



Sparks!

BY INNOVATION BOOST

Table of contents

Welcome to August's edition of SPARKS	3
From the Baltic Sea to agriculture	4
Highlights from the report	5
CHIH-K lays the foundation for the hydrogen economy in Kristinestad	7
Drop-in session on funding application support	9
Sitra growth report: Businesses and research must meet more often	10
Mid Sweden University: testbeds strengthen collaboration between research and industry	11

Welcome to August's edition of SPARKS

Innovation, collaboration and sustainable development at the heart of Community Days 2026

Spring has provided many valuable insights into how innovation, research, and collaboration can contribute to the development of our region. Both Sparks Innovation Day in Kristinestad and the Community Days in May and July clearly demonstrated a strong commitment to future-oriented issues and a willingness to find solutions together.

In this issue of SPARKS, we highlight several current initiatives from Novia University of Applied Sciences and Vaasa University of Applied Sciences (VAMK). We take a closer look at collaborations in areas such as the hydrogen economy and the circular economy—fields that are developing rapidly and offering significant opportunities for companies and organizations to get involved.

Our ambition with SPARKS is to make research, innovation, and development projects accessible and easy to understand. We want to showcase concrete examples, current projects, and emerging opportunities in a way that feels relevant and useful for businesses and other interested stakeholders.

If any of the projects presented here spark your interest, please feel free to get in touch. Many of these initiatives are built on collaboration, and we would be happy to discuss how you can become involved or benefit from the results.

In this magazine, you will also find a link to the recording of the Community Days, allowing you to revisit the discussions and presentations at your convenience.

Enjoy the reading!

Best, Anna Bertills / Project manager

From the Baltic Sea to agriculture – Novia’s research seeks solutions for the future

How can we build a more sustainable society in a time marked by climate change, uncertainty, and increasing pressure on natural resources? This question lies at the heart of much of the research and development carried out at Novia University of Applied Sciences’ School of Bioeconomy.

The recently published Research & Development Report 2025 presents ongoing projects in areas such as marine environments, agriculture and forestry, biodiversity, and societal transformation. What these projects share is a commitment to transforming research into practical solutions that benefit people, businesses, and the environment.

The report demonstrates how Novia’s researchers, together with municipalities, companies, and other partners, are exploring new pathways toward a more sustainable and resilient society—from the ecosystems of the Baltic Sea to the agriculture of the future.



[READ THE ARTICLE](#)

Highlights

Natural fibres and local value chains at the core of the circular economy

How can natural fibres, local raw materials, and regional production contribute to a more sustainable future? These are key questions addressed by several of Novia's development projects within bioeconomy and the circular economy.

During the year, the project NorNa – Nordic Natural Fibres in Circular Economy – continued its efforts to highlight the potential of Nordic natural fibres such as flax, hemp, nettle, and sheep wool. Through study visits, interviews, seminars, and collaboration with researchers and businesses, the project has gathered knowledge on how natural fibres can be utilized in future textiles, construction materials, and other bio-based products.

One of the year's seminars focused on the role of natural fibres in the green transition. Participants learned about research into new bio-based materials and how cultivating fibre crops on rewetted peatlands can reduce climate emissions while creating new industrial raw materials.

The project has also strengthened its international networks through study visits in Denmark. Among the organizations visited was VIA University College, which conducts research in textiles, design, and circularity. The focus was on the entire value chain—from cultivation and fibre extraction to finished textile products.

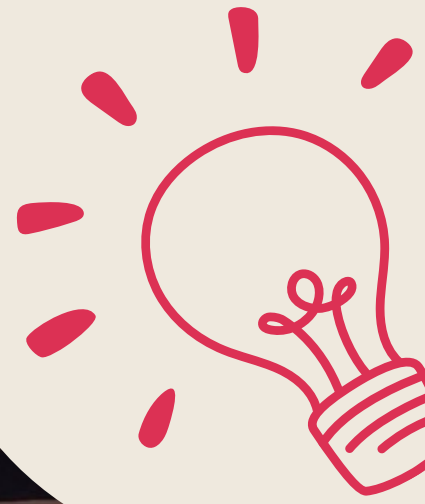
The work on natural fibres forms part of a broader perspective on local economies and circular systems. By developing regional value chains, dependence on global supply chains can be reduced while creating new opportunities for rural businesses, producers, and local communities. The objective is to strengthen self-sufficiency, transparency, and resilience by making sustainable use of local resources.

New circular solutions are also being explored within aquaculture. The project Freshwater Mussel – An Aquaculture Feasibility Study has investigated the potential of freshwater mussels as a resource for future production of animal feed, food products, and water purification solutions. The project demonstrates how biological resources can be integrated into circular systems where nutrients and materials are used more efficiently.

Together, these projects illustrate how research, innovation, and collaboration can contribute to a circular economy in which local resources gain new value and sustainable solutions are developed for the future.

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CHIH-K lays the foundation for the hydrogen economy in Kristinestad



Kristinestad is increasingly positioning itself as a future hub for green energy and hydrogen production. To ensure that regional businesses and the local workforce can benefit from the opportunities created by the green transition, the CHIH-K (Coastal Hydrogen Innovation Hub – Kristinestad) project is currently underway.

The project is led by Vaasa University of Applied Sciences (VAMK) in collaboration with Business Kristinestad. Its objective is to strengthen expertise in the hydrogen economy, enhance collaboration between education and industry, and create conditions for new business opportunities in the region. At the same time, the project prepares local companies for the requirements and opportunities associated with future investments in green energy and hydrogen production.

A key part of CHIH-K's work involves creating meeting places where companies, educational institutions, researchers, and development organizations can exchange knowledge and establish new connections. For this reason, the project participated in Sparks Innovation Day in Kristinestad, an event that brought together stakeholders from across the region around innovation, entrepreneurship, and sustainable solutions for the future.

Throughout the day, participants attended inspiring presentations, learned about ongoing research and development projects, and explored practical examples of how innovation can contribute to regional growth. The event also provided valuable opportunities for networking and discussions on how companies can benefit from the green transition and planned regional investments.

For the CHIH-K project, the event was an important opportunity to highlight the possibilities that the hydrogen economy can create for local businesses. Project representatives explained how companies can already begin preparing for future investments by developing relevant skills, strengthening networks, and familiarizing themselves with the requirements of major energy and industrial projects.

Particular emphasis was placed on the business opportunities available to small and medium-sized enterprises. Planned investments in green energy and hydrogen will create demand for a broad network of suppliers in areas such as engineering, logistics, construction, services, and maintenance. For many businesses, this represents access to new markets and growth opportunities.

Sparks Innovation Day also demonstrated the value of collaboration between education, research, and industry. When different stakeholders come together, new ideas, partnerships, and projects emerge that can strengthen regional competitiveness. For CHIH-K, this cooperation is a central component in building a regional innovation cluster focused on hydrogen and green energy.

The event sent a clear signal that interest in the green transition is strong throughout the region. It also showed a shared willingness to develop the solutions and expertise needed for Kristinestad to play a leading role in the energy systems of the future.

[READ THE ARTICLE](#)

Drop-In Session for Funding Application Support



DUX



September 11



Join us at DUX on **11 September** for a drop-in session where businesses and organizations can receive guidance and support with funding applications.

Experts will be available to discuss funding opportunities, application processes, and project development ideas.

Sitra Growth Report:

Businesses and Research must meet more often



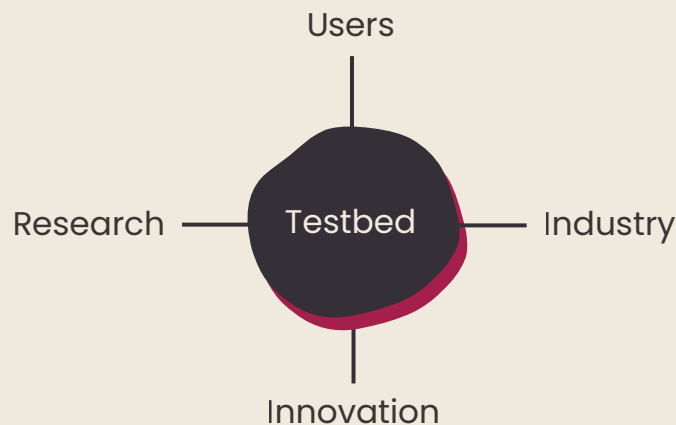
Finland's future growth depends on bringing research and industry closer together. New knowledge only creates value when it is transformed into innovations, products, and services. To strengthen competitiveness, more long-term collaboration is needed between companies, universities, and research institutes. Shared innovation environments, researchers working within businesses, and increased mobility between academia and industry can accelerate development and make research more relevant.

Regional innovation clusters in fields such as energy, artificial intelligence, health technology, and the circular economy are already showing the way forward. By combining cutting-edge research expertise with companies' market knowledge, Finland can more rapidly turn ideas into growth.

When research and entrepreneurship work together, innovation capacity, competitiveness, and opportunities for sustainable economic development are all strengthened. It is an investment in future prosperity.

[READ SITRA'S REPORT](#)

Mid Sweden University: Testbeds Strengthen Collaboration Between Research and Industry



According to Mid Sweden University, testbeds are important arenas for open innovation where researchers, companies, and users come together to jointly develop and test new solutions. By creating environments where ideas can be evaluated under real or near-real conditions, the path from research to practical application becomes both shorter and more efficient.

Testbeds serve as a bridge between academia and industry. Companies gain the opportunity to test new products, services, and technologies before making major investments, while researchers gain valuable insights into market needs and the challenges businesses face in practice. As a result, research outcomes can be transformed more rapidly into innovations that generate both commercial and societal value.

At the same time, testbeds help build long-term relationships between research institutions and businesses. When stakeholders collaborate on shared challenges, knowledge exchange, innovation capacity, and the ability to develop competitive solutions are strengthened. This is particularly important in an era of rapid technological development, where companies need access to the latest research in order to grow and renew their operations.

By investing in more testbeds and collaborative innovation environments, regions and countries can create better conditions for innovation, entrepreneurship, and sustainable growth. Testbeds demonstrate in practice how research and business can work together to develop the solutions of tomorrow.



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