

SustainX supports SMEs to improve digital and sustainable innovation readiness through training, advisory support and interregional collaboration. Our aim is to connect regional ecosystems and help SMEs move towards investment-ready projects.



SustainX Best Practice One-Pager | March 2026

Innovation Ecosystem Insights from the SustainX Learning Journey in Dusseldorf, Germany

As part of SustainX, partners visited innovation actors and support organisations in Germany to better understand how mature regional ecosystems help SMEs innovate, collaborate and grow.

The Learning Journey offered a practical view of how innovation parks, research centres, intermediaries and business support organisations work together to support SME development, technology uptake and interregional cooperation.

What we observed

The Learning Journey highlighted several ecosystem features that strengthen SME innovation support:

- Strong collaboration between ecosystem actors
- Innovation support is more effective when research organisations, business support actors, innovation parks and SMEs work in a coordinated way.
- Access to testing and demonstration environments
- SMEs benefit from spaces and structures where ideas, technologies and solutions can be tested before scaling.
- Practical support for innovation development
- The ecosystem offers structured support to companies, helping them move from early ideas to more mature innovation projects.
- Connection between regional strengths and European opportunities
- The observed practices showed how regional ecosystems can better position themselves for collaboration, funding and cross-border partnerships.

Why this may be useful for EDIHs & EEN nodes

This one-pager may be useful for EDIHs and EEN nodes because it provides:

- examples of how ecosystem actors can collaborate more effectively to support SMEs
- inspiration for connecting SMEs with testing facilities, research actors and innovation intermediaries
- practical insights for strengthening regional innovation ecosystems
- talking points for interregional cooperation and matchmaking discussions



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