

Friendship Cities and Program Implementation in the Baltic Sea Region

After the pilot phases, each region involved in the KISMET project sought a friendship city where the validated tools and methods from the Sustainable Food Environments Enabling Programme were implemented. This initiative aimed to collaboratively create sustainable and circular food systems across the Baltic Sea region. Additionally, it supported local and regional authorities in developing sustainable food environments and advancing circularity within food systems.

KISMET provides methods and tools to foster innovation and enhance existing resources. These support measures target governance, demand, and production across the Baltic Sea region, equipping authorities to drive meaningful change.

KISMET's goals include shifting consumer behavior, promoting circular economy principles, and transforming regional food chains toward climate neutrality. The project seeks to guide consumers toward best practices, create business opportunities within the circular economy, localize food chains and production, and help society take a significant step toward climate neutrality.

Friendship City Iisalmi

In January 2025, following the publication of the KISMET Enabling Programme Sustainable Food Environments & Circular Food Systems (link: <https://kismet-project.eu/>), the friendship city activities in the KISMET project began in earnest. Xamk had already contacted the City of Iisalmi in December 2024 and presented the KISMET programme's actions and tools to them. At the beginning of January, we received confirmation from Iisalmi that they would join the KISMET network and participate in the project as a friendship city. This marked the start of cooperation with the City of Iisalmi's Food Services.

At the end of January, the KISMET project partners organized the first online meeting for friendship city partners. During this online meeting, participants were introduced to the KISMET programme's actions and tools. They discussed the start of cooperation, the goals, and the next online meeting scheduled for February 2025.

After this, we began discussions with Iisalmi Food Services regarding the KISMET programme's actions and tools to be implemented in Iisalmi. Through these discussions, the Awareness about Food Waste action was selected. Iisalmi Food Services had previously monitored food waste across different locations and customer groups. Still, the focus of food waste management shifted to leftovers from plates among students in Iisalmi upper secondary schools. Iisalmi Food Services wanted to reduce and prevent these plate leftovers.

In February, KISMET partners organized a second online meeting for the friendship cities, divided into groups based on the KISMET programme's actions they had selected. The City of Tartu in Estonia had piloted the Awareness about Food Waste action from the KISMET programme. Maris Väli-Täht presented this pilot and the different tools of the action. We also received more detailed tips from Maris on implementing the action.



Image1. Friendship cities meeting in Vilnius, May 2025. Anne-Helena Sutinen and Janne Maksimainen, City of Iisalmi, Piia Mikonsaari, Xamk. (Photo Jenni Palosaari).

Implementation of Awareness about Food Waste

After this, we began planning the implementation of the Awareness about Food Waste action together with Iisalmi Food Services. The target group was upper secondary school students aged 13–16. Since the KISMET programme action did not provide sufficiently detailed tools to raise food waste awareness among young people, we decided to create an Action Plan for Raising Awareness about Food Waste for

Iisalmi Food Services. The framework for this action plan was drawn from the KISMET programme, while the practical tools were gathered from projects conducted in Finland and at Xamk.

We identified three thematic areas to guide food waste management: food education, communication, and customer collaboration, derived from the KISMET programme's action. We then sought a theoretical framework for each theme, which formed the basis for the action plan's theoretical section. From this, we developed the necessary tools for practical actions in Iisalmi Food Services. Additionally, we included suggestions in the action plan for various already-existing food waste management tools, from which Iisalmi Food Services could choose the most suitable tools for future food waste management actions.

To develop the action plan and its practical tools, Xamk organized five workshops with Iisalmi Food Services: one in person in Iisalmi and the remaining four online. Participants included the Food Service Manager, Food Service Supervisor, and other staff from Iisalmi Food Services, as well as a Climate Coordinator from the SISU project and a Home Economics Teacher from an Iisalmi comprehensive school.

During these workshops, we first went through the theoretical part of each theme: food education, communication, and customer collaboration. This was followed by a practical session, in which participants discussed together what these themes meant in their own work and how, through these themes, they could cooperate with schools to raise young people's awareness of food waste and prevent it. The workshops resulted in a jointly developed plan for practical tools to manage food waste for the school years 2025–2026 and 2026–2027.



Image 2. Workshop with Iisalmi Food Services in Iisalmi, May 2025. (Photo Piia Mikonsaari).

The Action Plan

Based on these discussions and theoretical foundations, Xamk developed an action plan titled “Raising Awareness about Food Waste: Iisalmi Food Services Action Plan for 2026–2028.” The action plan was structured around the following content:

- Purpose of the Action Plan
- Background: “Awareness about Food Waste”
- Themes Selected for Food Waste Management
- Workshop Materials for the Themes: food waste, food education, communication, and customer collaboration
- Planned Goals and Measures: school year 2025–2026, school year 2026–2027, school year 2027–2028.

In November 2025, the action plan was completed and presented in an in-person meeting in Iisalmi to Food Services staff and stakeholders.



Image 3. “Raising Awareness about Food Waste: Iisalmi Food Services Action Plan for 2026–2028.”

Friendship City Cooperation – KISMET Network

In May 2025, KISMET project partners, friendship cities, and associated organizations (AOs) met in Vilnius, Lithuania. The purpose of this two-day

meeting was to get to know the friendship cities from different countries and regions and to exchange experiences on implementing the KISMET programme.

Xamk and Iisalmi had the opportunity to discuss and learn about Peipsiääre County's experiences in Tartu, Estonia, in piloting the Awareness about Food Waste action. It was also interesting to exchange experiences with school food services from different countries. Other friendship city participants came from Sweden, Denmark, Lithuania, Estonia, and Finland.

In September, KISMET partners organized the third online meeting for the friendship cities. During this meeting, each partner and friendship city shared experiences regarding cooperation, successes and challenges, programme implementation, and the current status of implementation.

In November 2025, the KISMET Final Conference was held in Savonlinna, Finland, with participation from project partners, friendship cities, AOs, and stakeholders. The event showcased the results of the KISMET programme, pilots in LIP regions, outcomes of friendship-city cooperation, and future actions to enable sustainable food environments. The most valuable aspect of the event was, again, the opportunity for participants from different countries to meet and exchange experiences.



Image 4. The Final Conference Participants, November 2025. (Photo Ronnit Hasson).

The KISMET Continues to Live On

The KISMET programme continues to live on, even though the project itself has ended. The friendship city cooperation also continues. Xamk has already scheduled a follow-up meeting with Iisalmi Food Services for May 2026, where we will learn how the practical implementation of the Action Plan has progressed during the school year 2025–2026 and discuss the

following actions for the school year 2026–2027, to be carried out in cooperation with partners in food services.

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More information about KISMET: <https://interreg-baltic.eu/project/kismet/>