRI has been at the forefront of economic and business education, providing students with a comprehensive understanding of economics and business management. Over the decades, it has expanded its curriculum and adapted to the changing economic landscape, ensuring that graduates are well-equipped to meet modern demands.

Today, EFRI UNIRI is known for its academic excellence, offering a range of undergraduate and graduate programs that attract students from all backgrounds and nationalities. Its commitment to bilingual education in Croatian and English fosters inclusivity and global engagement.

As the project meeting was held in Croatia, let's introduce our two Croatian partners: the Faculty of Economics and Business in Rijeka (EFRI UNIRI) and Mreza Znanja (MZ).

Beyond teaching, EFRI UNIRI faculty members are active researchers, contributing to the fields of economics, business, and international studies. The faculty also collaborates with local and international organisations, providing students with practical experience and enhancing their education.

In summary, EFRI UNIRI combines a storied history of academic achievement with a modern commitment to excellence, significantly impacting the economic and business sectors in Croatia and beyond.



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# MEET THE CROATIAN PARTNERS: MREŽA ZNANJA

**Knowledge Network (Mreža znanja, abbr. MZ in Croatian)** is a consulting company based in Zagreb, Croatia. With over 20 years of experience, MZ specialises in strategic consultancy for local and national authorities as well as private sector entities. MZ has produced approximately 40 feasibility studies with cost-benefit analyses (CBA) for infrastructural projects, primarily in the sectors of science, research and higher education, health and medicine, circular economy, and sustainability.

Through its projects, MZ has facilitated innovation and competitiveness among SMEs across various sectors. MZ's experts have contributed to national and international strategies, roadmaps, policies, and initiatives, including the Croatian Smart Specialization Strategy (2016–2020 and 2021-2029), the Croatian National Development Strategy 2030 (Education and Skills Policy Note, with a focus on science and innovation), and the National Research Infrastructure Roadmaps for Croatia and Slovakia.

Since the pre-accession period (2007-2013), MZ experts have been developing and implementing projects funded by European Union funds. While initially focused on project development and implementation for clients, MZ has expanded its interests and capabilities, establishing itself as a valuable contributor to international EU-funded projects.

In relation to the SIM project, MZ's managing director authored the Code of Business Ethics endorsed by the members of the Croatian Chamber of Economy. Additionally, MZ has experience in GRI reporting for companies, the ECG framework (Economy for the Common Good), and the CSR index used in Croatia. MZ collaborates with the Croatian Business Council for Sustainable Development and the CSR Community at the Croatian Chamber of Economy. MZ experts actively participate in ESG-related initiatives and are involved in transitioning Croatian companies to ESG reporting.

Two team members have backgrounds in curriculum design and teaching, which aligns well with their involvement in the Social Impact Manager project.



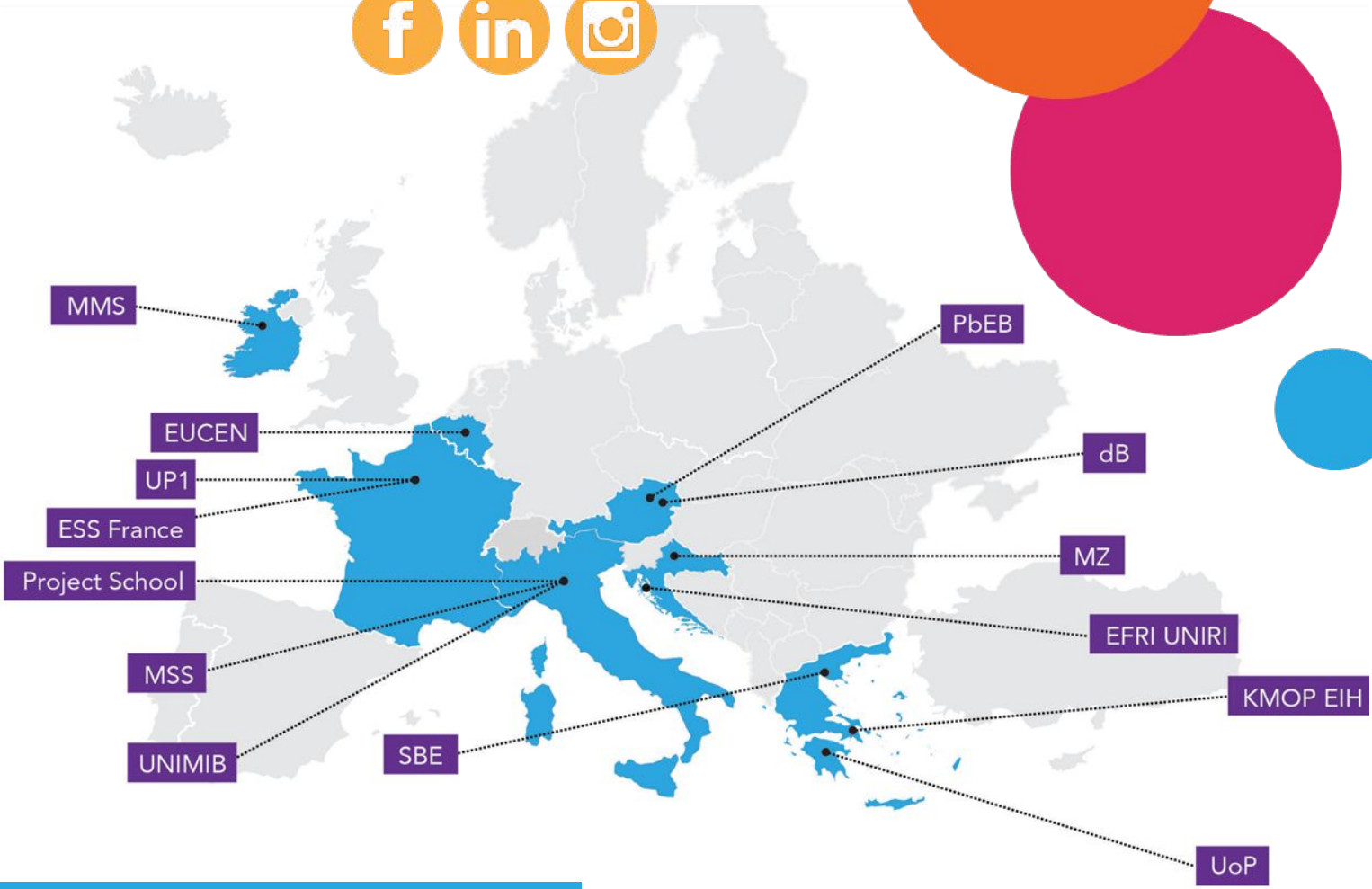
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