

Interregional Conference of the Vanguard Initiative Network

The Next Steps of Interregional Collaboration in Bio-economy

Organised in collaboration by East and North Finland and Vanguard Initiative's Bio-economy pilot in Kajaani, Finland on 25-26 September

Location of the event is **Kaukametsä Conference and Cultural Centre** ([Koskikatu 2-4, Kajaani](#))

Wednesday, the 25th of September

9.00-9.15 *Welcome to East and North Finland and welcome to the VI Bio-economy pilot's interregional conference*

Jouni Ponnikas (Regional Development Director, Regional Council of Kainuu)

Ilaria Re (Chief Operating Officer, Consorzio Italbiotec, Lombardy Green Chemistry Association and the co-lead of the Bio-economy pilot)

9.15-9.45 *Vanguard Initiative in a nutshell and collaboration opportunities with respect to the pilots*
Reinier Zweers (Programme manager European Cooperation, Gelderland Province, East Netherlands, former Chair of the Vanguard Initiative Board)

Karolien de Bruine (EU-Liaison, East Netherlands Development Agency)

Vanguard Initiative is a network of regions that looks to support industrial innovation and to build European value-chains based on complementarities in regional smart specialisation strategies. In the core of the Vanguard activities are the eight thematic pilots, which create concrete opportunities for interregional collaboration. During this session we will hear how the network and its activities are organised and how the pilots operate.

9.45-10.45 *Bio-economy pilot: State of play and bio-aromatics demo-case focus*

Ilaria Re (Chief Operating Officer, Consorzio Italbiotec, Lombardy Green Chemistry Association and the co-lead of the Bio-economy pilot)

Ludo Diels (Portfolio Manager at Processes4Planet and Former Advisor Sustainable Chemistry - VITO, Bioaromatics demo case leader of the Vanguard Initiative Bio-economy pilot)

The Bio-economy pilot started its activities in 2014 and looks to foster the development of new industrial applications and high added-value bio-based products that surpass conventional uses in food, feed, and fiber. Over the years, more than 20 European regions have been involved in the pilot activities and today the pilot has 16 participating Vanguard Initiative members. During this session, we will hear an overview of the pilot,

its objectives, and activities so far. In addition, we will hear more about the Bioaromatics demo case of the Bio-economy pilot.

10.45-11.00 [Coffee break, restaurant Karanka at the venue](#)

11.00-11.30 *East and North Finland: An overview of the hosting region*

Eerikki Vainio (Senior Advisor, East and North Finland EU Office)

Bio-economy as a part of East and North Finland RIS3 strategy

Saija Tikkanen (Specialist, International Affairs, Council of Oulu Region)

East and North Finland is a member of the Vanguard Initiative network since 2020 and the Vanguard Initiative Board since 2023. The region joined the Bio-economy pilot in 2024. East and North Finland is a NUTS 2 level region that consists of seven NUTS 3 level regions (South Savo, North Savo, North Karelia, Kainuu, Central Ostrobothnia, Northern Ostrobothnia, Lapland) and has a joint smart specialisation strategy that brings all the mentioned regions together. In this session we will hear about the S3 priorities of East and North Finland, especially from the bio-economy topics perspective.

11.30-12.30 *Bio-economy pilot: Looking forward*

Moderator: Tuula Kokkonen (Business and Innovation Manager, Regional Council of South Savo)

Panelists:

- **Ilaria Re** (Chief Operating Officer, Consorzio Italbiotec, Lombardy Green Chemistry Association and the co-lead of the Bio-economy pilot)
- **Ludo Diels** (Portfolio Manager at Processes4Planet and Former Advisor Sustainable Chemistry - VITO, Bioaromatics demo case leader of the Vanguard Initiative Bio-economy pilot)
- **Sari Koivula** (Forest and Climate Expert, Regional Council of North Karelia)
- **Anne Saloniemi** (Specialist, Lapland University of Applied Sciences)

This session has two parts. It will start with a short panel followed by an open and inclusive discussion on possible new demo cases and topics the pilot could concentrate on. The panellists will set the frame for the discussion, where one perspective is what East and North Finland could offer and propose as topics for future collaboration. The session will especially touch on the following questions: 1) how to include regional expertise in existing demo cases and 2) how to create new demo cases starting from partnerships or demo-existing facilities. The panellists will come from the Bio-economy pilot's current demo cases and East and North Finland.

The Bio-economy pilot currently has four demo cases that concentrate, for example, on the conversion of lignin and forestry and agro-food biomasses into high-added-value biobased products, such as bio-aromatics, bio asphalt, bio-energies, and biopolymers.

The pilot is open to new ideas, partnerships, demo cases, and perspectives that could bring added value to the regions and stakeholders.

12.30-13.30 **Lunch (paid by the organisers), restaurant Karanka at the venue**

13.30-14.30 *East and North Finland showcases: local stakeholders present their activities related to the pilot*

Jarkko Rätty (Head of research and development, Leader of the cleantech research in Measurement Technology Unit, University of Oulu, Kajaani University Consortium) and the local stakeholders

During this session, we will hear presentations from some East and North Finland stakeholders and their ongoing activities and potential success stories with respect to the pilot topics. How could these stakeholders link with and contribute to the pilot?

Speakers:

- **Jarkko Rätty** (East and North Finland regional Contact Point for the Bioeconomy pilot)
- **Lasse Pulkkinen** (Research Director, South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences): *Forest cluster in South Savo – RDI in Savonlinna technology park*
- **Harri Auvinen** (Research and Development Manager, Savonia University of Applied Sciences): *Bio and Circular Cluster – North Savo*
- **Mikko Ahokas** (CEO, Macon Oy)

14.30-16.30 *Visit at Valmet Automation Ltd, Kehräämöntie 3*

18.00-20.00 Dinner (paid by the organisers) at Manor House hotel Karolineburg, Karoliinantie 8

Thursday, the 26th of September

9.00-9.15 *Takeaways of the first day*

Ilaria Re (Chief Operating Officer, Consorzio Italbiotec, Lombardy Green Chemistry Association and the co-lead of the Bio-economy pilot)

9.15-9.45 *Bio-economy and the EU policy frame*

Jorge Molina Villanueva (Policy Officer, DG Research and Innovation, European Commission)

Wim Haentjens (Policy Office, DG Research and Innovation, European Commission)

Bio-economy is high on the EU agenda. The topic links to several EU initiatives including a communication aimed at boosting bio-technology and bio-manufacturing in the EU that the European Commission published in March.

During this session we will hear a short overview on the EU policy framework from the bio-economy perspective. What are the current and possible future topics on the EU agenda, and what do we know about future funding opportunities in the bio-economy sector?

9.45-10.15 *East and North Finland showcases: local stakeholders present their activities related to the pilot*

Jarkko Rätty (Head of research and development, Leader of the cleantech research in Measurement Technology Unit, University of Oulu, Kajaani University Consortium) and the local stakeholders

During this session, we will hear presentations from some East and North Finland stakeholders and their ongoing activities and potential success stories with respect to the pilot topics. How could these stakeholders link with and contribute to the pilot?

Speakers:

- **Anne Saloniemi** (Specialist, Lapland University of Applied Sciences)
- **Antti Haapala** (Professor, Department of Chemistry, University of Eastern Finland)
- **Egidija Rainosalo** (RDI Coordinator, Centria University of Applied Sciences)

10.15-10.45 *Bio-economy pilot: looking forward and how could East and North Finland contribute*

Ilaria Re (Chief Operating Officer, Consorzio Italbiotec, Lombardy Green Chemistry Association, and the co-lead of the Bio-economy pilot)

Heikki Sirviö (Regional Development Manager, Regional Council of North Savo)

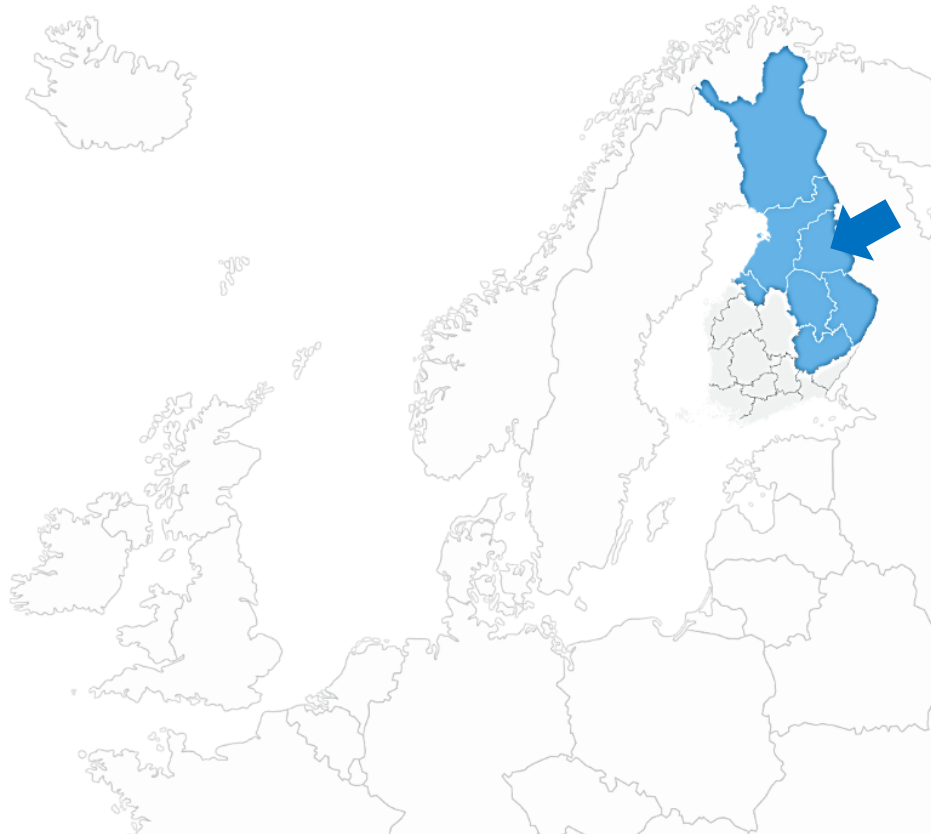
During the event, we have heard about the pilot, its past, current, and possible future activities and what East and North Finland could bring to the pilot. During this session, we will summarise what are the topics and the areas where East and North Finland could contribute to the pilot activities and who would the actors be. We will also hear how the pilot sees its next steps and what new demo cases and other activities could be developed.

10.45-11.00 *Final remarks and end of the event*

Ilaria Re (Chief Operating Officer, Consorzio Italbiotec, Lombardy Green Chemistry Association and the co-lead of the Bio-economy pilot)

Jouni Ponnikas (Regional Development Director, Regional Council of Kainuu)

Practicalities



How to get there?

You can get to Kajaani by plane or by train. The Finnish airline [Finnair](#) offers for example the following connections between Brussels and Kajaani:

- **24th of September (Brussels – Helsinki – Kajaani)**
 - Brussels – Helsinki 11.40h – 15.15h
 - Helsinki – Kajaani 17.35h – 18.55h
- **26th of September (Kajaani – Helsinki – Brussels)**
 - Kajaani – Helsinki 12.20h – 13.35h
 - Helsinki – Brussels 16.40h – 18.15h

You can also take the train from Helsinki or Oulu to Kajaani. Train tickets can be purchased on the webpage of the national railroad company [VR](#).

- **Helsinki – Kajaani on the 24th of September**
 - 8.13h – 14.28h
 - 11.19h – 17.32h
 - 14.13h – 20.32h

- 16.13h – 22.19h
- **Kajaani – Helsinki on the 26th of September**
 - 12.17h – 18.40h
 - 14.33h – 21.45

- **Oulu – Kajaani on the 24th of September**
 - 10.07h – 12.10h
 - 12.24h – 14.30h
 - 18.15h – 20.25h

- **Kajaani – Oulu on the 26th of September**
 - 14.32h – 16.36h
 - 17.36h – 19.45h
 - 21.05h – 23.08h

Where to stay?

Accommodation for participants is arranged at [Hotel Kajanus](#) of the Peera group. The fixed price for a single room from the 24th to the 26th of September (Standard Room) is 105 € per night. The event participants are responsible for making their own reservations and for covering the accommodation expenses.

When making your reservation, please use the code KL24. This way you will get the room with the above-mentioned price. Reservations should be done by the 10th of September (2 weeks before the event). The hotel reception can be reached:

- by phone (+358 102305400)
- by email (info@hotelkajanus.fi).

What to see?

Kajaani hosts the ruins of the world's northernmost stone castle. When Finland was still part of Sweden, people who were seen as enemies of the crown were sent to Kajaani castle to serve their time as prisoners. During the Great Northern War in the beginning of the 18th century the Russian army blew the castle up. What remains today are the ruins of once a mighty castle that sits on the shores of the river Kajaani.

Kajaani can be considered as the hometown of two men that have deeply marked Finland's history: Elias Lönnrot and Urho Kekkonen. Finland owes its national epic, Kalevala, to Elias Lönnrot. He travelled especially around Karelia during the first part of the 19th century collecting folk tales from rural people and using the oral folklore and mythology in his work. Lönnrot's work and memory is cherished by the Elias Lönnrot centre located at the small and charming Kajaani town hall. The town hall was designed by the German architect Carl Ludvig Engel, who also helped to rebuild the monumental centre of the country's capital, Helsinki.

Urho Kekkonen was the president of Finland from 1956 to 1982, making him by far the most longstanding president in the history of the country. Kekkonen spent a big part of his childhood and his youth in Kajaani, where his home building still stands at Kalliokatu 7.

The most recent highlight in Kajaani is the [EuroHPC supercomputer LUMI](#), which is the fastest in Europe and the fifth fastest supercomputer in the world.

Did you know?

If Kajaani seems a rather distant place even on the Finnish scale, it is actually located very close to the country's continental geographic center. The center point can be found in Puolanka – a municipality that has branded itself as the most pessimistic place in Finland. Tourism in the region of Kainuu is strongly connected to nature with for example a lot of hiking opportunities. This is not surprising given the vast forest areas in the region. Nature and wildlife tours are one of the main tourist attractions of the region with bear safaris being the highlight.

When you visit Kajaani you definitely cannot leave without trying the best rye bread in the country. Rye bread is a sourdough bread that has a solid place in the Finnish kitchen. Currently, rye bread enjoys the status of a national food and Finns even celebrate rye bread day yearly in the end of February. The arguably best rye bread in Finland can be bought in the Kajaani city center.

What is East and North Finland?

East and North Finland is a NUTS 2 level region that consists of seven NUTS 3 level regions (South Savo, North Savo, North Karelia, Kainuu, Central Ostrobothnia, Northern Ostrobothnia, Lapland). Geographically East and North Finland covers over two thirds of the country, but on the other hand it is a region with a sparse population and long distances. The interregional conference host city Kajaani is located in the Kainuu region.

The regions of East and North Finland have a longstanding history of collaboration and have together produced a joint smart specialisation strategy for East and North Finland. This strategy brings the seven regions together and forms the basis for East and North Finland's membership in the Vanguard Initiative network. The joint S3 is available [here](#).

Questions?

In case you have questions regarding the practicalities (how to get there, accommodation etc.), please contact:

- **Minna Mustonen**
Assistant of International Affairs, Regional Council of Kainuu
minna.mustonen@kainuunliitto.fi

In case you have questions regarding the content of the event or the Vanguard Initiative's Bio-economy pilot:

- **Ilaria Re**
Chief Operating Officer, Consorzio Italbiotec, Lombardy Green Chemistry Association, and the co-lead of the Bio-economy pilot
ilaria.re@italbiotec.it
- **Eerikki Vainio**
Senior Advisor, East and North Finland EU Office
eerikki.vainio@eastnorth.fi

In case you wish to know more about East and North Finland and its membership in the Vanguard Initiative network, please contact:

- **Eerikki Vainio**
Senior Advisor, East and North Finland EU Office
eerikki.vainio@eastnorth.fi