Clusters & Cooperation for Regional Development in Central Europe

www.clusterscord.eu

This project is implemented under the CENTRAL EUROPE Programme co-financed by European Regional Development Fund
In economic and innovation policy the term cluster is usually used to explain geographical concentrations of economic and innovation activities. According to conventional wisdom clusters support economic development through the specialization of regions in activities within which companies gain higher productivity through accessing external economies of scale or other comparative advantages. During the past 15 years clusters and innovative (competence) networks have gained more and more importance as an element of economic development and innovation strategies of the European Union and its Member States.

(NGP Cluster Excellence Project)

Introduction to clusters

Global competition is increasing in a steady peace. How come some regions develop and grow while others decline and how come some companies can expend their business in ferce global competition while others are forced to shut down. One important answer is CLUSTERS. They foster competitiveness of associated companies and boost their innovations potential.

A cluster can be broadly defined as geographically co-located end producers, suppliers, services providers, research laboratories, educational institutions and other institutions in a given economic feld. Clusters are important drivers of dynamic regional economies and they are powerful engines of economic development. They provide a fertile business environment for companies, especially SMEs, to collaborate with research institutions, suppliers, customers and competitors located in the same geographical area.

However, market fragmentation, weak industry-research linkages and insuficient cooperation within the EU in the innovation sector lead to a situation where the clusters not always have the necessary critical mass and innovation capacity to face global competition.

Innovation
Science
Industry
Regional
Entrepreneurship
Networks/SME
Market integration
Investment Atraction

Competition
Trade
Export promotion

Environment
Energy
Social
International afairs

In the picture is illustrated role of clusters in diferent policy areas. Sometimes it plays very important role (innovation, science, entrepreneurship…) and sometimes less important role (social, environment, energy…).

Economic outcomes signifcantly difer within the EU member countries, refecting diferences in the quality of regional microeconomic business environments and in the composition of regional economies. The recent focus of European policies to harmonize national business environments (Common currency on monetary policy, Stability and Growth Pact on fscal policy, Common market on many microeconomic policies) has decreased the level of diferences between national laws and regulations.

Clusters-Cord project www.clusterscord.eu
Within the cluster sector of a regional economy, recent research has indicated that the strength of the cluster portfolio is an important factor to understand the impact of the cluster sector on an economic performance of a region. Cluster policies are designed and implemented at local, regional and national level, depending on their scope and ambition. It is the role of the Community to facilitate and add to such efforts, notably by improving the framework conditions, promoting research and education excellence and entrepreneurship, fostering better linkages between industry (especially SMEs) and research, and encouraging mutual policy learning and cluster cooperation across the EU.

The setting up of a common European research and innovation space must be based on two main elements: the definition of successful policies and program by the decision makers towards the definition of international interventions supporting the cluster development and the innovation inside the clusters, both at level of single SMEs and at overall level as clusters and the parallel step must be to implement tools and provide management system to apply the policies and to identify how to introduce innovations in the clusters system.
CENTRAL EUROPE Programme

CENTRAL EUROPE is a European Union program that encourages cooperation among the countries of Central Europe to improve innovation, accessibility and the environment and to enhance the competitiveness and attractiveness of their cities and regions.

CENTRAL EUROPE invests €231 million to provide funding to transnational cooperation projects involving public and private organizations from Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia.

The program is financed by the European Regional Development Fund and runs from 2007 to 2013. Interested partnerships are invited to propose their projects following public calls for proposals, which will be widely publicized.

Facilitation of innovation across Central Europe is one of the key priorities of the CENTRAL EUROPE Program. Supporting the establishment and development of transnational clusters in key competence areas is being considered as relevant for enhancing the framework conditions for innovation and support for transnational cooperation between cluster organizations and cluster initiatives is a vital element of the European Commission’s broad-based innovation strategy.

More information can be found on http://www.central2013.eu/index.php
Clusters-Cord Project

The business and geographical clusters have proved to be an effective regional economic development tool, in particular in peripheral/less competitive areas (contains 12 new EU member states), where the concentration of interconnected businesses, suppliers and associated institution in specific fields increases their productivity, drives the innovation processes and leads to stimulation of new businesses. CLUSTERS-CORD project is based on this premise and is focused on promotion of the exchange of best practices in cluster management, as well as the cooperation among clusters from the same thematic field but different geographical origin, through the creation of so called “meta-clusters”.

Regional development agencies and other business supporting actors are acting very often as clusters facilitators, as well supporting actors in clusters services development and promotion. The creation of industrial clusters various between the EU27 countries, whereas in the new member states clusters are relatively new instruments receiving currently support from structural funding scheme.

The partners within the CLUSTERS-CORD, representing the regional business supporting actors (e.g. RDAs), have joint their forces in order to improve regional capacity in the management and development of clusters, through the exchange of experiences and good practices and development of direct cooperation among existing actors.
**Concept of the project**

CLUSTERS-CORD is an interregional cooperation project, which aims for the improvement of the regional capacity in management and development of clusters. Sustainability of this goal requires an exchange of experience, good practices and a development of direct cooperation among the existing actors. The regions, where clusters relatively new instruments are, can learn from the experienced partners in this field.

General objective of the project is to strengthen the cooperation among clusters from the same thematic field but different geographical origin through the creation of 5 Strategic Cooperation plans which will result in the creation of at least three so called “meta-clusters”. The project has selected 10 key industries that have been closely examined:

- Mobility & Logistics
- Professional Services
- ICT
- Automotive & Aeronautics
- Tourism
- Health Science
- Energy & Environment
- Production Technologies
- Wood Industries
- Food Processing

Clusters-Cord project offers a possibility of the collaboration for cluster organizations and their members, enabling them to get easily in contact, to find cooperation partners, to get to know best practices and to benchmark their performance. In order to reach the main goal – to establish these meta-clusters and to support the cooperation between clusters – the project is on the regular basis bringing together clusters’ managers, clusters’ representatives, as well as relevant decision makers exchanging the knowledge about the creation of new services and methods as well as potential synergies.

The project’s main efforts started with the benchmarking activities of regional clusters and regional cluster policies of participating actors. The outcomes of the benchmarking activities were summed up in the benchmarking study, which was the key outcome of the entire Clusters-Cord project.

The best practices were identified in this study and based on the data gained, 5 industries suitable for future creation of at least 3 meta-clusters - each in one industry - were selected. Additionally a systematic comparison process of involved regions has been made, where the current situation has been digested in each region and project level conclusions have been made. To reach our goal, similar or adaptable regional initiatives have been studied and lessons to be learnt have been summarized.
The benchmarking study was a crucial document for benchmarking conference, which took place in Milan, Italy. Cluster policies and practices were discussed in relation to five industry sectors:

- food,
- energy/environment,
- tourism,
- health
- ICT.

The conference was starting point for the process of implementation of meta-clusters. Responsible partners will follow the work on strategic plans of the establishment of meta-clusters in industrial sectors mentioned above. There will be organized exchange forums in the different partner’s regions where cluster managers, experts and companies from fully grown or developing clusters will have chance to exchange experience and discuss the situation of clusters in different regions and learn from each other. This should help to bring those actors more together and support their international activities. As a result of the cooperation in meta-clusters, agreements between the clusters should be signed, guaranteeing future joint activities and their internationalization.
Partners of the project:

- Lead Partner – Regional Development Agency of Usti Region, PLC (Czech Republic)
- Stuttgart Region Economic Development Corporation (WRS) – (Germany)
- Regional Development agency of Piestany (Slovakia)
- Regional Development Agency Bielsko-Biala (Poland)
- Upper Austrian Chamber of Commerce (Austria)
- Milano Metropoli Development Agency (Italy)
- Mid-Pannon Regional Development Co. (Hungary)
- “ARLEG” S.A. Regional Development Agency (Poland)
- Centre for research, innovation and regional development (Czech Republic)
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