

## The successful and sustainable path to new partners, markets and innovative products



# Editorial

For small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the pressure to innovate is enormous. Since 2008, we have helped them to address this task by initiating over 750 international partnerships for technology, research and business, creating 1,800 cooperation profiles and organising 12,500 B2B meetings. We have welcomed around 22,000 participants to our events and answered about 1,000 questions on EU topics each year.

Both innovative and internationally oriented small and medium-sized enterprises as well as research-performing stakeholders currently face many challenges. As the NRW.Europa team, we look forward to helping you with your questions about innovation strategies, funding, and business, research or cooperation partners and with topics such as innovative technologies, digitalisation, new supply chains or market entry in new countries. How do new ideas, products, technologies or services evolve? How can you further develop them in an efficient way and then market them internationally? On the following pages, you will find some answers from practice. All examples have one thing in common: They show that Europe is not an empty shell but instead a marketplace full of opportunities. **Seize them – #EENcanhelp!**

## NRW and Europe

In November 2020, North Rhine-Westphalia's Ministry of Economic Affairs, Innovation, Digitalisation and Energy formulated a new foreign trade strategy and established a new agency in the shape of NRW.Global Business GmbH in the process. To ensure that the stakeholders involved work together even more efficiently, not only were existing structures modified, but in addition a greater focus was placed on promising fields such as digitalisation and circular economy. These priorities are naturally also found in Europe's new Industrial Strategy and the EU Commission's Green New Deal. The state government's funding programmes also address these topics. In view of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

especially for small and medium-sized enterprises, which are responsible for 88 per cent of EU exports, NRW.Europa's broad portfolio of consulting and support services is particularly important – because only those with the right answers can react to the additional pressure by opening up new markets or adopting innovative business models.

## The Network

NRW.Europa is part of the Enterprise Europe Network and offers assistance for small and medium-sized enterprises in North Rhine-Westphalia with questions concerning international market access and innovation capacity. The project is coordinated by ZENIT GmbH and implemented in cooperation with the Foreign Trade and Investment Promotion Department of NRW.BANK. NRW.International GmbH was also part of the consortium up until mid-October 2020. Its tasks and team were transferred to ZENIT when NRW.Global Business GmbH was established. With 600 nodes in almost 70 countries, the Network launched by the EU is the world's largest platform for technology transfer. You can find the German partners at [www.een-deutschland.de](http://www.een-deutschland.de).

Whether you are a company or a research stakeholder, we look forward to accompanying you into a sustainable future and supporting you in your innovation projects.

## #EENcanhelp, your NRW.Europa team



*The NRW.Europa experts have helped us with a very wide variety of questions. The information and advice they gave us in the areas of internationalisation and finance were particularly important for our company's success. Especially start-ups with high growth potential should make use of the services offered by the Enterprise Europe Network.*

Anna Yona,  
Managing Director, Wildling Shoes GmbH



*As consultants as well as a research and further training centre for all aspects of water usage, we've been working with the NRW.Europa team in the area of European research funding for many years. I can only recommend that everyone makes use of their know-how.*

Dr David Schwesig,  
Technical Director, IWW

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# New insights into materials

Anyone looking for innovative solutions in the area of materials simulation for research and development purposes will strike lucky in Bochum. Why? Because technology start-up OpenPhase views itself as a link between the worlds of academia and industry. It develops and markets software for the simulation of microstructural evolution in the field of metal processing. The NRW.Europa team has accompanied the company since its foundation.

The centrepiece is the 'OpenPhase Studio', the company's graphical simulation environment. With it, OpenPhase, which started as a university spin-off from Ruhr University Bochum, follows an innovative approach to materials simulation. The company uses the latest scientific findings to produce three-dimensional, virtual microstructures. The basis for this multi-physics simulation software for metallic materials is the phase-field method. The know-how acquired in this way makes it possible to optimise production processes and develop new materials. With it, processes taking place in the material at micrometre level can be visualised by means of physical simulation, and it is also possible to improve the production, development and understanding of the microstructure in general.

Among others, OpenPhase facilitates:

- Innovations in/acceleration of materials development
- An efficient use of experiments
- Process optimisation through better understanding of materials behaviour

## Support across the board

The NRW.Europa team at ZENIT has assisted the young entrepreneurs headed by Dr Johannes Görler and Dr Matthias Stratmann since 2016, when it helped the

two doctoral students to submit a successful ERDF proposal. With the funding earmarked for innovative university spin-offs, they had 18 months to develop their idea further and set about establishing their business. The NRW.Europa team was on hand here too. For example, it helped the budding entrepreneurs to compile a business plan as well as with their questions about financing, marketing and target group analysis.

Particularly important was NRW.Europa's support for OpenPhase's participation in Bochum's 'Senkrechtstarter' start-up competition, which the newly founded company won in 2018. After that, one thing led to another: Thanks to its convincing business plan, the company was able to secure a convertible loan from NRW.BANK and help with recruiting an employee, who was financed by the State of North Rhine-Westphalia through a grant under the Innovation Assistant scheme.

First contacts to potential partners and customers were established by entering a cooperation profile in the Enterprise Europe Network's worldwide database and participating in brokerage events. In addition, the NRW.Europa team helped with various questions to do with international market strategies – and looks forward to supporting the innovative team at OpenPhase GmbH in the future too.

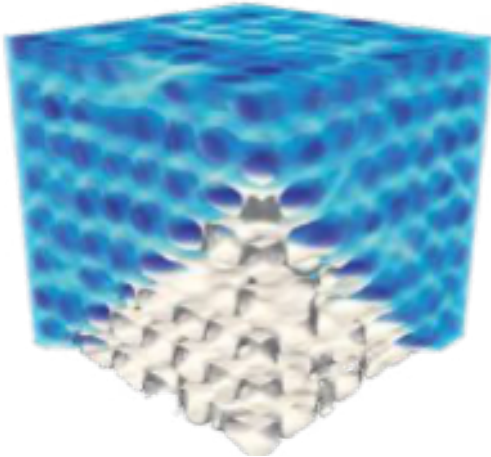


<http://openphase-solutions.com/>

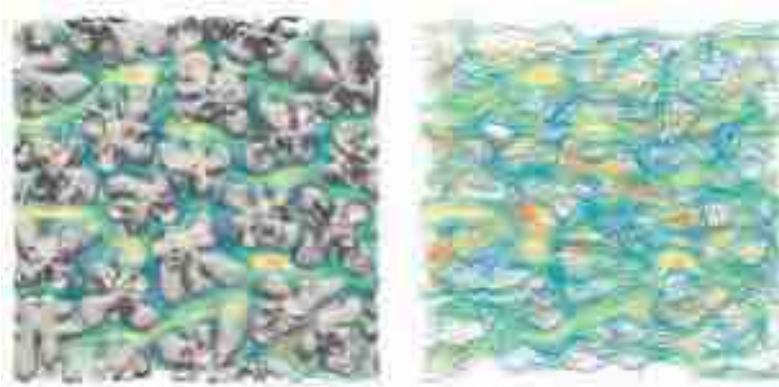


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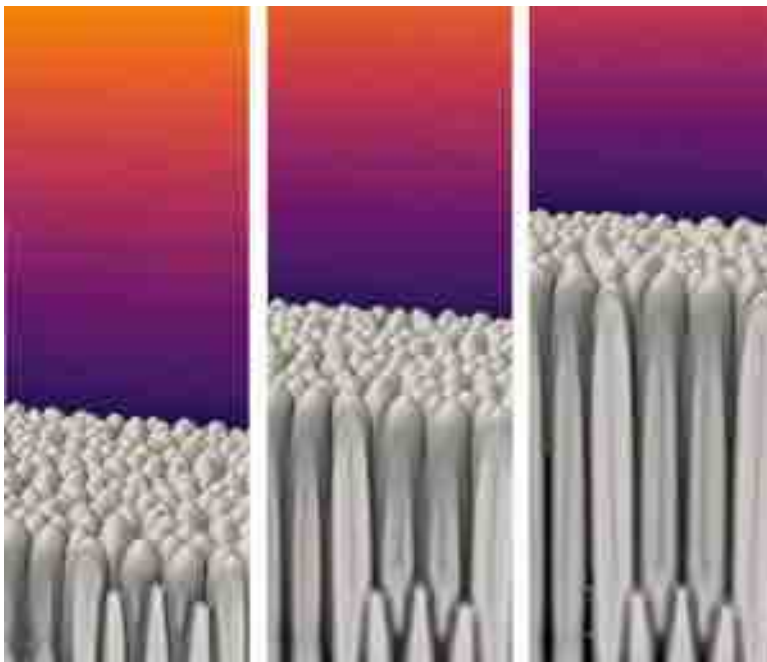


Simulation of microstructural evolution and plastic deformation in nickel-based superalloys under creep conditions.



Quantification of the castability of a molten metal by simulating its flow through solidifying dendrites.

Simulation of additive manufacturing in metallic materials. The "molten pool" produced by the laser solidifies extremely quickly and forms fine dendrites.



- Help with business plan
- Funding advice
- Finance, marketing, target group analysis
- Participation in brokerage events
- Strategic internationalisation

*“The NRW.Europa team at ZENIT has accompanied us since the pre-foundation phase and has continued to stand by us in word and deed during the difficult times of the coronavirus crisis. Their help with maintaining a good network is particularly valuable at present.”*



**Dr Matthias Stratmann and  
Dr Johannes Görler**  
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# On the road to success with barefoot shoes

To turn a small start-up into a flourishing business within just five years you need determination, talent, passion and a little bit of luck! This is what Anna and Ran Yona have achieved with their company Wildling Shoes GmbH. The NRW.Europa team was on hand to help.

What was initially intended only for children is now increasingly delighting adults as well. Anna Yona, who lived in Israel for several years with her husband and three small children, started off in 2015 with a crowd-funding initiative that yielded € 75,000. In mid-November 2018, the Gummersbach-based company was awarded the start-up prize “GRÜNDERPREIS NRW” worth € 30,000. Apart from the product itself, the jury also acknowledged the company’s fair manufacturing operations within Europe and decentralised work that enables the meanwhile 160 employees to reconcile family and job in the best possible way. “With the shoe concept she developed herself, Anna Yona combines personal experience with entrepreneurial spirit. She is an outstanding example of how – with sufficient drive and courage – both are possible,” said Professor Andreas Pinkwart, NRW’s Minister of Economic Affairs, in praise of the founder.

The start-up was accompanied on its road to success by the NRW.Europa experts at ZENIT GmbH and NRW.BANK. Of particular interest in this context were the consortium’s services in the areas of internationalisation and finance.

## Made use of many services

Contact to the NRW.Europa team was first established in 2018 through the “Internationalisation Competition”, which the consortium had already run in previous years. As one of the winning companies, Wildling was

eligible for support in various areas. Because it was growing very rapidly and therefore needed a lot of advice, the offer came at precisely the right time. Anna and her husband Ran had estimated monthly sales of about 200 pairs of shoes. It is meanwhile 30 times as many. All shoes are sold exclusively via the online shop.

The dedicated entrepreneurs made use of various consulting services offered by NRW.Europa. These included market research in other European countries, entry of a company profile in the Enterprise Europe Network’s database and the search for potential distribution and cooperation partners in Europe as well as logistics partners for overseas. NRW.Europa also helped them with their questions about public funding, internationalisation strategies, product liability law abroad and optimisation of internal processes.

## Always in contact

In 2019, Wildling Shoes was among the companies presented Europe-wide in the European Commission’s marketing campaign “#EUOpen4Business”. Anna Yona was one of the faces on the posters – an example of a successful company on its path to growth. The NRW.Europa team informs Wildling about potentially interesting cooperation partners on a regular basis and is happy to explore together ways to help the company on its journey into new markets.



[www.wildling.shoes](http://www.wildling.shoes)



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Anna Yona on the poster of the EU's marketing campaign #EUOpen4 Business.



Warm feet in winter.

Anna and Ran Yona started Wildling Shoes in 2015 with the help of a fundraising campaign.



- Financial advice
- Provision of market information
- Cooperation partner search
- Help with entering new markets
- Internationalisation strategies

*“The NRW.Europa experts have helped us with a very wide variety of questions. The information and advice they gave us in the areas of internationalisation and finance were particularly important for our company’s success. Especially start-ups with high growth potential should make use of the services offered by the Enterprise Europe Network.”*



**Anna Yona**  
Managing Director  
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# Cross-border cooperation with style – Fashion Match Düsseldorf

Under the title “Gallery FASHION & SHOES”, the Igedo Company organises international fashion order shows in Düsseldorf four times a year that have an established place in the fashion industry’s diary. To increase added value for all stakeholders and for Düsseldorf as a fashion city, the organisers are now working together with the “Modefabriek” show in Amsterdam.

With support from NRW.Europa, in January 2020 Amsterdam’s international matchmaking event “EU Fashion Match” was staged for the first time in Düsseldorf. In October 2020, the new virtual event “Fashion Match Week” for stakeholders in the fashion industry from Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands also took place for the first time.

The Igedo Company launched the first fashion fair in Düsseldorf in 1949 and since then has numbered among the major players in the international fashion scene. With various order shows, it offers international exhibitors and trade visitors a dynamic platform for exchange and networking. The objective is to further develop its portfolio through new approaches and to network even more closely at international level. This is where NRW.Europa – with its international network of partners – comes in, with the aim of boosting synergies and shining the spotlight on North Rhine-Westphalia as a fashion location.

## Making use of an international network

Always well-connected, the NRW.Europa team at NRW.International found an experienced project partner for the fashion industry in the shape of Enterprise Europe Network Netherlands/KVK. EEN Netherlands has been responsible for organising “EU Fashion Match” in the framework of the “Modefabriek” fashion show in Amsterdam for many years. The North Rhine-Westphalian fashion industry was also interested,

as witnessed by a successful trip to Amsterdam with NRW designers in 2018.

The successful matchmaking concept from Amsterdam was therefore adopted for the first time in Düsseldorf in January 2020 in the framework of the international fashion order shows “Gallery FASHION” and “Supreme”. The participants were offered a wide and varied three-day programme packed with informative workshops and matchmaking sessions. They profited from enlightening and practice-oriented insights and were able to establish new contacts in the fashion industry.

## New virtual event presents opportunities for cross-border cooperation

The trade fair organisers and project partners want to continue and further develop their successful partnership. The virtual event “Fashion Match Week” in October 2020 therefore focused on trilateral cooperation with fashion industry stakeholders from Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. The virtual event brought together young designers, fashion labels and retailers from the three neighbouring countries. Besides personal meetings and workshops, Düsseldorf, Berlin, Amsterdam, Brussels and Antwerp were presented as fashion hotspots for young entrepreneurs in the sector. The NRW.Europa team was on hand to help maximise and successively further develop the potential offered by this cooperation.



<https://igedo.com/>



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- Organisation of brokerage events and delegation visits
- Cooperation partner search via profiles
- Provision of market information
- Internationalisation support

Gallery FASHION is the exclusive order show that stands for an exciting mix of premium brands and agencies, avantgarde design collections, contemporary brands, shoes and accessories.

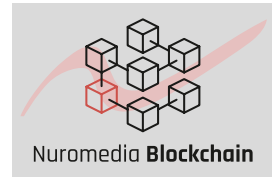


*“Cooperation between the international brokerage event “Fashion Match Düsseldorf” and the virtual “Fashion Match Week” is a clear win-win situation. Exchanging experience opens up new perspectives for the stakeholders involved and, through the participation of international experts, Düsseldorf and North Rhine-Westphalia can demonstrate their appeal for the fashion industry. NRW.Europa provides the right tools for stimulating cross-border cooperation.”*



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# Blockchain technology upgraded through EU project



The energy industry is increasingly getting to grips with “blockchain”. Experts consider that the technology has the potential to significantly influence the energy sector in the coming years. In the framework of an EU programme, the NRW.Europa team brought Nuromedia together with the blockchain-based trading platform “ESB for the Energy Sector”, and the company is now using this technology successfully.

Nuromedia is based in Cologne and has a broad portfolio, with a main focus on the health and energy sectors. It delivers solutions in the areas of virtual and augmented reality, digital twin, big data, mobile apps, digital health, digital education, blockchain and game design.

In February 2019, the NRW.Europa team at ZENIT received an enquiry from Spain. An Andalusian member of the Enterprise Europe Network was urgently looking for a partner with know-how in software development and blockchain technology for a client in the field of energy monitoring for an EU project. The team got in touch with Nuromedia straight away and on the very same day contact was established between the German company and the Spanish consortium leader, and Nuromedia was accepted as a partner in the project consortium.

## EU project enhances existing know-how

The proposal under the EU’s Eurostars programme for research-performing SMEs was approved, meaning that the project ‘Improvement opportunities of energy services based on blockchain and optimisation of trading process (ESB)’ was able to start in December 2019. The aim is to create a smart platform based on blockchain technology that will enable electricity and

power trading companies to optimise their performance in intraday trading. From the consortium’s point of view, with the advancing heterogenisation of the electricity market where renewable energy is being generated decentrally and more and more end users are also becoming producers, the step towards a decentrally managed, blockchain-based energy trading platform is inevitable. Only in this way can the data of the various stakeholders involved be stored in an unchangeable state and with a common model based on trust. In addition, ‘smart contracts’ offer the possibility to execute trading transactions automatically and securely.

For the Rhenish company, the project offers an excellent opportunity to enhance its existing know-how in the area of blockchain technology. The aim is not only to strengthen its own market position but also to boost in-house projects and products.

The outcome of this active cooperation with the German and Spanish partners for Nuromedia is direct marketing opportunities through the joint commercialisation of the project results, as energy supply companies and service providers are already represented in the consortium. The aim is to put the project results into practice together with them. Within the consortium, it is expected that the project will create around 50 jobs in Spain and Germany in the long term.



[www.nuromedia.com](http://www.nuromedia.com)



Co-funded by EUREKA member countries and the European Union  
Horizon 2020 Framework Programme



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The aim of the blockchain project "ESB for the Energy Sector" is to show how energy services can be improved.

- Mediation of cooperation partners
- Use of the cooperation partner database
- Participation in brokerage events
- Participation in the networking event "Successful R&I in Europe"



Digital twins allow digital simulations or the planning of products, buildings or entire towns and cities in real time.

Using virtual and augmented reality offers industry possibilities and cost savings previously unimagined.



*“The Enterprise Europe Network acted quickly enough to give us the opportunity to assert ourselves against other European SMEs and be selected as one of the consortium’s key partners. The support provided by the NRW.Europa team was – as always – expedient and very professional.”*



**Dr Holger Sprengel**  
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# Emergency communication via EmergencyEye® – Expansion into new markets

Born out of a tragic incident, with its EmergencyEye® technology COREVAS is expanding into new markets. The company is not only broadening its product portfolio but also working on its development in the direction of industry. In both new fields the motto is: “Transparency when it counts!”

After his parents, Günter Huhle and Carola Petri, survived a dramatic accident, in 2016 Viktor Huhle came up with the brilliant idea for EmergencyEye®. Since then, COREVAS, a start-up based in Grevenbroich and founded by his parents, has focused on developing software to improve emergency communication. “In the long term, it can presumably save thousands of lives,” says Carola Petri, Managing Director of COREVAS. In the meantime, EmergencyEye® is attracting interest from emergency call centres in Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

The EmergencyEye® technology was initially developed for use in emergency communication and is already being used in countless emergency control centres. The company is now expanding into different industrial sectors. Contracts have already been signed with Swiss Post, Rheinenergie and most recently with Evonik.

The company is now experiencing a demand for the functions developed especially for industry, such as photo documentation and the cursor function, from operational headquarters, crisis and disaster intervention teams and supervisory authorities for reconnaissance purposes in special operations and major emergencies. Under the name EmergencyEyeCOMMAND, in short COMMAND, a crisis management solution for decision-makers in public authorities has recently become available.

## Successful partner search, fundraising and internationalisation

The NRW.Europa team at ZENIT has assisted COREVAS since 2017, when the company found its IT development partner at an international matchmaking event and also successfully secured funding from the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy as well as the EU’s Horizon 2020 framework programme. However, this regular exchange not only includes advice and support on the topic of funding but also explores the company’s further development.

During the coronavirus crisis, the company has grown into an SME, is now certified in accordance with ISO 9001, has successfully completed the prequalification procedure, is active in the “Bundesverband IT-Mittelstand Deutschland e. V.” (the federal association of IT SMEs in Germany), engages with the Federal Cyber Security Authority (BSI) and is certified as a provider of software “Made and hosted in Germany”.

With the help of the NRW.Europa team, COREVAS was recently able to secure further funding for the integration of artificial intelligence and machine learning into crisis communication. Together with a consortium of leading scientific institutions and companies in the field of artificial intelligence, the company is also currently in the process of submitting an application within the innovation competition “Artificial intelligence as a driver for economically important ecosystems” of the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy.

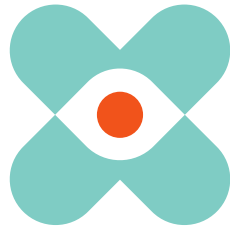
# COREVAS

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EmergencyEye®

- Mediation of cooperation partners in the framework of the networking event “Successful R&I in Europe”
- Funding advice
- Strategic support



*“Through the Enterprise Europe Network and the NRW.Europa team, we not only had a jump start for the development of EmergencyEye but also grew into an SME in record time thanks to their advice and support. We’re now looking forward to expanding our portfolio through COMMAND and to further internationalisation in Switzerland and Austria.”*

*The software for improving emergency communication should save thousands of lives in the long term.*



**Professor Günter Huhle**  
Principal Shareholder,  
**Carola Petri**,  
Managing Director,  
**Viktor Huhle**  
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# A topic with a future: EU project on optimal use of water

Important questions concerning the optimal use of water as a resource are the focus of a large-scale project aimed at the joint development of technical and digital solutions together with new business models. The objective is a greater use of circular economy approaches and smart technologies in the water sector.

How can water availability be increased in water-scarce regions? Which smart, digital solutions can be implemented? And how can a contribution be made to creating a water-smart economy and society? From September 2020 onwards, 36 project partners from eight countries will spend four years working on these trailblazing questions. They will help to find answers to one of the greatest challenges of our times. The project is coordinated by IWW Water Centre in Mülheim an der Ruhr. ZENIT's funding experts have helped the centre for many years with their questions related to the strategic submission of proposals and also support it via various networks.

The project is based on case studies that illuminate specific problems in six European cities or regions. Water companies from Alicante in Spain, Bodø in Norway, Flanders in Belgium, Lisbon, East Frisia and Venice are involved as a kind of "living laboratory". Together with research partners and local technology providers, they will develop and demonstrate solutions. IWW is supervising the German case study in East Frisia, which will centre on treating water in water-intensive companies in the dairy sector in such a way that it can be recycled in the production process.

The experts from Mülheim will also develop an evaluation framework for water-smart solutions.

They see as yet untapped potential above all in the use of digital tools, as there are currently no adequate standards for interacting systems.

## Stakeholder cooperation in the search for smart solutions

"We've also attached particular importance in the case studies to bringing on board public authorities, citizens' initiatives and political decision-makers because good results can only then find their way into practice when all stakeholders are involved from the outset," says Dr David Schwesig, Technical Director of IWW. They expect to be successful both in overcoming existing problems as well as in the planning of completely new urban settlements. The latter includes a project in Norway, where a new district will be built on an old military airport. The main aim is to avoid wasting drinking water and also to develop innovative, environmentally friendly concepts for de-icing roads and pavements, he adds.

Another goal is to find smart solutions for the wastewater problem in Venice's ecologically sensitive lagoon. This includes, for example, developing an electronic market platform, where the supply of and demand for treated wastewater for use in industry and agriculture can be brought together.



[www.iww.de](http://www.iww.de)

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- Strategic support for innovation, research and development projects
- Competitive neutrality in the assessment of project ideas for public funding programmes
- Competent support for proposals and projects
- Help with finding cooperation partners
- Integration of questions related to internationalisation, transfer and innovation management



*In the framework of the EU project, the water experts will also work on smart solutions for the wastewater problem in Venice's ecologically sensitive lagoon.*



*“We’ve been working with the NRW.Europa team in the area of European research funding for many years. I can only recommend that everyone makes use of their know-how.”*



**Dr David Schwesig**  
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# Know-how from Mülheim reconciles wind energy and bird protection

Anyone who – such as the EU through the European Green Deal – wants to boost sustainable energies, therefore also wind power, must not neglect bird protection. This is precisely where the WITURBISA research project comes in. Thanks to the mediation of the Enterprise Europe Network, GEOsat GmbH from Mülheim can also contribute its specialist know-how and complement the consortium in an ideal way.

Protected bird species still get caught all too often in the rotor blades of wind turbines and are symbolic of the conflict of interests between sustainable energy production and species protection.

Under the leadership of Nordic Radar Solutions, the Danish project coordinator, the aim is to develop a radar system with optical sensors by the end of January 2023, which switches off the turbines automatically as soon as protected bird species fly near it. When the Danish company was looking via the Enterprise Europe Network for an additional project partner with know-how in the field of image recognition, the NRW.Europa experts at ZENIT did not have to think very long. They brought GEOsat GmbH from Mülheim an der Ruhr into play, a company operating at international level that specialises in geoinformation systems, satellite navigation, earth observation and image recognition.

## One quick call

ZENIT's funding experts rapidly established contact to the Danes and also advised GEOsat GmbH on the Eurostars programme, so that the company was soon able to join the project without further ado, which

started in February 2020. The outcomes at the end of the project will be a prototype radar system that integrates 2D/3D image capture camera systems and a technical solution for aggregating sensor data.

The system jointly developed with the Scandinavian partners will make it possible to predict approaching birds and their flight path as well as identify the bird species from a distance so that the turbines can be switched off.

## Enhanced business potential

WITURBISA (Wind Turbine Bird Strike Avoidance) thus pursues promising approaches towards reaching the EU's goal of climate neutrality while at the same time protecting species and thus preserving biodiversity. In addition, the project fosters the sustainability of the participating companies, which profit from the transfer of know-how. This opens up new opportunities for GEOsat GmbH in a trailblazing industry as well as the possibility to enter the market in northern Europe. The WITURBISA project is taking place in the framework of the European funding programme "Eurostars", and the German partners are funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research.



[www.geosat.de](http://www.geosat.de)

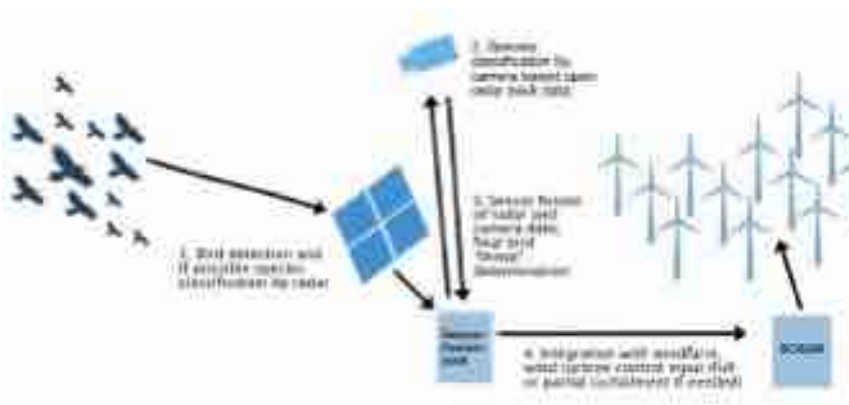


Co-funded by EUREKA member countries and the European Union Horizon 2020 Framework Programme



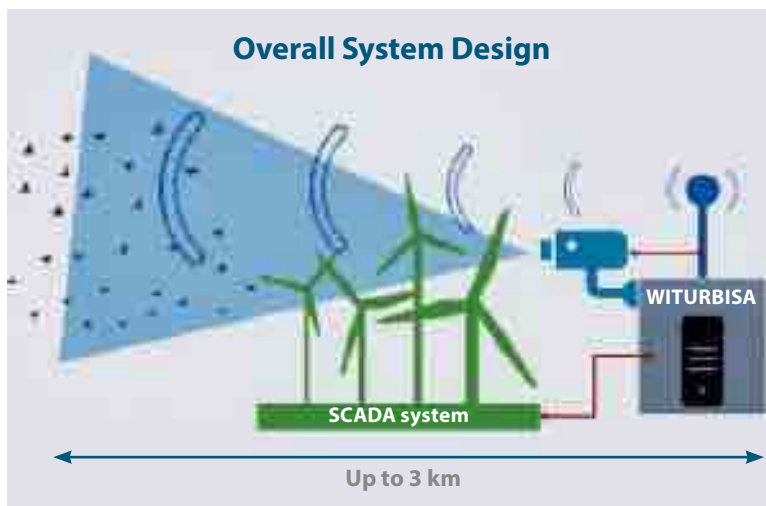
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- Cooperation partner search
- Funding advice
- Innovation management consulting

The WITURBISA radar system with image capture and a solution for aggregating sensor data.



The system can already detect an approaching flock of birds at a distance of three kilometres.

The project's most important objective is the protection of rare bird species.



“For us, the project facilitates a welcome strategic expansion of our activities in the wind energy sector. It was the NRW.Europa team who brought this to our attention. The team’s expertise is also an important source of information on potential participation in business meetings (matchmaking) or calls for tender and advice on our own project ideas.”



**Olaf Ludwig**  
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# Efficient machines and innovative processes

Anyone looking for equipment and systems for portioning or shaping frozen food will strike lucky in Haltern am See. The NRW.Europa team at ZENIT has helped the company, which was founded in 1948, with applications for funding and other projects for many years.

They had already met at the end of the 1990s when the company was granted state funding for the development of shaping technology. A combination of sawing and shaping makes it possible to produce the widest conceivable range of frozen foods in various shapes and sizes. Today, the innovations generated by the company open up completely new possibilities again and again. This includes the processing of tuna, shrimps, poultry, kebab meat and agricultural products. That is why famous food brands around the world rely on Nienstedt's processing equipment. A subsidiary in the USA serves the North American market.

When looking for information about the SME Instrument in the EU's Framework Programme, the company, which has its headquarters near Münster, contacted ZENIT again in 2014. In the shape of the Central Innovation Programme for SMEs (ZIM), an alternative to EU funding was quickly found that was more suitable and matched Nienstedt's requirements. The application was successful.

A little later, the NRW.Europa team helped with an application within the Regional Economic Development Programme, which Nienstedt submitted to NRW.BANK but then withdrew because the project for which it was intended did not harmonise time-wise with the company's business operations. However, this changed shortly afterwards.

## Digitalisation of production processes

In order to become even more efficient, Nienstedt worked on optimising its production processes and warehouse management. For future production planning and control, the company brought the NRW.Europa team on board once again, who advised it in the area of innovation. Here, both corporate structure and process organisation were analysed and targets defined.

Together with digitalisation consultant Dr Dieter Kramps, who like Nienstedt is a member of Netzwerk ZENIT e.V., the most important to-dos in the areas of automation and digitalisation were formulated in two workshops. Various requirements with regard to optimisation were identified, along with potential – above all in digital and systematic knowledge management – capable of being transformed into practice at short notice.

That is why digital production planning and integrated personnel planning as well as an automated warehouse are to be set up, among others. Through the changes to processes and organisation resulting from this, Nienstedt wants to manufacture even more in the future and achieve an even higher degree of accuracy.

In order to cover the financial requirements involved, the application within the Regional Economic Development Programme, which was withdrawn at the time, was revised and submitted in the spring of 2020. The funds will be used, among others, to purchase new hardware and software.

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**NIENSTEDT**

[www.nienstedt.de](http://www.nienstedt.de)



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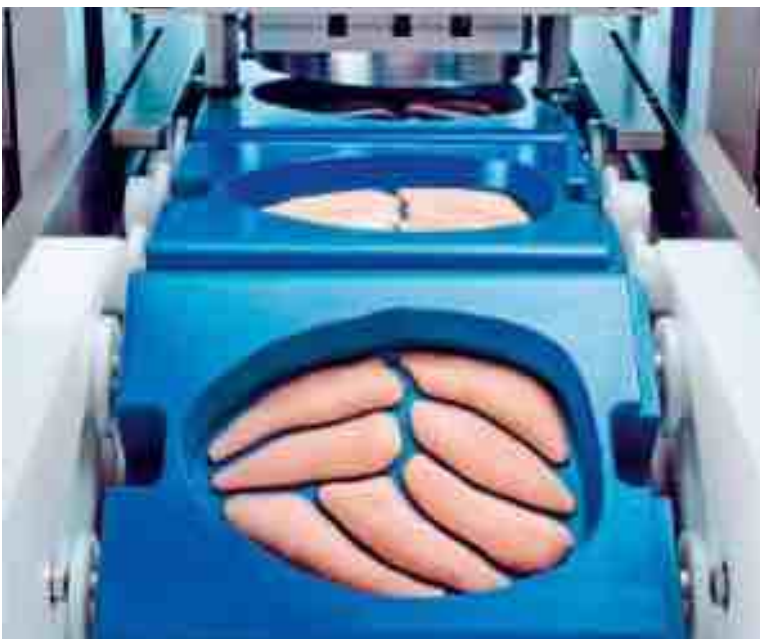


Digital integration of concepts and machines in the R&D department at Nienstedt.



Further development of punching technology for waste-free shaping of frozen food products.

Precise portioning of a high-quality fillet without loss of structure, using poultry as an example.



- Advice on the SME Instrument in Horizon 2020
- Advice on the Central Innovation Programme for SMEs
- Advice on ERP, digitalisation and loans for innovations
- Innovation management consulting

“The NRW.Europa team has helped us with various projects over many years. This applies both to the successful acquisition of funding as well as support for innovative business processes.”



**Jan Groneberg**  
Managing Director, Nienstedt GmbH  
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# Step-by-step success in the USA

The USA counts as a land of endless opportunities. The NRW.Europa foreign trade experts at NRW.BANK know which funding options are in place to help companies make it across "The Pond". Of this FOGTEC was also able to convince itself, a company that wants to roll out its fire protection technology for rail vehicles there – something completely new to the USA.

From its base in Cologne, FOGTEC develops, manufactures and markets fire detection and firefighting systems, among others for buildings, industrial plants and underground transport infrastructures such as road and rail tunnels. With this product portfolio, FOGTEC has become the global market leader in the railway sector and supplies system solutions for rail vehicles on all continents. "Our high-pressure water mist systems help to ensure that people can remain in the vehicle in the event of a fire until it has reached a safe evacuation zone," explains Roger Dirksmeier, who is responsible for the rail vehicle sector at the owner-managed company. As a result, underground transport infrastructures can be designed and operated more cost-effectively.

## Location sought

FOGTEC had already been working to open up the US market in the field of fire protection for rail vehicles for several years. In 2019 the time had finally come. "The NRW.Europa team at NRW.BANK helped us in two ways here," reports Dirksmeier. It compiled a list of potential funding and financing programmes and helped to establish contact with the US Consulate General in Düsseldorf.

## Important mediators

The US Consulate General and NRW.BANK have shared a long-standing partnership for many years.

Anette Salama, commercial specialist at the US Embassy, took care of FOGTEC. She made sure that Roger Dirksmeier was able to meet a short time later with a member of staff at SelectUSA, the US government's investment agency. Anette Salama: "SelectUSA is the central contact point for all aspects of investment promotion and bundles the activities of all US ministries as a central task force. The agency helps companies in various ways to gain a foothold in the USA."

These services include, for example, a team with regional expertise that helps with location analysis, mediates contacts in the USA and advises on tax issues.

## Preferred partner

In the summer of 2020 – despite the restrictions imposed by the coronavirus pandemic – FOGTEC's activities in the USA took on concrete shape: Discussions on potential locations were held via video, and the company sought to recruit its first employees. FOGTEC already has another continent in mind for its further involvement abroad, but one constant will remain. Roger Dirksmeier: "Next up is to find a location in China. Because working together with them is so great, the NRW.Europa team is once again our preferred partner – and will remain so too for our future activities abroad."



<https://fogtec-international.com/>



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NRW.BANK consultant Dr. Klaus-Hendrik Mester  
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- Search for funding programmes at national level and in the target country
- Support in the search for suitable financing instruments
- Consulting with external partners
- Mediation of contacts to help find a location



*The high-pressure water mist systems help to ensure that people can remain in the vehicle in the event of a fire until it reaches a safe evacuation zone.*



*“Through the contact mediated by the NRW.Europa team, we’ve gained access to information and opportunities which we didn’t know existed. This helps us enormously to make decisions which are also expected to bring long-term success.”*



**Roger Dirksmeier**  
Managing Director, Rail Systems  
rail-contact@fogtec.com

# On the right track

The perfect consummation of a toy that has remained almost unchanged for over 50 years, the slotcar racetrack, has a name: Harrel-RacingStandard. The first modular version, called “The Road”, comes from Solingen. The NRW.Europa team is helping the company on its journey into the luxury segment.

In fact, Harald Dannert, the developer of the slotcar racetrack, primarily manufactures plastic parts in his company, PKKT GmbH. His motto is: Durability, reliability and functionality. This was also the benchmark for his new product: The first modular slotcar track, which is stable, torsion-resistant and patented, allows for a stable construction and can dispense with an intermediate power supply over long distances. Dannert united the best of three worlds for this. The result was a hybrid of wood, plastic and metal.

As with other manufacturers, power is supplied via metal strips made of stainless steel. According to Dannert, however, who would like to inspire car fans, racing drivers, slotcar clubs as well as fulfil childhood dreams, his system is much more sophisticated: “The particularly ingenious feature is tucked away inside the modules. Robust copper cables connect sockets and plugs and merely transfer the current to the stainless steel strips. This means that the ring circuit is installed ex works and contact resistance is minimal. With this, we promise a stable power supply for distances up to 100 metres – and this with only one transformer.”

For the moment, the Harrel-RacingStandard is designed as a classic analogous slotcar racetrack. For the future, however, switch modules are planned that will allow for digital operation. In the meantime, an adapter module is available as an interim solution that makes it possible

to change over to the plastic tracks of other manufacturers. The modules are produced in their own factory in Solingen.

## Distribution models and markets

Up until now, all sales have been direct, with the Harrel RS crew taking care of each client individually. In order to professionalise sales and distribution and with a view to operating abroad as well at some point, Dannert is making use of the know-how of the NRW.Europa team at ZENIT. Among others, the team has helped him to develop sales models for his high-end product and looked for platforms that are popular in the luxury segment as well as sales outlets abroad. Within a very short time, the company received an order from Thailand, and the NRW.Europa experts helped with the paperwork.

By completing the first order in a third country with the assistance of NRW.Europa, the company was able to familiarise itself with the procedures involved in doing business with third countries and became more confident about making decisions. This also includes expertise in working out transaction costs and incorporating these when calculating prices in the future. This not only saves time but also allows the company to act with greater confidence in new markets.



<https://harrel-rs.com/>



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kh@zenit.de





Tribute to Steve McQueen's "Le Mans" of 1971.

- Help with sales/distribution strategy
- Market research
- Target group analysis
- In-depth support as winning company in NRW.Europa's Internationalisation Competition 2020



The track for slotcars on a scale of 1:24 ...

... and for vehicles on a scale of 1:32.



“The services offered by the NRW.Europa team are very interesting and helpful. This applies especially for small and medium-sized enterprises keen to progress and achieve lasting success, and which are proud to manufacture products “Made in Germany”. And at the same time see themselves as an important part of Europe.”



**Harald Dannert**  
Managing Director, Harrel GmbH & Co.  
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# Innovation capacity and internationalisation as success factors

The Kunststoff-Institut Lüdenscheid and ZENIT have been working closely together for many years. As one of its over 40 stakeholders, the institute both supports the services provided by NRW.Europa and uses them for itself and its member companies, especially in the area of innovation management.

What makes a company successful in the long term? And which services can help here? These are questions that KIMW asks itself on a regular basis and tackles proactively. The institute, with its some 100 specialists in materials and process engineering along with mould, surface and testing technology, not only uses the support services of the Enterprise Europe Network for itself – its 380 member companies also benefit from the Network's innovation support.

To boost this further, KIMW already made use three years ago of NRW.Europa's consulting services in the area of innovation management. Because the topic of "New Markets" produced a weaker result in the overall analysis, the institute subsequently set in motion a number of change processes.

"We're always busy searching for new markets and innovative products. Especially in recent years and on the basis of our new strategy, we've concentrated more on new industries and achieving a greater international focus," says Michael Krause, KIMW's Managing Director, summarising the institute's activities.

## Strategic partnerships and new media

As a consequence, the institute has, for example, established strategic partnerships at international level. These include cooperation with Plastipolis, a plastics network based in France that deals with competition

procedures. 400 stakeholders from industry, science and training work together proactively in strategic business units such as Advanced Materials, Smart Manufacturing, Intelligent Plastics and Ecoplastics. The NRW.Europa experts helped KIMW here too.

This also applies to social media. Digital technologies and media are playing an increasingly important role in visibility and communication with partners and customers – not only in times of the coronavirus pandemic. This is why the Lüdenscheid-based organisation developed a corresponding strategy together with the communication experts from the NRW.Europa team.

## Training, research support, strategic market development and consulting

The Kunststoff-Institut Lüdenscheid was founded in 1988 and today has 380 members. As a service provider in the area of plastics technology, it combines the scientific knowledge of tomorrow with the manufacturing processes of today. Its work centres primarily on plastics and surface technology, joint projects in application engineering/process integration, materials engineering/new materials, education and training.

KIMW has been an NRW.Europa stakeholder since 2015 and uses its services systematically for its own work as well as organising joint activities, such as events, publications or special seminars.

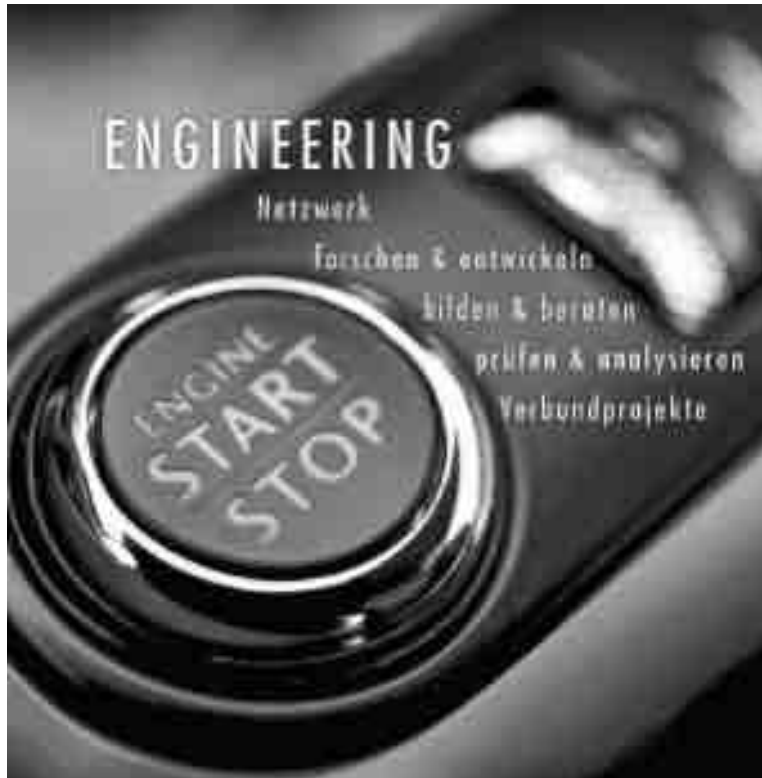


[www.kunststoff-institut.de](http://www.kunststoff-institut.de)



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Since its foundation in 1988, the Kunststoff-Institut Lüdenscheid has grown to 380 member companies.

Service provider in the field of plastics technology: Combining the scientific knowledge of tomorrow with the manufacturing processes of today.



- Innovation management consulting
- Internationalisation support
- Mediation of technology partners
- Advice on social media

“Among others, NRW.Europa’s experts are helping us to develop our internationalisation strategy, which in turn is helping us to reach our marketing objectives. But we’re also happy to make use of their know-how in the area of new media or the acquisition of funding.”



**Michael Krause**  
Managing Director  
Kunststoff-Institut für die  
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(KIMW)  
mail@kunststoff-institut.de

# Flood protection for rivers and coastal regions

Climate change is omnipresent, and people in regions so far unaffected are meanwhile also familiar with the term “heavy rain”. AQUABURG Hochwasserschutz GmbH has developed a simple but effective solution. The Münster-based company used the NRW.Europa team’s know-how to set up new sales channels.

“Intelligent flood protection: Quick and easy to set up – and safe to use!” This is how the company, founded in 2013, advertises its flood protection wall. This can be stored in a concrete duct in a pavement or dyke in areas at risk of flooding.

The wall consists of steel posts, a water-tight, high-tech membrane and a pressure-absorbing stainless steel mesh. In the event of imminent flooding, the barrier can be assembled in just a few steps. After use, it is simply stowed away again in the duct.

With this innovative concept, in 2017 Hartmut Wibbeler, AQUABURG’s managing director, won the Efficiency Prize of NRW’s Ministry for Environment, Agriculture, Conservation and Consumer Protection. The construction is namely much lighter and therefore less resource-intensive than conventional aluminium dam walls. It takes just two adults to assemble it, which is especially important if there is little advance warning. In addition, the fact that the system is stored invisibly on site means no transportation is needed.

A new addition to the product portfolio is the “AquaVerschluss”. This is put together in the same way as the AquaWand but delivered on pallets when needed and then simply screwed into ground sleeves or quickly inserted into a ground rail in a few easy steps.

## Market survey and search for cooperation partners

Of course, domestic competition never sleeps. And so AQUABURG looked for sales opportunities abroad. In this context, they recalled having been in touch with ZENIT in the past. A workshop was quickly arranged to clarify where the NRW.Europa team should provide support. In a first step, they discussed and explored which neighbouring countries were particularly affected by flood damage. The primary objective was then to sound out the market in these countries and find suitable partners there. To this purpose, a company profile was entered in the Enterprise Europe Network’s cooperation database.

However, the main focus of these services, which were free of charge, was market research in Austria, Switzerland, Italy, England, Denmark and France. NRW.Europa reported back to AQUABURG on regulations/legislation, potential customers and partners, the competitive situation, trade fairs, associations and any available funding opportunities. In cooperation with the Network colleagues in the target countries, it was possible to identify a large number of potential cooperation partners. Contact with a Danish company proved to be particularly interesting. As specialists for all kinds of water barriers, at the beginning of 2019 they seized the opportunity to complement their own product range with equipment from Münster and thus attract new customers.



[www.aquaburg.com](http://www.aquaburg.com)



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The AquaWand installed and assembled.

- Market survey
- Market research
- Funding advice
- Cooperation partner search



Hartmut Wibbeler by the water behind the AquaWand.



The AquaWand in action on the Baltic Sea in Denmark.

View from the Baltic Sea towards the AquaWand.



*“Thanks to the support of the NRW.Europa team, we found partners in Denmark and Austria, who are now successfully marketing our system.”*



**Hartmut Wibbeler**  
 Managing Director  
 AQUABURG Hochwasserschutz GmbH  
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# Prospects in difficult times: New business ideas against the crisis

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, the travel industry has found itself in a crisis the likes of which have never been seen before. According to industry representatives, around 2.9 million jobs are at risk. TMTM, a small company from Münster that specialises in cycling tours to Greece, was also obliged to look for alternatives from one moment to the next.

The order books for the tours from Easter 2020 onwards were almost full – then came the coronavirus. A catastrophic situation for tourism professional Stefan Bücken from Dülmen. However, for him throwing in the towel was out of the question and so he reactivated his contacts to NRW.Europa's internationalisation experts at ZENIT. They had already helped him back in 2012 to organise cycling holidays on the Peloponnese peninsula.

## Safeguarding jobs through cooperation and new destinations

After the lockdown and with the help of NRW.Europa and one of its Italian partners in the Enterprise Europe Network, Bücken revived his contacts to Funactive Tours, a cycle tour operator in South Tyrol. The two companies agreed on a joint venture. Within just three months, they together planned cycle tours for the Ruhr area, among others, where tourism was also severely affected by COVID-19.

The two travel companies had already finalised detailed cycling tours shortly after the outbreak of the pandemic. They lead through amazing parks and green spaces, along old railway lines, through unique river landscapes, past impressive industrial monuments, along the Emscher, Ruhr, Rhine and Lippe rivers and past sights such as the Zollverein Coal Mine, Villa Hügel or the Henrichenburg World Heritage Site. There is even

something for football fans, as the German Football Route with a visit to the German Football Museum in Dortmund is also part of the programme.

To advertise their tours, TMTM and Funactive Tours set up the joint website [radreiseguru.de](https://radreiseguru.de) to reach out to interested cycling tourists wanting an all-round carefree package.

Through the joint venture, the two companies have managed for the time being to safeguard jobs as well as their position in the marketplace and to stay in the race. North Rhine-Westphalia's economy and tourism in the region are also profiting from this new product.

## Long-standing partnership

TMTM and the NRW.Europa team had already worked together before. One of the results of discussions with the Greek regional government of the Peloponnese, which ZENIT conducted on behalf of the State Chancellery of North Rhine-Westphalia in 2012/2013, was to prolong the tourist season among others via cycling tours. In Stefan Bücken, the NRW.Europa team identified the right expert for this. He planned tours in the Peloponnese, which he and others marketed throughout Europe, and some time later he was awarded a second contract – this time from the Epirus region.



<https://radreiseguru.de>



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Cooperation between TMTM and Funactive Tours centres on nature adventures and cultural programmes for young and old.



New perspectives: Taking a break on the slagheap – a cyclist's panoramic view of the verdant Ruhr region.



Long perfected: 30 years' experience as a service provider for active holidaymakers.

- Advice in times of crisis
- Mediation of cooperation partners
- Market research

*“The travel industry currently finds itself in a tremendously difficult situation. The long-term consequences are not yet foreseeable, and we need the support of the state, the federal government and Europe. We have to develop new business models. The expertise of the NRW.Europa consultants was and is very helpful here.”*



**Stefan Bücker**  
Managing Director, TMTM  
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# NRW.Europa

## Your network for innovation and sustainable growth

### Our value proposition

We tailor our services to your requirements and put them into practice with you. Here, we make use of our consulting know-how and our network of 600 partner organisations in around 70 countries, which are working together in 17 Sector Groups and 12 Thematic Groups. This network effect is unique.

### Information

- > Information on EU topics and feedback opportunities
- > Information on EU public calls for tender
- > Feedback on the impacts of EU directives
- > Events and workshops on EU topics, innovation, funding and finance

### NRW.Europa

Consortium comprising ZENIT GmbH and NRW.BANK.

In the wake of the restructuring of NRW's foreign trade operations, NRW.International's tasks and project team were transferred to ZENIT in October 2020 and will continue there. NRW.Europa is a partner in the Enterprise Europe Network and supported by the State of North Rhine-Westphalia and NRW.BANK.

### Please contact us ...

... via our newsletters and publications, a personal appointment or a visit to one of our events or workshops.

[www.nrweuropa.de/kontakt](http://www.nrweuropa.de/kontakt)

@NRWEuropa

#EENCanHelp

# Service portfolio

## Advice on internationalisation and business partner search

- > Mediation of partners for international business with approx. 5,500 cooperation profiles in the areas of sales/distribution, technology and research
- > International B2B brokerage events at trade fairs and congresses at home and abroad, on site and in digital format
- > Direct cooperation and mediation of contacts through collaboration with Network colleagues
- > International company visits
- > Workshops and consultation days on the topic of internationalisation
- > Targeted help with market development

## Technology transfer and mediation of cooperation partners

- > Cross-border technology transfer through access to over 1,000 technology offers and requests
- > Technology-based brokerage events at international trade fairs and congresses
- > Networking of innovative small and medium-sized enterprises with universities and research institutions in NRW
- > Special events and consultation days
- > Partners for supply and distribution chains

## Innovation support

- > Innovation management and support
- > Audits and strengths/weaknesses profiles
- > Strategy development
- > In-depth support for digitalisation questions and circular economy/green value creation
- > Targeted consulting for young and fast-growing companies

## Advice on funding and finance

- > Preparation of meetings with financial partners
- > Individual research on regional, national and European financial instruments and support measures for innovation and sustainable growth
- > Customised search for funding options in target countries abroad
- > Information and coaching on funding programmes for international projects, technologies and innovation, especially Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe
- > Funding consultation days in digital format



# NRW.Europa – Our services

Information on EU topics and enquiry service  
Internationalisation support  
Cooperation partner search  
Trade fair and delegation scouting  
Technology and know-how transfer support  
Innovation management consulting  
Funding information and advice  
International funding advice

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