



WP2 Development and Re-Assessment of Services

2nd Re-Evaluation Plan

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DINO – Digital Innovation Ostbayern ist ein gemeinsames Projekt von:



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1 Introduction

In this assessment, we will continue our analyses of the services provided by DInO. We built upon the findings of the first regional analysis conducted in March 2024. Further, this paper shows an analysis of feedback gathered by participants of the services and how many services have been provided to how many customers. Based on the digital maturity assessment of the customers, each service will also be analyzed regarding how helpful it was in increasing an SME's or PSE's internal or external digital maturity and their impact on the overall regional maturity.

In our first regional analysis, we concluded that the available data for Eastern Bavaria indicates disparities in digital skills within our customer target groups but strengths in knowledge-intensive industries with potential for digital innovation, such as mechanical engineering. The funding environment, the existence of municipalities that already incorporate smart region solutions, the well-developed education and research institutes, and the recently improved digital infrastructure offer the potential for further cooperation between public and private entities in the region. Further improvements lay in, for example, the digitization of the tourist infrastructure, to produce spillover effects between industries, or to profit from experiences from neighboring regions. Our findings further suggest that at this project stage, the services offered match Eastern Bavaria's needs for improving its digital maturity. However, further alignments were needed in advertising and communication regarding the provided services. During the first half of the project, several challenges arose, also in terms of communication and coordination between the various parties involved. The flexibility and adaptability of the project team proved to be crucial for successfully dealing with unexpected changes and challenges.

To respond to these challenges, the marketing strategy was adapted to the region by focusing on simple language, easily accessible use cases, and the involvement of regional multipliers. In addition, a workshop was held in which all DInO partners worked out the strengths and weaknesses of the consortium as well as better ways of cooperation and customer transfer. The services are consistently re-evaluated, both individually and collectively, to create a cohesive offering that adapts to the changing needs of the region.

Section 2 gives a brief overview of the economic developments in Eastern Bavaria and first insights of the Digital Maturity Assessment Tool are analyzed and the Key Performance Indicators of the services are presented. The next section,3, analyses the four service pillars of DInO by taking a closer look at all services provided. Section 4 serves as a discussion part in which the overall changes in the services and the strategies to adjust them are explained. Finally, section 5 gives an overview of the rest of the project term and analyses the impact of DInO and its services on the overall maturity of SMEs and PSEs in Eastern Bavaria.

2 Analysis of DInO Customers

2.1 A changing regional environment

Throughout the past half year that has passed since the last regional and service assessment, the political and economic situation in Germany has changed drastically. In the first half of the year, the political situation was difficult due to fighting parties within the government and unknown outcomes to potentially important legal changes that might affect the whole German Economy. In the second half of the year, this insecurity got worse until the breakdown of the current government.

Additionally, due to the ongoing worsening of the economic situation, several big players in the German economy like Volkswagen or ZF- Zahnradfabrik Friedrichshafen among others have announced that they need to close plants and lay off thousands of employees. The combination of these news induced a standstill at nearly all companies regarding any change in terms of innovation of products or processes. Many companies introduced a ban on business trips to events or seminars that were not necessary for the core business to use all resources available as efficiently as possible. SMEs in particular fear that the situation will deteriorate in 2025. In addition to the general economic situation, SMEs are particularly concerned about the shortage of skilled workers.(Welt, 2024)

Elections in Germany will be held most probably by the end of February, but the economic situation will not change as fast. This has had an enormous impact on planned events and workshops to deliver our services as especially the regional environment in Eastern Bavaria is driven by the large manufacturing and supplier industry and economic structural change is leading to profound upheavals as rural areas in particular are facing major challenges.(Dörr et al., 2024)

Therefore, the services in DInO for Eastern Bavaria need to be modified in terms of their length and intensity to ensure that participation remains possible. The impact of DInO on the region's digital maturity will take more time to become evident, as currently, many people are adopting a cautious and watchful stance. The assessment and evaluation of services will continue as all partners engage in a comprehensive evaluation of the region, its needs, and the necessary adaptations regarding the services and communication strategy offered. This approach aims to create a consistent service offering that meets the evolving needs of the region and directly supports the project's goals through ongoing assessments of regional requirements and demands. Existing services will be continuously re-evaluated and adjusted to better serve the needs of both customers and the region.

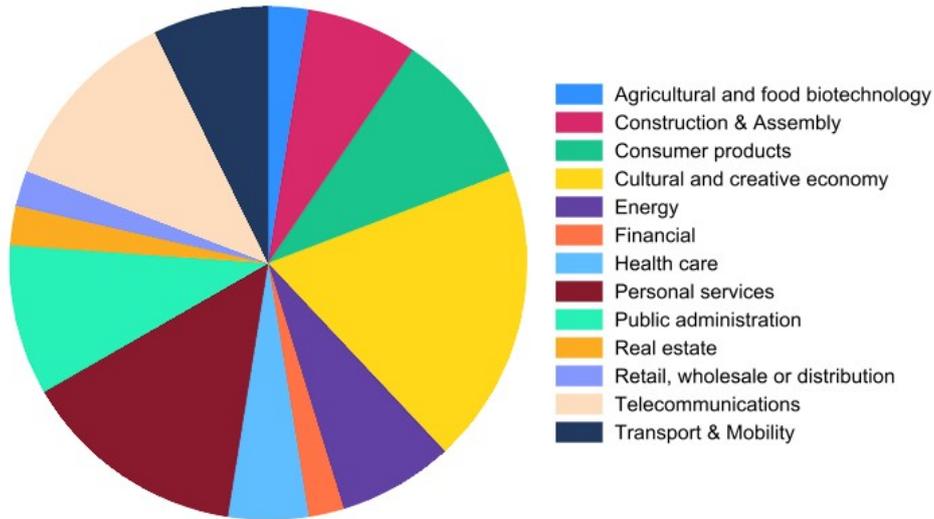


Figure 1: DMA Sectors

2.2 Digital Maturity Assessment Tool Results

There were a total of 42 DMA T0 SME participants. The analysis of the Digital Maturity Assessments (DMA) up to October 2024 indicates that the average overall rating of EDIH DInO's SME customers is 36.19%. This indicates that there is still significant room for improvement in the digital maturity of the consulted companies. It is particularly striking that the lowest ratings were achieved in the dimensions of Automation & Artificial Intelligence (24.57%) and Green Digitalisation (29.88%). This indicates that companies in Eastern Bavaria are struggling to implement advanced automation or AI technologies and integrate sustainable digital practices. This aligns with the services offered by DinO, which focus heavily on AI to address this situation. The dimensions of Digital Readiness (32.45%) and Digital Business Strategy (39.45%) are also below average, indicating that many companies have not yet developed comprehensive digital strategies or are not investing sufficiently in digital technologies. By contrast, the dimensions of Human-Centric Digitalisation (44.24%) and Data Governance (45.62%) score the highest. This shows that companies have already made progress in the user-centered design of digital solutions and the handling of data.

Another important point is the distribution of DMA ratings by company size. Most DMAs, 66.7%, were completed by micro-enterprises (1-9 employees), a total of 28. This suggests that smaller companies are particularly well-represented and need specific support to improve their digital maturity. Nine assessments, or 21.4%, were from small companies (10-49 employees), four assessments, or 9.5%, were from medium-sized companies, and one assessment, or 2.4%, was from a small medium-sized company (50-499 employees).

The SMEs participating in the DMA survey represented a diverse range of sectors, as

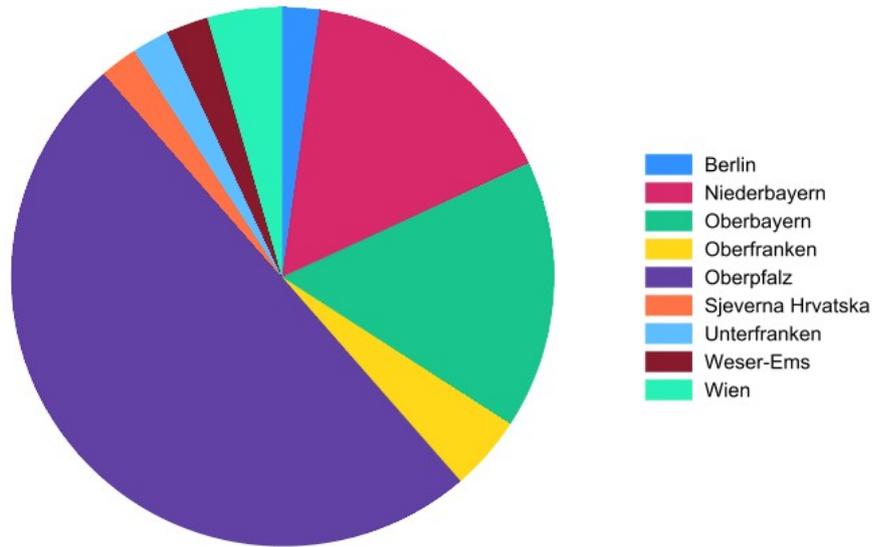


Figure 2: DMA Regions

illustrated in Figure 1. The cultural and creative economy was the most represented sector, with eight participants, accounting for 19.0%. The personal services sector followed, including six participants, or 14.3%. Both the retail, wholesale, and distribution sectors, as well as telecommunications, had five participants each, representing 11.9%. The consumer products sector had four participants, accounting for 9.5%, which was the same number as those from public administration. The construction and assembly sector had three participants, constituting 7.1%. Similarly, the energy sector also had three participants, or 7.1%, as did the transport and mobility sector, which had an equal representation. The healthcare sector included two participants, making up 4.8%. Lastly, the agricultural biotechnology and food biotechnology sectors, the financial sector, and the real estate sector each had one participant, representing 2.4%.

Considering the distribution in regions as shown in Figure 2, most SMEs came from Eastern Bavaria, which is made up of Oberpfalz (Upper Palatinate) and Niederbayern (Lower Bavaria), together accounting for 69.0% with 29 customers. The other Bavarian government districts combined accounted for 19.0% with 8 customers. Additionally, 4.8% of the SMEs, or 2 customers, came from other German regions, and 7.1%, or 3 customers, came from outside Germany.

As of October 2024, a total of 18 PSEs have completed the Digital Maturity Assessments. The average score across all assessed dimensions was 40.22%, indicating a moderate level of digital maturity among these organizations. Among the evaluated dimensions, Digital Readiness achieved the highest average score of 45.33%. This suggests that the PSEs are relatively well-prepared in terms of foundational digital capabilities and infrastructure. The second highest scoring dimension, Data Management and Security, had an average score

of 42.11%, indicating a reasonable focus on safeguarding data and managing it effectively. Interoperability followed closely with a score of 41.56%, reflecting moderate success in ensuring that systems and processes can work together seamlessly. The dimension of Human-Centric Digitalisation scored 37.61%, highlighting the need for a greater emphasis on designing digital initiatives that prioritize user needs and accessibility. The lowest scoring dimension was Green Digitalisation, with an average score of only 35%. This points to a significant gap in integrating sustainable and environmentally friendly practices within the PSEs’ digital transformation strategies. Overall, the results identify areas of strength, such as Digital Readiness, while underscoring the need for targeted improvements, particularly in Green Digitalisation and Human-Centric Digitalisation. These findings indicate that while progress has been made, there is still considerable room for development to achieve comprehensive digital maturity.

At the moment there are too few T1 DMAs to analyze, which is due to the fact that most of the services were only carried out during 2024, currently further T1 DMAs are being queried and can then be used to determine how much the DInO services have affected the digital maturity of SMEs in Eastern Bavaria.

2.3 Key Performance Indicators

Table 1 from October 2024 summarizes the KPIs achieved to date. The partners continuously input data into the project’s internal CRM system, evaluate it, and collaboratively analyze it once a quarter. The table shows the services in the left row, the number of participants for the services collected, and the SMEs and PSEs benefiting from each service. It also compares these achievements against target values in the right row.

Services such as Cooperation Accelerator (T4.1) and Support to Find Funding Instruments (T5.1) have seen significant participation, with 231 and 135 individuals involved, respectively. In T4.1, 123 SMEs participated, while T5.1 engaged 77 SMEs, both exceeding their targets. This demonstrates that flexible, low-threshold services with clear benefits from shorter events or workshops are particularly effective in Eastern Bavaria. Furthermore, for Support to Find Funding Instruments, the customer base was already established, and there was no need to change the advertising strategy to attract enough customers for the service. Services like Digital Technologies (T4.2) and International Matchmaking (T6.1) attracted 157 and 63 persons, respectively, indicating healthy engagement levels. Services such as IoT & UAV Test Lab (T3.4), Quantum Computing & HPC Capacities (T3.5), and 5G Testbed (T3.6) show minimal or no participation of SMEs or PSEs. SMEs constitute the majority of participants across most services, which aligns with the project’s primary focus. For example, 451 SMEs engaged overall, compared to 144 PSEs. Funding-related initiatives, such as Support to Find Funding Instruments (T5.1), proved highly successful,

reflecting a critical need for financial assistance in fostering innovation. In total, 871 participants engaged with services, comprising 451 SMEs and 144 PSEs.

The current numbers fall short of the cumulative targets of 1,635 SMEs and 190 PSEs, highlighting the need for increased efforts to reach the project's full potential in enhancing the digital maturity of PSEs and SMEs in Eastern Bavaria. Compared to the last analysis of KPIs in July 2024, overall performance has significantly improved. At that time, there were 660 individuals counted, along with 154 SMEs and 45 PSEs. This indicates that both the number of SMEs and the PSE customers have more than doubled since the previous KPI analysis. This positive trend shows that the DInO Hub is on a good way of being established as a key multiplier of innovation in the region. The next section describes the performance of the services in more detail and analyses why they under or overperformed so far and what has or will be done to better adjust them to the needs of the region

Services provided by DInO				
Service	Persons	SME	PSE	Target
T3.1 Dependability	42	22	5	40 SME, 10 PSE
T3.2 Eye-Tracking as Digital Tool	21	18	3	40 SME
T3.3 AI and Machine Learning	16	10	3	40 SME, 10 PSE
T3.4 IoT & UAV Test Lab		1		40 SME, 10 PSE
T3.5 Quantum Computing & HPC Capacities		1		40 SME, 10 PSE
T3.6 5G - Testbed				50 SME
T4.1 Cooperation Accelerator	231	123	9	50 SME
T4.2 Digital Technologies	157	38		240 SME
T4.3 Founder's Academy		4	1	30 SME
T4.4 The Academy of Digital Mindset and Start-up Skills	59	10	20	30 PSE
T4.5 Paperless Office		4	6	70 SME, 30 PSE
T4.6 Security Audits		3		25 SME
T4.7 Individual SME & PSE consultations	25	14	13	60 SME, 20 PSE
T4.8 Creative Digitization Strategies		7		150 SME
T5.1 Support to find Funding Instruments	135	77	31	30 SME
T5.2 Financial and promotional support for innovative Startup Ideas in the Pre-Seed Stage		28		40 SME
T5.3 EEN-Collaborations Horizon Europe		2		
T6.1 International Matchmaking	63	25	2	50 SME
T.6.2 Awareness raising and initial advice for companies		25		300 SME, 50PSE
T6.3 Events to connect digital start-ups with large & SMEs	123	37	51	250 SME, 50PSE
T6.4 Rural Region Early Adopter Test Pool		2		60 SME
Total	871	451	144	1635 SME, 190 PSE

Table 1: KPIs October 2024

3 Experience with Service Deliveries

3.1 Test Before Invest

The main advantage that EDIH-DInO offers its customers is modern test labs in the region. Together with DInO researchers, customers can develop prototypes and learn how to work with technologies in the fields of AI, HPC, 5G, Eye-tracking, Cyber Security & Dependability and IoT & UAV to generate a proof of concept or demonstration for potential investors or credit institutions. The following section describes the experience with the services in the "Test Before Invest" pillar. The main challenge was customer acquisition, especially for services that are difficult to grasp, followed by difficulties in commissioning the Test Before Invest infrastructure and time management of the services offered.

Different strategies have been applied to raise awareness for the Test before Invest services to acquire the first customers. At the beginning of the project, large-scale attempts to reach customers with cold calls or emails that promoted the services had a very low success rate. Potential customers were hard to reach and the response rate was meager. For this reason, the advertising strategy had to be shifted towards networking and cooperation with regional multipliers and to showcase the Test before Invest technologies at trade fairs, conferences and events in the region. This shift caused a positive change in the visibility of the Test before Invest services in Eastern Bavaria. The networking and cooperation with economic development and regional consultants in common events and advertising the services in their channels often caused customer contacts to follow up. Additionally, once the first customers were secured, the services gained popularity rapidly through word-of-mouth recommendations. The realization that not every company has the opportunity and time to travel to larger cities for initial consultations or get to know new technologies at big trade fairs, led to a closer focus on advertising the Test before Invest services directly on-site in different locations across Eastern Bavaria. One example was the DInO road trip through Eastern Bavaria in cooperation with economic development agencies and regional consultants in June 2024. Here, individual consultations on the topics of IT-security and Eye-Tracking were held. The user-friendliness of websites, software solutions, training materials and other digital products was examined live on site using mobile eye trackers. Audits based on BSI IT-Grundschutz were conducted, emergency plans and ISMS guidelines were developed, and workshops on security awareness were held for employees.

The shift in customer acquisition strategies led to a strong increase in demand for the services Dependability, Eye-Tracking as well as AI and Machine Learning. Unfortunately, this was not the case for the IoT & UAV Test Lab, 5G Testbed, and HPC services. While the demand for the IoT & UAV Test Lab service slightly increased, the 5G Testbed and

HPC services still have no significant demand. The fact that the changed advertising strategies did not work for the two services was also since the infrastructure was not yet presentable and therefore the services were not tangible enough for the market. After having built up a significant customer base, the services Dependability and Eye-Tracking as digital tool in particular faced the challenge that individual consultations were very time-consuming. This is why a format with workshops that have around 5 participants has been developed for these services.

Since the consortium has a lot of expertise in the field of AI and there are other tasks dealing with this technology, there was initially the problem of dividing up the customers among the partners and providing similar services via the partners. This problem was solved through intensive exchange and the services in the field of AI were clearly differentiated from one another. Furthermore, the customers are passed on among the partners that are best suited to fulfill the specific needs of the customers.

The services offered in the tasks IoT & UAV Test Lab and HPC Capacities will be marketed more intensely. To better fit the specific needs of the region and to show the usefulness of the services to potential customers, an advertising strategy is currently being developed that focuses on clear communication of use cases with high relevance for SMEs and/or PSEs in Eastern Bavaria. Furthermore, these services are marketed closely together to respond better to the market and are presented together at regional events. The 5G-testbed service is adjusted towards a broader context which covers different aspects of network engineering with the infrastructure and technical devices still available for testing.

T3.1 Dependability (Functional Safety & IT-Security)

This task is based at the Laboratory for Safe and Secure Systems (LaS³) at OTH Regensburg and focuses on tackling the most immediate IT-security needs of local SMEs and PSEs. To gain an overview of the IT infrastructure of an SME or PSE, an audit questionnaire based on BSI Grundschutz has been developed, which covers all important areas of cyber security in companies. This helps to identify specific needs for action and provides clear recommendations. User-centric issues, such as employee phishing awareness, are also a focus. Eye-tracking technology is used to train employees and improve their ability to recognize phishing attacks.

To date, numerous individual consultations have been conducted. In cases where customers did not present a specific issue, a general assessment of IT security measures was carried out on-site. Based on the findings, emergency plans and ISMS guidelines were collaboratively developed with the customers. While the focus was primarily on documentation and emergency preparedness, a comprehensive security concept for a medical application was also successfully created. Other customers received interactive workshops for their employees on IT security awareness, focusing on phishing emails and

social engineering. After a 30-minute introduction on identifying and avoiding phishing emails, participants completed a quiz distinguishing real emails from phishing attempts. Eye-tracking recorded their focus and overlooked details, which were analyzed afterward to provide personalized feedback and highlight areas for improvement, making the learning experience both practical and engaging.

To tackle the different situations encountered in local SMEs, the services are threefold: If the customer had no overview of the state of IT-security in their firm, initial consultations included a general audit to identify needs. Afterwards, or when a customer presented a clearly outlined challenge, the consultation focused on generating documentation and emergency plans as well as security concepts. The third pillar consists of measures to strengthen security awareness among the employees, such as workshops. Since in-depth individual consultations were very time-consuming, a series of advanced workshops was developed, in which 3-5 clients participated at the same time. This approach allows general insights into certifications and necessary emergency measures to be shared with multiple customers simultaneously, freeing up more time for individual consultations later on.

In the beginning, the lack of customers was a big issue for this task. This was overcome by offering low-stakes entry-level workshops at many local conferences and networking events so that potential customers could get to know the task. Since the level of knowledge on IT security varies greatly between different SMEs, the team opted for a simpler, less technical approach, initially focusing on general audits and security awareness topics to avoid overwhelming potential customers with complex technical details. This proved successful in developing a customer base that was then often also interested in a more in-depth consultation on IT-security.

For this task, the change in advertising as well as cooperation with other tasks have proven to be successful in generating a solid customer base, so that lack of customers is no longer an issue. In creating tailored solutions for customers that focus on both technical and behavioral aspects of cybersecurity—such as risk assessments, vulnerability management, and employee engagement—this task contributes to enhancing the innovation potential of Eastern Bavaria.

T3.2 Eye-Tracking as Digital Tool

DInO offers eye-tracking consulting and analysis at the OTH Regensburg laboratory, featuring both stationary and mobile eye trackers. These tools can be used to assess the usability of digital products by identifying how user-friendly designs attract attention and influence interactions, ultimately enhancing the user experience and product efficiency. The analysis combines real-time eye movement data with traditional questionnaires. Additionally, services include security awareness evaluations, revealing what users identify as security-relevant and where improvements are needed. Phishing training is also provided

to assess employees' recognition of phishing emails and what key details they may overlook.

Among the individual consultations that were conducted, a usability review of a medical application using eye-tracking was considered very successful by the customer. A study was set up to compare heat maps between user groups with and without certain features, allowing the client to implement a solution that best fits its customer base. Other individual consultations included website reviews with eye-tracking and workshops for employees. In addition, SMEs and PSEs participated in half- or full-day workshops to learn about eye-tracking technology and how to use it in a work context.

The main problem of this task was developing a customer base. Many potential customers did not know what eye-tracking was or what it could be used for. Once the network was established and customers were aware of DInO's services, also through word of mouth, the popularity of the service grew steadily. Another prevalent issue is the amount of time required for individual consultations. The fact that 80 hours were spent on a single app usability test illustrates the high time investment required, emphasizing the depth and thoroughness of the services provided. Therefore, the concept was developed to offer longer, advanced workshops where 3-5 clients can participate at the same time to learn about eye-tracking. If clients need further advice, an individual session can be arranged. This ensures that a large client base can participate in the service, while still maintaining the quality of the consultations. Due to the high demand and the high number of consultations already carried out, this task is helping to significantly increase the digital maturity of SMEs in Eastern Bavaria.

T3.3 AI and Machine Learning

This task aims to address the specific needs of different organizational levels. Technical and engineering teams receive guidance on selecting and implementing suitable AI) and ML technologies. Management teams get strategic advice to align AI/ML initiatives with organizational goals, including cost assessments and risk evaluations. General staff participate in workshops and training to build foundational knowledge and facilitate the adoption of AI/ML technologies. The focus is on enabling organizations to explore these technologies through practical, low-risk applications, helping them assess data quality, identify use cases, and develop prototypes using OTH infrastructure.

It was incredibly difficult and tedious to find points of contact with companies, especially at the start of the project. One reason for this is that the market is oversaturated with offers in the field of AI and that companies were often unable to distinguish what DInO does differently or better than other formats. The emphasis on "free, pragmatic, individual advice without obligation" worked well here. In addition, some companies have little interest in AI offerings because they may have already been on one or more training courses and these did not meet their expectations, so they wrote off these formats.

Often, customers were not sure what they wanted from the service or had unrealistic high expectations of the implementation of AI or ML technologies. Many companies have heard of AI, but have exaggerated expectations of the technology, which often ended in disillusionment at first. A craft business or carpenter doesn't know what to do with AI. There is often a lack of basic digitalization, therefore the approach of the task had to be very low-threshold and involved mostly individual initial advice, advising customers on the possibilities of AI and ML technologies but also about the prerequisites of implementing them. The first goal is to bring processes and information of SMEs or PSEs into a state where they can slowly start with data analysis and AI.

Furthermore, many small companies in Eastern Bavaria do not have the capacity to deal with complex and time-consuming implementation of AI/ML technologies in their daily work processes. The DInO Team relies on cooperation and teamwork with the consulted companies in order to solve their problems or have them benefit from the offered technologies. SMEs in the region are often running at 100% capacity and therefore cannot deal with the issue of digitalization, even if they see sense and added value in it. The companies for whom the topic is important and that have the capacity to implement them, often spend large sums of money to buy a service provider on the market. The DInO Team reacted to this specific market situation by positioning the service provided and the EDIH as a whole as an independent, neutral authority that can be consulted on content-related, organizational, or strategic issues alongside the service provider. However, this needs time and advertising before being recognized by the SMEs in Eastern Bavaria. Another hindering factor for the consultants of this service is that companies from urban regions are much more open to new technologies and quicker to initiate new contacts with institutions such as DInO. The interpretation is that rural companies are very busy in their daily business currently and have great difficulties in attracting young talent, too. SMEs consulted in this task also showed certain reservations when an institution as DInO comes to "help" them. In this context, it is always a matter of gaining the trust of these companies.

This approach meets the needs of the region by raising the relatively low level of digital literacy among the workforce. This can then be built upon and more complex systems can be implemented in the future. Consulting has shifted to regular appointments where DInO consultants discuss innovations and challenges with clients and offer expert feedback. With the involvement of PSE and SMEs from sectors such as software development, construction, and real estate management, the task is well underway.

T3.4 IoT & UAV Test Lab

This task demonstrates all types of state-of-the-art UAVs/drones, such as Hexacopter, VTOL, and Quadrocopter, showcased at the DIT Technology Campus in Freyung. The

drones can be implemented with different detecting systems and use 5G cores to construct a temporary 5G campus network. Measurement of network strength is also possible.

As with all the Test before Invest services, the first challenge was to get the infrastructure working and to gain the first customers. Technical problems with the tethering system caused this task to be delayed. Due to the complexity of the offered technical systems, it took way longer to get the demonstrators working which made it very difficult to attract customers to this task. The problems were finally solved by the end of 2024 and the IoT & UAV Test Lab service can now be provided to all possible customers.

In line with the shift in advertising that was conducted for the whole Test before Invest service pillar, the service, and its technologies were advertised with the help of regional multipliers in Eastern Bavaria. For this service, the shift has only worked partially despite multiple attempts to promote the service at trade fairs and regional events, the demand remains lower than expected. To some point the lack of demand was also because of the missing infrastructure, most regional multipliers regarded the technology as interesting but did not see a concrete use case for SMEs in the mostly rural regions of Eastern Bavaria. Compared to other technologies that could be presented on-site at trade fairs (like eye-tracking) this was not possible for the IOT & UAV Test Lab service. Since the demonstrators have been working the service has been presented at local events which were advertised as dedicated IoT & UAV events and not as before as a part of broader digitalization events, the demand for consultancies in this task has been rising. This can be explained by the fact that SMEs currently considering the use of drones or IoT are actively searching for such events in the Region and are more likely to enter a conversation with the DInO consultants than on common DInO events. We received favorable responses from PSEs regarding this service, but our infrastructure was not ready to support consultations at that time. Now that the infrastructure is operational, we will re-engage this target group, including firefighters and border police. Additionally, based on our successful experiences with joint marketing efforts, such as face-to-face events showcasing similar technologies, we plan to position this service close to the changed Task T3.6 and promote them together. Furthermore, we intend to expand our service offerings to include technologies like edge computing, EDGE AI, and embedded infrastructure, creating a portfolio that better meets the needs of the region.

To benefit from the learnings made in other tasks, detailed use-cases of the technologies from this task, tailored to the rural character of the region have been developed and are presented to regional and local stakeholders, aiming to create interest among SMEs and PSEs in the region. Along with the experiences made in T3.1, T3.2, and T3.3 it can be assumed that with the use cases explained and the possibility to showcase the technologies better, the multipliers and potential customers have a better understanding of the service and will acknowledge their usefulness, leading to greater demand in consultations for

this services. Besides the collaboration with multipliers, the showcasing of IoT & UAV technologies is intensified. In December 2024, a performance show to present all possible technologies and their updated use cases for this service was hosted at TC Freyung. This initiative has already attracted more customers to the service, along with our HPC and 5G offerings, leveraging the positive feedback received from previous presentations. The performance show will be offered to potential customers again in the first or second quarter of 2025.

This task initially faced the problem of not having a broad customer base. Another problem was the set-up of the Test before Invest infrastructure. The modified advertising strategies that worked well for the other tasks did not work here because the testing infrastructure was not yet stable enough to be presented at events or used in consultations. With the experience gained, the team is confident that the presentation of use cases and the fact that it is finally possible to present the infrastructure will attract several customers in 2025. This task is being closely monitored to minimize risks for the project. If, contrary to expectations, demand does not increase, this task will have to be changed to better fit the needs of the region.

T3.5 Quantum Computing & High-Performance Computing Capacities

This task aims to prepare PSE and SME with hands-on opportunities to gain initial experience with HPC before investing in the technology themselves. Interested parties are introduced to the basics of HPC and its potential application areas. The infrastructure at the Laboratory at Leibniz-Rechenzentrum in Garching and the laboratory at VIRZ (Verband Innovatives Rechenzentrum e.V.) can be used after arrangement.

The process of putting the High-Performance Data Center Laboratory at Deggendorf into operation is progressing more slowly than initially planned, with completion expected by the end of June/July 2025, due to unforeseen circumstances including rent agreement modalities. The hardware is only partially accessible. There was almost no demand for consultancies without the offer to use the capacities of the High-Performance Data Center. The team reacted to the circumstances and offered low-threshold consultancies for SMEs in the region. The task application was changed, as with the other tasks, by promoting it more through multipliers and showing use cases at local events. However, in the case of HPC, this did not lead to the desired success. There have not been as many inquiries for HPC consulting as expected.

The low increase in demand is partly because HPC is very difficult to grasp. Especially for smaller companies with a lower digital maturity, as there are many in Eastern Bavaria. In contrast to the other tasks, no low-threshold use cases could be developed, as the topic of HPC is very complicated and almost always requires a high digital maturity level by the users of this technology. The companies with specific concerns in the field of HPC and a

high level of digital maturity were mainly interested in using the advanced infrastructure. This means that these interested parties could not be advised before the final application of the data center is available.

To ensure that the service can be run at full capacity as soon as the Data Center has taken up its function, the DInO team is already working towards this point in time and many advertising measures have been initiated to make the service visible in Eastern Bavaria. The key problem remains that the consulting services and the Test before Invest scenario can only be marketed and advertised effectively, as soon as the center is completed. New events are already planned and in preparation. The next Fut3ch symposium will take place in Deggendorf on 7 and 8 May 2025. The upcoming FuT3ch Symposium in May 2025 and at least two “Digital Coffee Break” sessions together with planned workshops will gain the necessary attention. In addition, this technology with possible use cases was exhibited at the performance show in Freyung together with T3.4 and T3.6 and the marketing department has been tasked with strengthening regional and local press efforts to acquire customers.

This task is currently not on schedule and there is a risk that the construction of the High-Performance Data Center will be delayed further and thus the consultations will be further delayed. To minimize the risk of not being able to conduct consultancies that rely on the infrastructure which could arise from the further delayed commissioning of the data center, the team is monitoring the progress of the data center’s construction very closely. Should this eventuality occur, the team is preparing for it by developing alternative strategies. For example, the customers acquired up to that point could be passed on to other EDIHs that offer this technology. In the long run, the task could also be adapted to function as a part of the AI service ecosystem offered by DInO in the other tasks.

T3.6 5G Testbed

This task offers a 5G testbed for SMEs and PSEs in the region. The local 5G stand-alone campus network at TC Freyung can be used to test the connectivity of 5G client devices. An advanced spectral analyzer that can be coupled with a signal generator analyzes wireless communication. Software-defined radios are available to emulate any signals using high-performance workstations. A backpack mobile network scanner is available to create a detailed network coverage map.

The service was presented at various conferences and meetings with regional stakeholders and numerous potential customers. Unfortunately, orders for this service remain very low, and the anticipated hype surrounding the 5G technology has diminished in Eastern Bavaria. SMEs find it challenging to engage with and invest in 5G technologies. Although the 5G Testbed is a highly advanced product, feedback from potential customers suggests that it has been over-engineered for this target group. For example, the investment of

over 300,000,- Euros for a 5G campus network is often beyond the financial reach of most SMEs, leading to a lack of motivation to utilize this service. To address this issue of low customer engagement, we are currently modifying our service offerings. We plan to expand into consulting for data management and network engineering. With this new service concept, we aim to provide network and data management consulting to better understand our customers' network requirements. Additionally, we will recommend more affordable solutions, such as LoRaWAN, which may be better suited for SMEs and PSEs.

After conducting a small proof of concept for this adapted service, we received positive feedback regarding the planned technologies. The first exhibition of the new technology set took place at the performance show at TC Freyung in December 2024. This event showcased all possible technologies and use cases for our adapted service. The initial response has indicated a significant interest in the service across Eastern Bavarian SMEs and PSEs. This task is being closely monitored to minimize risks for the project. We are promoting a low-threshold approach that has been successful in other projects, along with new advertising strategies such as using simple language and leveraging multipliers. This approach will be showcased alongside other services that share a similar technological focus and target audience. To adapt to the changing economic conditions and market situation in Eastern Bavaria, we will closely evaluate feedback on this service from multipliers and customers and make any necessary adjustments.

3.2 Skills & Training

As part of the services and offerings under "Skills and Training," numerous activities were initiated and successfully implemented to promote digital transformation in Eastern Bavaria. The measures and initiatives carried out within the DInO project have already contributed to advancing digital transformation in the region during the first year. Targeted networking, individual consultation, and workshops to enhance digital skills have proven successful approaches to elevate Eastern Bavaria's digital maturity. Establishing a network was particularly crucial during the first year to raise awareness of the project's offerings among the target audience and to highlight self-development opportunities in digitization. At this initial stage, customer outreach and acquisition presented significant challenges, primarily due to a lack of established contacts with decision-makers and executives.

As with the "Test Before Invest" services, establishing contact with regional multipliers is essential. This approach serves two purposes: Promoting the events and understanding the specific needs of the region. For instance, there are already numerous online and offline events about artificial intelligence in the area, leading to multipliers and potential customers being overwhelmed with promotional materials from these initiatives. Customer

acquisition in the SME sector is also challenging because many competitors from the private sector are vying for potential clients and are offering workshops on digitization topics. The demand for fully individualized one-on-one consulting has not met expectations. This is primarily because private competitors, free public offerings, and other services from DInO effectively address these needs. As a result, some initiatives have had to adapt by either organizing collaborative events with other public providers, as seen in T4.2 Digital Technologies, or by introducing new digital tools that add value for SMEs and PSEs, as in T4.7 Individual SME & PSE Consultation, to attract new customers.

The most effective strategy has been to engage multipliers in personal discussions to demonstrate the advantages of the DInO events for SMEs. The main additional benefits for the region that multipliers acknowledged were free offerings of workshops with experts from the research institutes or the other DInO partners and the neutrality of these DInO experts as well as their knowledge of the region's needs.

For the three tasks T4.1: Cooperation Accelerator, T4.3: Founders' Academy, and T4.4: The Academy of Digital Mindset and Start-up Skills, a fixed time-frame for annual events was initially planned. However, regional stakeholders indicated that this long-term commitment was not suitable for the economic realities of Eastern Bavaria. In terms of content, the services align better with one-day events rather than a multi-month workshop series. The digital landscape can change significantly within nine months, making long-term planning challenging. Smaller companies with only a few employees cannot afford to have their staff absent for multiple days throughout the year. This could put them at a disadvantage in an already competitive market. Moreover, companies are eager to achieve tangible outcomes from workshops or events on digitalization and innovation, which they can quickly implement to enhance their operations. Partners involved in the DInO events and workshops, whether as co-hosts or supporters, expressed that they did not want or were able to collaborate for periods lasting as long as nine months. They felt that the cost-benefit ratio for their region was unclear. Therefore, from the partners' perspective, it is more advantageous to organize shorter and more flexible workshops.

The project team responded to the feedback by adopting an open process that allows start-ups and SMEs to engage in topics that matter to them. This approach contrasts with the original plan outlined in the grant agreement, which specified a fixed group of start-ups and SMEs for a duration of 6-8 months. Instead of being confined to a closed group, participants now have the opportunity to get involved in discussions that are relevant to their interests. Another benefit of a more flexible workshop design is that many new companies will emerge during the three-year project period. These new businesses can also participate and gain from a flexible structure, helping maintain workshop attendance and capacity utilization. Also, the feedback of the participants showed that the content was very well suited to improve their digital maturity in smaller steps. The success of

this approach is also evident in the fact that many companies willingly return to these events voluntarily, even without a prior commitment. Once the multipliers were convinced about this new approach, they helped effectively market the DInO events through their channels. The changes in Task T4.8, Creative Digitization Strategies, followed a similar trend. The main issue identified was that the two-day workshops were too lengthy for the target audience. As a result, a new concept was developed that includes shorter, more flexible workshops.

It was also interesting to observe how the public sector responded to different offers, mainly in tasks T4.2: Digital Technologies, T4.4: The Academy of Digital Mindset and Start-up Skills, and T4.5: Paperless Office. Low-threshold solutions, such as a Paperless Office, were very well received by PSEs. However, attracting PSEs as customers for more complex technological topics, like AI, proved to be more challenging. Many viewed AI as complicated and held biases against it. Additionally, there was a significant variation in competency levels among the PSEs in the region, making it difficult to achieve a critical mass of expertise during online discussions.

The "Skills and Training" work package has made significant progress in enhancing digital maturity in Eastern Bavaria. This was achieved through strategic networking, flexible programming, and a focus on customer needs. By tackling regional challenges and forming partnerships, the initiative established a solid foundation for ongoing digital transformation. Future efforts should prioritize adaptability, accessible solutions, and simplifying complex technologies to encourage wider participation and maximize impact.

T4.1 Cooperation-Accelerator

This task supports start-ups and SMEs in Eastern Bavaria in tapping the potential of digitalization through cooperation. The aim is to sensitize, qualify, and network SMEs on the topic of "innovation through cooperation".

In the development phase of the Accelerator, thematic workshops and networking-matching events were designed to collect feedback from participating stakeholders, enabling the development of a needs-oriented service offering. The input gathered from the stakeholders indicated very clearly that nine months was too long for productive cooperation in this task. None of the possible cooperation partners was willing to engage in such a long-lasting cooperation, the project team reacted to that feedback and opted for an open process in which start-ups and SMEs can get involved in topics that are important to them, instead of being part of a closed group as it was planned in the grant agreement.

The team then implemented a series of well-attended events to activate companies on specific topics, gradually introducing them to the regional startup scene. Participants benefit from technology transfer, targeted matchmaking, and knowledge-building about industry cooperation. Among those events were workshops that aimed at creating a

fundamental understanding of AI technologies for SMEs and startups or encouraging self-employed individuals, startups, and companies to share creative business methods. The events proved highly effective, providing a valuable platform for SMEs and startups to present their approaches and engage in meaningful dialogue. Participants' foundational competencies were significantly enhanced, equipping them to apply them in their daily work. Collaborative learning at individual tables fostered valuable exchanges, enabling participants to engage freely and effectively. The positive feedback and high registration numbers highlighted the success of the specific networking setting, particularly in-depth discussions and lively interactions. The participants found the sessions engaging and well-organized. The feedback from the participants of the workshops suggested a desire for more practical examples, particularly in the area of predictive maintenance. Other topics of interest included AI in SMEs, SEO/SEA, and using the OpenAI API. It was also suggested that there should be more time for practical exercises and group work and that half-day sessions should be maintained. They suggested allocating more time to explore the methods in greater depth and to dive deeper into specific techniques. The networking opportunities were appreciated, as they promoted equality among participants by emphasizing names rather than company affiliations. For future events, attendees requested additional topics and methods related to prototyping, as well as a clearer structure for event schedules.

In addition to in-person events, two online sessions focused on the social media platform LinkedIn have been held. These events demonstrated a significant interest in effectively using LinkedIn, particularly among established companies eager to learn how agile startups leverage the platform. The online format has proven to be successful for seminar-style discussions. The insights from startups are particularly valuable, as they often operate with limited advertising budgets and rely on organic growth. Their experiences can be immensely beneficial for small SMEs and PSEs. Participants found the first event to be well-organized and engaging. Some attendees praised the insights and presentation, while others expressed a desire for more interaction and concrete examples. There were comments about the limited time for questions at the end and the presentation being somewhat lengthy. Overall, the feedback was positive, with a few suggestions for improvement. These suggestions were implemented in the subsequent online workshop. In that event, participants described the experience as excellent, commending both the speaker and the content.

The team responded to this feedback and organized two more events in the second half of 2024. The Prompt-a-thon was a successful event that highlighted the importance of artificial intelligence and was able to address many people's fears about AI while also generating excitement about its opportunities and possibilities. Collaborating on challenges in small groups proved to be particularly effective, allowing participants to apply what they had previously learned and gain valuable experience in a hands-on way.

Overall, the event was both successful and instructive. The participants found the event to be well-structured and informative, praising the engaging presentations and workshops. They appreciated the excellent time management and the support provided during group activities. Some suggested incorporating more practical tasks and adding extra breaks, while others expressed a desire for more in-depth sessions and opportunities to explore various challenges. Overall, the feedback was very positive, with participants expressing a wish for more similar events in the future. Although the Bavarian-Czech Innovation Day was successful, a higher turnout could have yielded even better results. All participants agreed that the method was highly effective and met their expectations and goals.

The combination of online and in-person formats and startup involvement demonstrated a strong demand for digitalization topics and practical workshops.

T4.2 Digital Technologies

Following the concept of the task, the team implemented a range of activities designed to promote digital technologies and empower SMEs, PSEs, and start-ups with advanced technical skills. The series introduced participants to digital technologies, drawing on the "Test before Invest" infrastructure to provide practical and accessible learning opportunities. In alignment with the project's objectives, the initial implementation included an e-learning platform successfully established as a central resource for digital content. However, the online event series faced a slower-than-anticipated start, attributed to market saturation. The oversupply of similar technology-focused events resulted in participants feeling overwhelmed, which reduced initial engagement and even canceled events.

Recognizing this challenge, the project team strategically adapted the approach to better cater to the needs and preferences of the target audience, by introducing alternative formats to enhance engagement and impact. On-site workshops about the topics AI and ML were implemented, offering interactive, hands-on experiences that addressed specific participant challenges. Additionally, larger thematic events, such as the "AI Day Conference," were introduced to attract broader audiences and provide in-depth exploration of critical technologies. These formats required greater organizational effort but yielded higher participant satisfaction and engagement. Feedback from the conference indicated that attendees greatly appreciated the opportunities for networking and exchange. The poster session, in particular, received high marks. Participants responded overwhelmingly positively to the event. The combination of poster sessions and presentations from academia and industry was diverse and enjoyable. Additionally, the follow-up and distribution of collected materials were well-received. Many participants expressed interest in attending a follow-up event. The AI4VET4AI event attracted a diverse international audience, facilitating extensive discussions about artificial intelligence and its applications that exceeded the time allotted during breaks. Participants highlighted the value of learning

about the success factors of our previous projects. In particular, they were interested in the interaction between management and employees, as well as our role as AI experts.

A further finding in the planning and implementation of events is that participating company representatives need to be offered added value through the presentation of experiences and stories from real-life practice, from which they can directly take something away from their company. Another finding that is striking in the knowledge transfer of AI and ML is that the starting position or prior knowledge and competence to classify AI about internal company processes is very divergent. This is shown, among other things, by the fact that there are a large number of companies that already use AI operationally and a large number of companies that do not see any potential for AI and therefore often show little interest in further training. The DInO Team has therefore entered into a cooperation with the adult education center "VHS Weiden-Neustadt gGmbH" for the topic of AI and ML in order to address small and medium-sized companies in the northern Upper Palatinate region more specifically through joint events. The aim is to use the adult education center to reach companies that would otherwise not be addressed by the event formats of other players. The first joint Events were successfully implemented in Autumn 2024 and further joint Events will be held in the year 2025.

These adjustments addressed market saturation and aligned with feedback indicating a preference for more immersive and tailored learning experiences. By diversifying the formats and strategically targeting audience needs, the project team ensured that the activities remained relevant and impactful, fostering greater digital maturity among participants.

T4.3 Founders' Academy

As part of the concept outlined in the project brief, the team organized a series of events to introduce companies, start-ups, and public institutions to entrepreneurship methods. In particular, the formats "StartUp Factory" and "Real Projects" were tailored to the specific target groups, allowing participants to acquire and apply practical skills through real, company-specific challenges. These hands-on formats provided not only theoretical knowledge but also enabled participants to directly apply the methods they learned to concrete challenges in their daily work.

In contrast to the original approach, which outlined a fixed nine-month workshop process, the project team responded flexibly to participant feedback. They opted for an open, needs-based process in which workshops were adapted to meet the specific needs of each participant group. This flexible framework allowed participants to learn, apply, and integrate entrepreneurship methods based on their current needs, fostering a deeper and more sustainable understanding of the content.

The first "Real Projects" involved nearly 70 students and three companies. Students formed teams to tackle the companies' challenges using design thinking, developing innovative busi-

ness models over seven days across eight weeks. In the end, 13 teams presented solutions, showcasing how academic training and practical experience can address real-world issues. The participants found the workshops to be very engaging. They had the opportunity to reflect on their roles and abilities within the team. The business model canvas helped analyze the product or service and re-evaluate the target audience or customers. The participants expressed a desire for more detailed information about the daily program in the future. In spring 2024, a workshop focused on digital business models was conducted. Participants utilized various entrepreneurship tools to analyze and understand the process more effectively, as well as to explore potential improvement options. It was highlighted that external support provided significant added value that should not be overlooked. The client is currently refining the results, with ongoing coordination aimed at potentially launching a spin-off based on the developed model.

The first run of the "Startup Factory" took place over three consecutive days in April and provided an inspiring platform for creativity and innovation. During these intensive days, a total of 20 promising business models were developed. Participants expressed that they appreciated the opportunity to exchange ideas with experienced mentors and the practical application of concepts learned in theory, such as business plans and strategies. They valued the chance to expand their networks, noting that every idea is valuable and that each person brings relevant skills to the table, allowing them to complement one another. They emphasized the importance of maintaining a hands-on mentality and advised not to let unexpected challenges derail progress. Additionally, participants wished for more opportunities to ask critical questions after the pitches, as many ideas could not be explored in depth.

The evaluation of the feedback from the participating companies shows that they need much more support in analyzing the problems they have in integrating digital solutions into their business models. From this, the right challenge must then be set, which can be worked on in the workshops. This insight shows the importance of tailored support to address specific business needs.

T4.4 The Academy of Digital Mindset and Start-up Skills

This task aims to help local authorities and start-ups gain a basic understanding of digitalization in administration and public institutions. Collaborative formats are intended to identify and open up potential for cooperation and innovation in the field of digitalization. In the initial project year, partners faced challenges in accessing the public administration as their target audience. This is partly due to limited experience in engaging with this group, but it also represents significant untapped potential within the region. Integrating public administration into the digitally and technologically savvy networks of Eastern Bavaria is both a challenge and an opportunity. Additionally, the

abundance of providers offering similar services complicates outreach efforts.

In contrast to the planned process in the grant agreement (fixed group of start-ups and SME for 6-8 months), the project team reacted to the feedback and opted for an open process in which start-ups and PSE can get involved in topics that are important to them, instead of being part of a closed group. The online and offline formats are designed to enable participants to learn flexibly and continuously. Participation is possible at any time, with the competence level increasing as the duration progresses. The offer is aimed at both municipalities and start-ups. For municipalities, the focus is on identifying and exploiting potential for digitalization and cooperation. Start-ups benefit from the opportunity to strengthen their cooperation skills and gain access to the public sector.

A series of networking and exchange formats was implemented, where both target groups learned from each other facing specific challenges on both sides: PSE and start-ups. The events highlighted the importance of providing low-threshold access to digital topics, especially for public administration. Participants' competency levels varied significantly, as individuals from different municipalities had distinct backgrounds and faced a range of challenges. As a result, their knowledge needs also differed—some showed a surface-level interest in basic implementation, while others, from more experienced municipalities, had detailed inquiries. Therefore, tailoring event content to accommodate different needs and prior knowledge is crucial for achieving optimal learning outcomes. Involving startups and their innovative approaches has proven extremely valuable and demonstrated that exchanges between startups and municipal stakeholders lead to fresh perspectives and untapped potential.

Overall, the feedback was very positive, emphasizing the value and effectiveness of the event. Participants expressed a desire for more collaborative opportunities in the future. They found the event informative and engaging, and many indicated interest in new projects that would allow municipalities to further explore the field of AI. Suggestions were made to introduce potential collaborations or projects. Topics such as generative AI and digitalization in city marketing generated substantial interest and should continue to be prioritized. Participants particularly valued practical workshops and examples of real-world applications.

The events not only enabled the transfer of knowledge but also encouraged networking between municipalities and startups. This networking is crucial for unlocking long-term cooperation and innovation potential. One key takeaway was that targeted information sharing and practical examples can help reduce biases and fears associated with new technologies, particularly AI. This approach promotes greater acceptance and a willingness to implement digital solutions. Overall, achieving a critical mass of competency levels in online dialogues continues to be a challenge that hinders meaningful discussions.

T4.5 Paperless Office

This task aims to empower PSEs and SMEs for a paperless office and to convey ideas on how processes and work steps can be optimized and implemented in new ways using digital tools.

Customer acquisition was initially challenging due to the presence of numerous competitors offering similar digitization services in the market. However, by leveraging larger multipliers and conducting workshops, we were able to hold our first individual consultations and successfully acquire customers. In the public sector, attracting interested parties for the paperless office service has proven to be relatively straightforward. Municipalities and public institutions appreciate the free support offered. On the other hand, customer acquisition in the SME sector is more difficult, as many competitors from the private sector are also vying for potential clients, viewing this market as more attractive than the public sector. Intensive consultations with district offices led to comparatively few customers in the first year. However, these efforts were valuable in cultivating relationships and establishing the district offices as multipliers for future growth. Additionally, satisfied companies and municipalities often provide recommendations, resulting in new individual consultations.

The quarterly workshops and short webinars consistently draw in new participants. Both the content presented and the presenters received positive feedback. Attendees expressed a strong interest and need for the content, although some voiced hesitation against the adoption of new technologies. After the events, several individuals asked specific questions, leading to individual consulting appointments. The strategy of focusing on online workshops and participating in community and town meetings has proven to be successful and will continue. Additionally, several individual consultations have taken place, significantly aiding customers—mainly micro-enterprises—in their digitalization efforts. The combination of workshops and individual consultations has been effective, so we will proceed with these services as planned.

T4.6 Security Audits

This task aims to assess an organization's information security level and identify quick win-improvement steps. Since it was found that a "one-size-fits-all" approach did not accurately represent the needs of local SMEs, the services offered in this task are threefold:

Firstly, a concept for security audits based on ISO 27001 and CISIS12 has been developed. These audits are designed to gain a general overview of the state of IT-security in the company and serve as an entry point to a more in-depth consultation. The audits target a general audience, that does not enter the consultation with a specific question in mind. As in the other tasks, a lack of customers was an issue, especially in the beginning. There are many entry-level offers already on the market, so most of the general audits

held in this task were part of the DInO Roadtrip in June 2024, were a lot of effort went into customer acquisition and this issue was counteracted by close collaboration with regional partners. However, once customers participated in the audits, the feedback was very positive. The customized audits are well-received and consistently provide valuable insights for SMEs. Based on the results of the audits, customers often seek additional advice in Work Package 3 or request tips regarding further certifications. The individual consultations have been rated as very valuable. Participants appreciated receiving a personalized list of areas for improvement in their IT security, along with sources for more information.

Secondly, workshops on technical aspects, such as penetration testing, were planned as on-site events in the Regensburg Lab, so that it would be easier to showcase technologies and conduct hands-on demonstrations. However, customer acquisition posed a significant challenge, resulting in the cancellation of the first workshop. To address this, the workshop series was transitioned to an online format, allowing participants from Eastern Bavaria to join without the need for travel. A combination of two cameras allows for showcasing the circuit boards and materials online as well. This change proved to be effective, attracting a total of 31 registrations for the first edition, generating positive feedback, and prompting requests for a repeat session, which is scheduled for December 12th. While the workshop has been well received and the number of registrations was quite high at 31, only 8 persons actually attended the workshop. This might be because the workshop had to be postponed once due to illness and will be revisited once the second workshop has taken place. The small group fostered a pleasant environment for intensive work and enable in-depth discussions and this workshop format will be continued in the next year.

Thirdly, in-person consultations include comprehensive audits conducted on-site with the customer. In this format, it is possible to dive into technical aspects, such as penetration testing, and test directly on their products and infrastructures. Although individual consultations are effective, they are also very time consuming. Finding new customers for this particular part has been relatively easy, as existing clients often recommend our services and attend conferences to promote us. Participants in the workshops frequently express interest in further consultations. It is planned to leverage this interest to develop a customer base for our penetration testing services. Because of the time-consuming nature of penetration testing, the team is planning to continue both the workshop series and the individual audits and tests, to allow a large number of participants to join while still working in-depth on specific systems and vulnerabilities. Here, a closer collaboration with the subcontractor will be established in the new year to efficiently provide high-quality consulting to as many clients as possible.

Overall, the lack of customers that was an issue, in the beginning, has been overcome by close collaboration with local multipliers and online formats to attract customers. A

better division of tasks with the subcontractor will allow for a streamlined workflow, that will solve the now prevailing issue of time constraints in the next year.

4.7 Individual SME & PSE consultations

This task aims to support SMEs and PSEs that want to improve their digital capabilities and modernize their business processes in developing and using digital strategies and products through one-on-one discussions with customers. It involves all DInO members and focuses on the challenges faced by the target group, such as limited resources and expertise in digital transformation.

The demand for completely individualized one-on-one consulting has not met expectations, primarily because the other DInO services well address the needs. As a result, only a limited number of individual consultations have been conducted. However, it was possible to meet customer needs in various individual consulting cases, particularly when there was a desire for a thorough and in-depth implementation of digitalization projects. In these instances, we successfully referred clients to partners within the innovation ecosystem. In response to this feedback, the service adapted by offering group workshops on specific topics related to digital transformation.

These workshops utilized tools like the "Baiosphere AI Compass" and "BAIOSPHERE FINDER" to address the unexpectedly high demand for networking through an AI-supported matchmaking platform, thereby providing more targeted advice on thematic issues. For example, the event "AI Compass" focused on the topic of Data, in July 2024 generated significant interest and was fully booked with participants from 25 different companies and institutions. Ample time was allocated for individual questions and issues, allowing for a focus on personalized advice despite the larger number of participants. The decision to hold the event online received positive feedback, indicating that this format can be sustained in the future. Feedback from participants showed great engagement, with many actively participating in the discussion round. Overall, the responses were overwhelmingly positive, as individual questions were addressed, and attendees could derive direct benefits and optimization ideas for their companies and organizations from the event.

The service has shown adaptability in responding to low demand for individual consultations by shifting to group workshops and expanding its scope to include AI-specific services, offered by the Bavarian AI Agency. The involvement of experts and external networks has been a key strength, offering a collaborative approach to finding solutions for clients' digital transformation challenges. The service is continuously evolving, with ongoing evaluations to align with customer demands and ensure that it remains relevant and effective in supporting SMEs and PSEs.

T4.8 Creative Digitization Strategies

This service aims to sensitize, qualify and network SMEs and PSEs from the creative industries to tap into Digitalization and innovation potential in and with the creative industries. Through interactive workshops, ways are shown to use digitization for themselves and their offers. They are organized in cooperation with partners from the creative industry partners and occur roughly four times a year over two days, featuring practical examples and work on participants' projects.

A subcontractor was found and contracted in the first quarter of 2024, the workshop concept was developed at the same time, and two two-day lasting workshops were implemented in the second quarter of 2024. Following the first "Unleashing Creativity" workshop, minor adjustments were made to better address the needs of the participants. This event was the initial trial of a new concept for creative digitization, which involved testing various workshop methods. After gathering feedback, the structure of the workshop was slightly refined. Participants emphasized that the intensive feedback on their projects was a key learning experience and a pathway for moving forward after the workshop. Overall, they expressed satisfaction with their participation, suggesting improvements, such as increasing the time allocated to work on their projects and placing an even greater emphasis on practical learning. This intensified the work on the individual projects on-site during the workshop period and made it possible to provide even more specific feedback to the workshop participants.

The second event had more people registered than attended. However, those who did attend were very engaged in each step of the workshop. The participants shared similar backgrounds, which facilitated a valuable exchange of experiences and knowledge. By incorporating even more practical aspects into the workshop, attendees appreciated having ample time to work on their digitization projects. They found the feedback from their peers beneficial, and the discussions proved successful for everyone involved. Additionally, the participants expressed a desire for a follow-up call to provide external motivation after the workshop, helping them to stay committed to enhancing their digital skills. The following planned workshop dates had to be cancelled due to low registration numbers, even though the feedback for the workshops held was very good. The main problems identified were that the two-day workshops were too long for the target group and that for a big part of them, Digitalization is considered a 'necessary evil', people don't want to deal with it because it's so big and difficult, which generally leads to more resignation than the desire to participate in a workshop.

Therefore the workshop concept was updated and changed and new forms of advertisement were included in November 2024. The roll-out of the new format is scheduled for January 2025. The Objective of the changed concept focuses on reorientation of the target group to overcome the inner barrier of dealing with Digitalisation. The redesigned

workshops are smaller and shorter with teasers and possibly longer formats afterwards instead of two days as a rule. The Concept Teaser is planned to last around two or three hours and is designed as a motivation for an introduction to the topic of Digitalization to create demand for more, longer-lasting workshops.

The offering is primarily intended to take place online, but can theoretically also be held offline. At the beginning of the event, there is an input phase of about 45 to 60 minutes, where specific topics are addressed, such as work methods and tools for the creative sector, or the use of artificial intelligence in the art industry. Afterward, there will be time for questions and discussions, with the opportunity to present personal projects. After these short teaser workshops, participants have the opportunity to take advantage of an additional offer, which can also be booked independently of the teaser workshops: individual consulting. This consists of two private sessions, each lasting 60 minutes. In the first session, the participant presents their own project, develops potential goals and strategies, and formulates a work assignment. A break of at least one week is scheduled between the two sessions. In the second session, the work assignment is revised, corrections are made, new questions are answered, and the goals and strategies are further refined and concretized.

In addition to individual consulting, an in-depth group workshop is also planned, which can be held either as a one-day workshop or over several weeks in three blocks. The structure of the workshop is a mix of group work and individual consulting. Depending on the format, the duration of the individual blocks may vary. In the one-day format, each of the three blocks lasts about two hours. In the multi-week format, the first and third blocks last about 2.5 hours each. The second block is optional and can be used for a roughly 30-minute individual consultation. The first block is an introduction to the topic, followed by an individual development of a digitisation project of the customer. The second part of the workshop consists of a round where the participants can present their achievements in their projects. The outcome is a toolbox for further digitisation of customers in the target group.

The promotion and communication concept is also altered to strongly match the needs of the target group. The invitations and flyers of the workshops are redesigned in a more artistic style with more space committed to art and less to text. The promotion of the workshops is generally shifted from online marketing towards direct promotion at art markets or similar to better address craftspeople and the target group as a whole.

3.3 Support to find Financing and Investment

Overall, WP5 has been running smoothly as both T5.1 and T5.2 easily earned customers from the previously existing ecosystems of the partner institutions. New customers were attracted by involving DInO stakeholders and using DInO marketing measures, which facilitated reaching companies outside these ecosystems. Four webinars were successfully held within the webinar series “Fördermittel kompakt”, established in 2024. Two webinars about founders’ funding were cancelled due to few registrations. This topic will be repeated in 2025, but its advertisement will be improved. Clear focus areas have been identified in T5.1 and T5.2. While these are successfully being accepted by DInO customers, less focus has been laid on helping SMEs find investors and EU funding. This is also due to the reduced interest of SMEs in the DInO networks in these areas. These issues will be addressed in the second half of the project by communicating these services more clearly and establishing DInO as a one-stop shop not only for R&D and founders’ programmes but also for investment and EU funding.

T5.1 Support to find suitable funding programmes

In this task, SMEs have been supported in finding suitable federal, state and third-party funding programmes to financially support and promote their investments in digitalisation, digital sales, and digital processes. Furthermore, SMEs have been supported with regards to F&D funding programmes helping to develop digital technologies. A clear focus has been on supporting SMEs with funding for digitalisation measures and tax return funding for R&D projects. Individual consultations were very well received by the customers. Specifically companies interested in the tax return funding „Forschungszulage“ were very thankful for the DInO support and some of them have already applied for it. The webinars with topics such as funding for research & development and AI funding were received very well. Stakeholders were included in the organisation of the webinars and the cooperations added value to the webinar series. Despite the proposal’s focus on helping SMEs and startups find investors, these topics have been less present as companies seemed more interested in “Forschungszulage” and similar programmes. In the future of DInO, the support to find investors will be advertised more clearly and formats will be established to address those SMEs in need of investors.

T5.2 Financial and Promotional Support for Innovative Startup Ideas in the Pre-Seed Stage

The financial and promotional support has been an individual consulting offer by THD StartUp Campus especially for innovative startup ideas in the Pre-Seed Stage in order to give an assessment of the status quo, to make recommendations and to show financing options. Furthermore, governmental promotion possibilities are to be explored

(e.g. FLÜGGE, EXIST). A clear focus has been on the funding programme EXIST Business Start-up Grant and EXIST Transfer of Research. The DInO advisors have received systematic training on subsidies, which has enabled them to support SMEs and start-ups in successfully submitting funding applications to the Exist program or to build up their customers' skills in such things as pitching their cases to potential investors. The companies have given positive feedback on the trainings and some even want further support during the implementation phase of their projects. The biggest challenge in the region is that many small companies are not even aware of the funding opportunities. So demand had to be created first.

T5.3 EEN- Services to find the right EU-Funding

Associated partner Bayerische Forschungsallianz as EEN contact point has supported DInO customers with their aspirations to get EU funding in individual consultations and has co-organised the Brokerage Event P4HEU. The first 18 months of DInO have clearly shown, however, that most Eastern-Bavarian SMEs are more interested in national funding programs as EU funding programs are estimated too complicated to apply for. To address this, in the future, webinars will be organized and news will be published to reach those SMEs ready to tackle the next level of funding. These measures will also serve to reduce constraints against EU funding.

3.4 Innovation Ecosystem

The WP6 Innovation Ecosystem & Networking work package has initiated and successfully implemented many activities to promote digital transformation in Eastern Bavaria throughout the project to date. These activities within the four services included international matchmaking events, awareness-raising and initial consulting services, events to network start-ups with SMEs and public institutions, as well as the establishment of a test pool for companies to test digital products before they enter the market. Establishing permanent information and networking platforms such as the "BAIOSPHERE FINDER" and the continuous expansion of the "Baiosphere AI Compass" ensures that the successes achieved and lessons learned have a lasting effect beyond the duration of the project. These structures contribute to strengthening the regional innovation ecosystem in the long term and support the continuous development of digital skills in Eastern Bavaria.

The collective efforts across all tasks have significantly advanced DInO's mission to promote digital transformation and innovation in Eastern Bavaria and beyond. The matchmaking initiatives (T6.1) and networking events (T6.3) have successfully connected SMEs, startups, and public administrations with both international and regional partners, fostering collab-

oration and creating numerous opportunities for business growth. These initiatives have underscored the importance of leveraging strategic geographic positioning and international partnerships to link regional and global markets. Additionally, the awareness-raising and consultation services (T6.2) have been crucial in addressing the digital maturity needs of SMEs and PSEs. By utilizing structured assessment tools, targeted communication strategies, and streamlined processes, DInO has ensured that its services are highly accessible and relevant. Meanwhile, the Rural Region Early Adopter Test Pool (T6.4) had to be changed due to difficulties in finding participants and identifying SMEs or start-ups that needed the test pool. Additionally, the preparation and conceptualization phase took longer than expected, and the number of registered institutions and participants was significantly lower than the target. To address these issues, the focus has shifted to enhancing marketing efforts and developing a network of multipliers to better engage the community and increase participation.

A consistent theme across all tasks is the emphasis on flexibility and adaptability, whether through refining service offerings, responding to stakeholder feedback, or leveraging synergies among work packages. These collective efforts have not only strengthened regional digital capabilities but have also laid the groundwork for sustainable, long-term growth in the innovation ecosystem. The insights and experiences gained from these tasks provide a solid foundation for future initiatives, ensuring that DInO remains responsive to emerging challenges and opportunities in the digital landscape.

T6.1 International Matchmaking

In this task, cross-border advice is provided to SMEs. DInO's matchmaking events have connected Eastern Bavarian companies and start-ups with international partners, serving as crucial platforms for knowledge transfer and business networking. Positive participant feedback and numerous new cooperation opportunities highlight the significance of these activities. Despite some challenges, like the cancellation of the Prague delegation, valuable contacts were established, paving the way for future collaborations. The varied themes and geographic focus of the events ensured a broad range of companies benefited from DInO's services. DInO worked closely with consulates (e.g., Bulgaria and Slovenia), the German Chambers of Commerce Abroad (AHK), and the Bavarian State Ministry of Economic Affairs to facilitate B2B matchmaking events involving SMEs and start-ups.

The implementation of an east-west-EDIH corridor as a thematic working group in the EDIH ecosystem is ongoing, here various EDIHs from all over Europe have established joint activities for international matchmaking. For the group's conception, DInO collaborates closely with EDIH-AICS in Karlsruhe. Key performance indicators and technology focus areas for the matchmaking events were designed for the group. Together with AICS, DInO organizes and moderates the group's meetings. The geographical location of the EDIH on

the border with the Czech Republic and Austria and the contacts associated with these countries are an advantage for the EDIH ecosystem, in which DInO serves as a bridge between eastern and western European SMEs. Another benefit of utilizing the network of the group is that finally, investors will be part of the matchmaking events, so far, no investors have been part of the international matchmaking service. Besides hosting the east-west corridor, DInO is also a part of the Danube Green Digital Corridor (DGDC) working group for international matchmaking in the Danube region, consisting of EDIHs from various central and eastern European countries.

This task has contributed to the overall maturity of the region and the EDIH ecosystem by enabling SMEs and start-ups, especially from the rural areas to connect to new international customers and partners to which they would not have the chance to be connected without DInO. The aim is to continue to ensure such a broad positioning in the future so that as many Eastern Bavarian companies as possible can be supported.

T6.2 Awareness raising and initial consultation services

This task is a key measure to facilitate access to DInO services for SMEs and PSEs and establish a systematic approach to promote and accelerate digitalization in Eastern Bavaria. The initial and awareness-raising consultation offers tailored support in objectively assessing the digital capabilities and digital maturity of the organizations concerned in a personal appointment on-site or online. Based on the results, initial guidance and recommendations for action can be given. Once the needs of the company or public institution have been determined, the most suitable services of the DInO partners are presented and, if interested, a referral is made to the relevant experts of the DInO team to enable in-depth consultation.

Various strategic activities were combined to enhance knowledge of digital transformation and facilitate initial consultations. These activities included mapping the customer journey, developing a conversation guide, conducting surveys for SMEs and public institutions, and organizing a planned DInO consultation hour. This integrated approach significantly improved accessibility to information and advisory services, allowing us to reach a larger audience of interested parties. The easy access provided through QR codes and online formats particularly fostered greater involvement from the public, promoting awareness and facilitating access to further advisory services. By intentionally utilizing target group-specific communication channels and materials, we significantly increased the effectiveness of our campaigns. The implementation of conversation guides and structured surveys enabled us to collect consistent and useful data, which was then utilized to refine our services. These efforts encouraged an open dialogue among stakeholders, which is crucial for building trust and creating lasting customer relationships. Systematically gathering feedback and data provided valuable insights into the needs and expectations

of our target groups, which is essential for the continuous improvement of our services. Feedback from our activities highlighted the importance of designing services that are flexible. The ability to respond quickly to changes and new findings emerged as a critical success factor for the project. All consortium partners regularly use the standardized DMA questionnaire, which offers tailored support in assessing the digital capabilities and maturity of the organizations involved, either during in-person appointments or online consultations. Additionally, awareness-raising initiatives within the consortium have been established. All services created materials to present their roles and tasks both internally and externally, ensuring that all consortium partners are well-prepared to showcase the project's services to potential customers.

For some services like Support to find Financing and Investment, the original EDIH customer journey proves to be inefficient. When advertising DInO funding services, customers contact DInO to specifically receive funding advice. The customer journey has to be adapted to maintain an efficient way of supporting SMEs. Introducing the DInO project and all its services is usually woven into the funding consultation itself, done at the very beginning of the meeting. This way, awareness for DInO is raised as well as providing a good service to the customer.

Overall, the Awareness Raising & Initial Consultation task has made a significant contribution to raising awareness of the importance of digital transformation and providing effective initial consultation. The insights gained provide valuable approaches for the further development of the initiatives in order to continue to promote and support digital competence and transformation in SMEs and public institutions. So far, DInO has been able to meet the needs of the customers. Should this change in the future, the EDIH is prepared and well-connected to refer customers to other EDIHs or other partners in our broad networks.

T6.3 Events to connect digital start-ups with large & SMEs

This task is dedicated to promoting networking events that aim to connect digital start-ups, SMEs, and public administrations. The core objectives are to strengthen the regional economy through digital transformation and to increase the competitiveness of the actors involved as well as to identify existing gaps in the portfolio of services. The idea of digital/AI entrepreneurship in rural areas is supported by organizing various events informing about the implementation of digital tools /AI.

Despite a broad range of existing offerings, specific needs were identified that had not yet been covered, particularly in the areas of digitalization that go beyond the direct use of AI. The feedback on this service has shown that the targeted integration of AI into existing offerings is not only feasible but also urgently needed to make services fit for the future and effectively meet demand. Implementing the planned events successfully

provided a platform on which start-ups were given direct access to SMEs and public administrations. In particular, the use of AI in public administration and in SMEs was intensively promoted, creating new opportunities for cooperation, including start-ups. These networks are essential to implement innovative digital solutions more broadly and systematically expand the digital skills of the players involved. Furthermore, the experience gained from the events and projects has shown that sustainable structures have been created that will continue to have an impact in the further course of the DInO project in the task and beyond. The establishment of constantly updated information and mediation platforms such as "BAIOSPHERE FINDER" and the continuous expansion of the "Baiosphere AI Compass" are measures that will strengthen the regional innovation ecosystem in the long term. Due to the already saturated market, we have not yet organized events such as fireside chats, roadshows, entrepreneurial pitches, and hackathons. Our focus is on successfully connecting digital start-ups, particularly in the AI sector, with SMEs and PSEs in Eastern Bavaria and beyond. This focus will continue in the future as we pursue established event formats.

The task effectively promotes digital transformation and competitiveness in Eastern Bavaria by promoting AI in Events and providing platforms for start-ups to connect with SMEs and public administrations. The promotion of sustainable structures like the "BAIOSPHERE FINDER" and the "Baiosphere AI Compass" in events, shows a long-term commitment to regional innovation.

T6.4 Rural Region Early Adopter Test Pool

This service creates a pool of registered volunteer testers, allowing companies to evaluate their digital products with local communities before market launch. Its main goal is to foster inclusive development of digital technologies and AI applications in rural areas, where such services are often limited and less accepted compared to urban centers. By establishing clear workflows and test guidelines, companies can assess their products in real conditions, enhancing quality and aligning offerings with rural needs. Close collaboration during planning and pilot phases further deepens understanding of market challenges, improving the testing pool's effectiveness.

The two main challenges for this service were finding participants for the test pool and identifying a subject matter expert SME or start-up developing a new product that required the test pool. In the summer of 2024, we encountered an interesting start-up interested in becoming a testing partner. However, the testing of its product is currently postponed because the funding program the company intended to use has started later than expected. The registration tool has been officially operational since September 2024. The preparation and conceptualization phase took longer and was more intense than initially anticipated due to the complexity of the task. Our goal is to engage 1,500 participating institutions

and recruit 1,000 registered testers. Currently, we have significantly fewer registered institutions and interested participants than we aimed for. Attracting individuals willing to register for rural region test applications has proven more challenging than expected. In response to these difficulties, we plan to enhance our marketing efforts for the service in the future, although reaching the target of 1,000 testers still seems unlikely by the end of the project term. So far, the effects on the project have included delays in achieving current target numbers, which in turn affects the support provided to institutions in the target area for testing their products. Additionally, we now recognize a greater need for marketing activities than we initially anticipated, which requires dedicating more personnel resources to this task. Developing a network of multipliers will play a crucial role in the dissemination and utilization of the test pool. Training and involving key individuals from the communities will extend the reach and understanding of the service. The strategic use of our in-house customer relationship management system will help us manage and communicate effectively with these multipliers, allowing the network to be maintained and utilized efficiently, thereby strengthening our overall testing pool efforts. To assess the needs of the companies in the region, a survey was created. We are currently working on having more resources (both personnel and finance) available to promote this service.

4 Summary of Service Adjustments

In Eastern Bavaria, customer acquisition for services that are difficult to understand was a major challenge. In particular, the “Test Before Invest” infrastructure was difficult to communicate, which made acquiring customers more difficult. Infrastructure was another important factor. Some services, such as the 5G testbed and HPC, did not see significant demand because the infrastructure was not presentable and the services were therefore not tangible enough for the Eastern Bavarian market. There were initial challenges with customer allocation among partners in certain tasks, particularly those involving events and workshops on AI, additionally, the market for AI-related events and seminars in Eastern Bavaria was already over-saturated. Time management also played a role, as individual consultations and long-term workshop series were time-consuming for customers, partners, and consultants. Another factor was that the language initially used in advertising was too complicated for the target group of regional SMEs and PSEs. By contrast, the Services that provided clear low-threshold offerings, like funding and investment had fewer problems acquiring customers. It was also advantageous if the partners were already regionally networked and had a customer base.

Initially, large-scale advertising efforts, such as cold calling and email campaigns, faced challenges due to difficulty in reaching potential customers and a low response rate. To

better understand the needs of SMEs and PSEs in the region, we analyzed the results of several surveys, along with customer feedback and input from partners and regional stakeholders. To understand the needs of companies and SMEs in Eastern Bavaria, DInO surveyed businesses in collaboration with regional management in Kelheim. The survey aimed to assess the current state of digitization, ongoing projects, and interest in information offerings. Composed of seven questions about digitalization, the survey received 149 responses—56 partial and 93 complete. Results showed a moderate level of digitalization among companies and a strong interest in further projects, particularly in AI and paperless office solutions. Key challenges included a lack of time, expertise, and concerns about data protection and IT security. There was a clear demand for support through subsidies, investments, and training to improve digital skills. Additionally, participants expressed interest in testing new technologies like AI and machine learning.

After receiving feedback from the customers and multipliers, the language was altered to be very simple, which led to a better acceptance of advertising materials. An important step regarding advertising the services was the clear communication of use cases that are highly relevant for SMEs and PSEs in the region. Presenting concrete benefits and practical examples increased the tangibility of the services. Switching to networking and presenting the technologies at trade fairs and conferences in Eastern Bavaria significantly improved visibility and demand. The strategy also involved close collaboration with regional multipliers and business development agencies to raise awareness of the services among relevant target groups. Joint events and the use of existing networks increased reach and raised trust in the services.

In addition, internal collaboration and specialization among partners were optimized to leverage expertise in a targeted manner and meet customer needs in the best way. The parallel use of different communication channels such as email and Microsoft Teams increased the risk of information loss. These experiences highlighted the need for continuous optimization of internal communication processes. For this reason, the DINO partners held an internal workshop to strengthen cooperation. A SWOT analysis was also carried out jointly. It showed strengths in for example in the professional and organizational diversity of the partners and in the growing regional network of DInO. Weaknesses were identified in internal competition for KPIs and customers as well as in common customer acquisition and the allocation of resources between tasks and partners. Among other things, the lack of coordination between the partners and the resulting potential duplication of work were seen as risks. The main opportunities identified were Europe-wide networking through the EDIH network and the good reputation of DInO in Eastern Bavaria. Intensive communication, mutual application, and clear differentiation of services to ensure that customers receive the appropriate services by DInO was the main result of the workshop. Another aspect was adapting the service formats to the regional market. Instead of

time-consuming long-term workshop series, more flexible formats, such as events with fewer participants, were offered. Some tasks also focused more on formats in high demand in Eastern Bavaria, like matchmaking. For example, events were supported by information and networking platforms. In services where this has not led to success, the infrastructure used, such as 5G, has been adapted to the demand in the region. New formats have been successfully implemented, including the digital coffee break. During these sessions, DInO partners take turns presenting their services in 30-minute webinars. The topics covered range from artificial intelligence and paperless offices to funding opportunities. These sessions are practical, concise, and tailored for small and medium-sized companies and public institutions. Participants can easily learn about the latest trends and technologies without any prior knowledge. Over 150 interested individuals have already attended and gained valuable insights for their digital transformation. Overall, the strategy aims to increase demand for underperforming services and ensure their long-term success through targeted marketing measures, improved infrastructure, close cooperation with regional players, and flexible service formats.

5 Outlook & Conclusion

In summary, it can be said that the activities and initiatives carried out as part of DInO have already made a significant contribution to promoting digital transformation in Eastern Bavaria in the first half of the project term. Targeted networking, individual consulting, the offer of Test Before Invest services and the continuous expansion of digital skills have proven to be successful approaches to help the region of Eastern Bavaria achieve a higher level of digital maturity in the further course of the project.

The implemented measures and the resulting learnings reinforce the importance of a well-coordinated, needs-oriented, and technology-based approach to promoting digital transformation. The effective networking of start-ups with established SMEs and public administrations makes a significant contribution to strengthening regional innovation capacity and the sustainable development of digital transformation in the region. The formats presented offered low-threshold and informative platforms that both raised awareness of digital technologies and demonstrated concrete application possibilities. The services show that successful intersectoral and interdisciplinary cooperation makes a significant contribution to achieving the objectives. Cooperation between different work packages, particularly in the coordination of responsibilities and intersections, made it possible to create a comprehensive offering that focused on larger events and multipliers. Using synergies between different sectors, and sharing resources and knowledge proved to be particularly valuable. These activities demonstrate that a coordinated and targeted approach can

significantly enhance the successful implementation of digitalization projects in rural areas. The knowledge gained and feedback from participants will contribute to the continuous improvement of services and offer valuable insights into the specific needs and potential of digitalization in these regions. In the long run, these initiatives are expected to enhance competitiveness and promote sustainable digital transformation in the rural regions of Eastern Bavaria.

The objective for the rest of the project period and beyond is to regularly reassess services across all areas, thereby closely watching regional economic developments and big trends. As the project is majoring more data on the success of the services in improving the digital maturity of Eastern Bavaria will become available The Policy Recommendation Plan will analyze the findings of this project and the experiences gained from providing services to SMEs and the public sector. The results and derived policy recommendations will be presented to the European Commission in May 2026.

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