

CEE-ClusterNetwork “Cluster Action Plan”



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1. Preamble

Cluster initiatives and company networks are important instruments for economic development and innovation policy especially in case of SMEs. They contribute considerably to the competitiveness of regions of all sizes in terms of creation of a regional profile and fostering sustainability and research by supporting especially SMEs.

CEE-ClusterNetwork is linking eleven partner regions/countries in Central and Eastern Europe, whose innovation policies focus on cluster and network policy. The main objectives are to find coherences in the different regional cluster policy implementation methodologies and to shape a common policy by defining common strategic issues and programmes.



On 28 November 2007 political representatives of all participating regions agreed on signing the **“CEE Cluster Agreement”** as a clear symbolic sign and statement to further bundle strengths and to also cooperate in the future in order to fulfill the above objectives raised.

(Foto: Horst Wagner, TMG)

The two key elements of the CEE Cluster Agreement are (abstracts):

- **Quality Guidelines for effective cluster management**
 - *on policy level:* e.g. cross-regional co-operation, strategic linkage on all levels, active participation of cluster companies, clear organisational structures, long-term financial support.
 - *on management level:* consensus on cluster strategy, services of cluster initiatives e.g. in field of networking, information & communication, opening of international markets.
- **Common strategic issues for future innovation and cluster policy**
 - *on policy and administration level:* e.g. focus on cluster initiatives in EU programmes, cross-border co-operation of clusters, international visibility of EU clusters, sustainable cluster policy, co-operation between R&D and entrepreneurs, give companies a steering role in cluster initiatives
 - *on cluster and network initiatives' level:* e.g. platform for EU cluster initiatives, closer co-operation universities-R&D-companies, high qualification for cluster companies and trainings for cluster managers, access to global markets

This commitment to coherent innovation and cluster policies is the first such agreement ever, showing CEE regions' eagerness to benefit from complementarities, exchange of know-how, economic internationalisation at regional, national and European level, and from economic growth.

2. Executive Summary

Cluster Action Plan (CAP) is a **strategic hand book for the development and implementation of common activities within CEE-Cluster Network** aiming at the definition of joint topics for cross-border activities at both a segmental and inter-segmental level and their consequent implementation.

CAP reflects the strategies and objectives principles anchored in the „CEE Cluster Agreement“ on common strategies and objectives for the future, signed on 28 November 2007 by 11 representatives of CEE countries and regions.

It covers all phases of the project cycle including:

- Preparation
- Evaluation / selection
- Development
- Implementation of pilot activities

CAP thus specifies in detail:

- Process from a regional project idea to joint CEE-ClusterNetwork activities (initial situation, goals, benefits);
- Project ideas to be realised by the partner regions;
- Topics of the trans-regional project ideas and their relevance for CEE-ClusterNetwork partners;
- Identification of possible financing instruments for these projects;
- Following steps of their implementation (pilot actions);
- Process of future cooperation and activities (including rules for participation on the new partner regions in trans-regional cluster projects).

Gathered trans-regional activities in a Cluster Action Plan elaborated by the project partners (according to the defined topics and the adjusted guidelines) will create a basis for the following steps of their implementation in a form of pilot actions.

3. About the CEE-ClusterNetwork

Clusters have so far operated mainly at a regional/local level. Cross-border co-operation has only recently become a part of their operations, usually on a case-by-case basis. Since September 2006, the CEE-ClusterNetwork consortium has been involving eleven neighbouring cluster regions from eight Central and Eastern European countries (Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) keen to mobilise and support national and regional innovation policy actors to carry out and design co-operation activities together with other competent public authorities.

The main objective of the project is to find coherences in the different regional cluster policy implementation methodologies and to shape a common policy in defining common strategic issues, strategies and programmes.

The project aims at coherent development of innovation and cluster policies in the strongest sectors of each regional economy at three levels:

- policy
- administration
- regional development agencies and cluster initiatives.

The Network is expected to have a major impact on the increase of the international competitiveness and growth of all participating regions and countries by:

- Quality guidelines for effective cluster management;
- Long-term co-operation of CEE regions in the cluster policy development and implementation (signing the CEE Cluster Agreement by political and governmental decision makers);
- More intense relationships between companies of the participating regions for the benefit of business and innovation;
- Critical mass - strong geographical focus on the Central and Eastern European countries due to the large number of participating regions;
- Exchange of experience with other EU regions and close cooperation with the EC;
- Enlargement of the CEE-ClusterNetwork in a second phase

Organisation:

The project consortium consists of 12 partners from 11 regions and 8 European countries. Strategic decisions are being taken within a Steering Committee consisting of representatives of the partners (including external experts) while the project on administrative level is run by the following Management Team:

Management Team

- Upper Austrian Technology and Marketing Ltd. (AT) – Coordinator
Anita Hingsamer, anita.hingsamer@tmg.at, Tel. +43 732 79810-5091
- ecoplus - Business Agency of Lower Austria Ltd. (AT) – Lead Partner WP3 “Cluster Action Plan”
Walter Freudenthaler, w.freudenthaler@ecoplus.at, Tel. +43 2742 9000-19655
- West Pannon Regional Development Agency (HU)
Tamás Kocsondi, tamas.kocsondi@westpa.hu, Tel. +36 92 598-026

Steering Committee / CEE-ClusterNetwork partners:

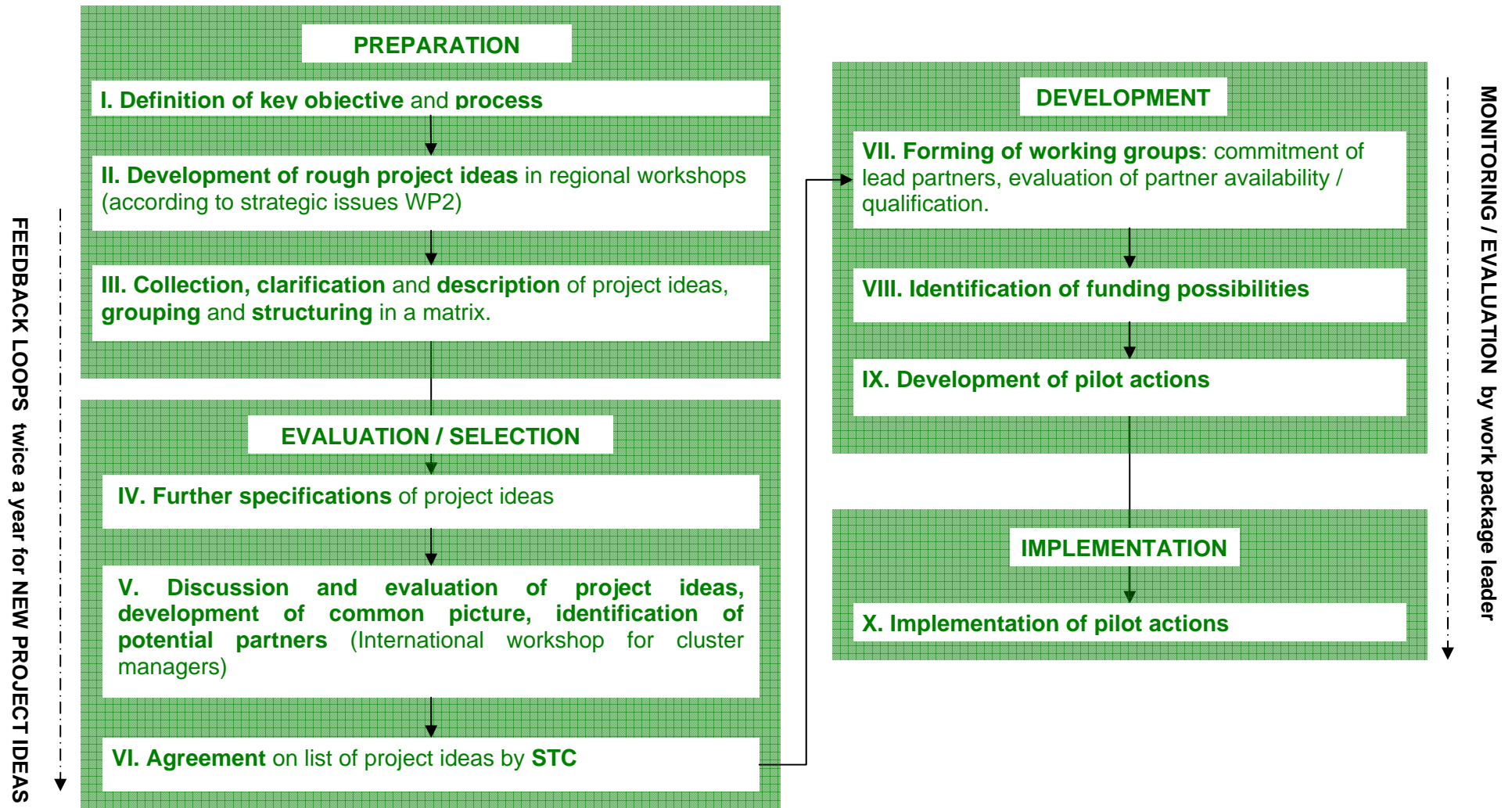
- Innovations - und Technologietransfer Salzburg GmbH (AT)
Oliver Jan Wagner, oliver.wagner@itg-salzburg.at, Tel. +43 662 8042 3148
- Tiroler Zukunftsstiftung (AT)
Johanna Bernhardt, johanna.bernhardt@zukunftsstiftung.at, Tel. +43 512 57 62 62 14
- Maribor Development Agency / Euro Info Centre Maribor (SI)
Vladimir Rudl, vladimir.rudl@mra.si, Tel. + 386 2 333 13 02
- Czechinvest - Investment and Business Development Agency (CZ)
Stepan Prochazka, stepan.Prochazka@czechinvest.org, Tel. + 420 296 342 420
- BIC Bratislava - Business and Innovation Centre Bratislava spol s.r.o. (SK)
Stefan Vratny, vratny@bic.sk, Tel. + 421 2 5441 7515
- ARP - Agencja Rozwoju Przemyslu (Industrial Development Agency) (PL)
Zygmunt Wons, Zygmunt.Wons@arp.com.pl, Tel. +48 22 460 37 86
- TIS - Techno Innovation South Tyrol (IT)
Iris Pahl, iris.pahl@tis.bz.it, Tel. +39 0471 068162
- Croatian Employers' Association National Centre for Clusters (HR)
Sandra Radakovic, sandra.radakovic@hup.hr, Tel. +385 1 48 97 560
- Clusterland Upper Austria Ltd. (AT)
Rainer Burgstaller, rainer.burgstaller@clusterland.at, Tel. +43 732 79 810 5177

CEE-ClusterNetwork is open to new partners.

Any public organisation or any network of such organisations dealing with the development and/or management of cluster policies and programmes that is not currently involved in the CEE-ClusterNetwork is invited to apply for joining the work undertaken commonly under the 12 CEE-ClusterNetwork Steering Committee members and/or pilot projects defined in the Cluster Action Plan.

1. The organisation should be registered in a country associated to the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP).
2. The organisation is a public or semi-public entity;
3. The organisation deals with the development and/or the management of cluster policies and programmes on behalf of a public authority.

“how-to“ – from a regional project idea to common CEE-ClusterNetwork activities



4. Cluster Action Plan in overview: From a regional project idea to common CEE-ClusterNetwork activities

Being pictured in its different steps in the graph above the CEE Cluster Action Plan provides a more detailed description explaining the process underlying the development of project ideas based on the strategic issues (CEE Cluster Agreement) and their development towards common CEE activities in a form of pilot projects.

PREPARATION:

I. Definition of key objective and process

As a starting point the overall goal has to be defined, here: development of common cluster projects in the CEE work plan.

Based on CEE regions' strategic interests as well as needs of their cluster initiatives and companies the partners have to agree on:

- Definition of the common strategic issues and thematic topics which are to be targeted through the creation of international collaborative projects;
- elaboration of the strategy for development of project ideas, including roadmap leading to the implementation of pilot actions;
- sustainability issues (e.g. future cooperation and implementation).

Altogether, this phase should lead to the clear definition of the process for gathering project ideas, including the development of guidelines and templates.

II. Development of rough project ideas

In the second phase – within each partner region – cluster managers and key stakeholders are brought together during workshops in order to brainstorm and discuss trans-regional activities and potential project ideas targeting common issues.

The project ideas should already contain rough specification of possible lead part in the project, potential man-days available and funding options.

III. Collection, clarification and structuring of CEE project ideas

This widely unstructured and not very in detail described projects ideas have to be collected by the responsible work package leader.

Various project ideas from different partners usually record similar themes, objectives, milestones or particular activities. A Matrix helps to bundle topically similar project categories from different regions. Unclear project ideas have to be traced to get the genuine contents behind each idea.

Therefore additional content clarification with authors of the respective project ideas per phone or E-Mail (based on the “Guidelines for survey among project managers concerning project ideas” elaborated by external expert) will be necessary to avoid potential misunderstandings and vague formulations to enable complex understanding of the project idea.

Based on clarification phase with originators of the project ideas the external expert systemises and writes out all project ideas outlining distinctly:

- History of operation / problem description;
- Definition of all stages of implementation including specification of activities, priority actions and methodology to be used;
- Target groups addressed by the project;
- Benefits to be achieved;
- Outcomes/results/impacts of activities;
- Milestones of the project;
- Proposal of the project leader;
- Proposal of the project members;
- Anticipated duration of the project;
- Estimation of the budget.

EVALUATION / SELECTION

IV. Further specification and concretion of project ideas

As the bundled project categories encompass or modify different original project ideas, it is imperative for the CEE Management Team to further specify and concretise these newly created projects on the basis of internal discussions led through various communication channels.

This “top-down” approach provides for a better reflection of key issues which need to be considered in the superior project categories and thus enables better specification of activities, milestones, stakeholders, effects/outputs/impacts, benefits or time framework necessary to consider within individual project categories.

V. Discussion and evaluation of project ideas, development of common picture, identification of potential partners

Cross-border co-operation of clusters in CEE has only recently become a part of their operations, usually on a bilateral case-by-case basis. Establishing a network of clusters and enabling sustainable co-

operation needs information and trust building. Exchange of experiences is a key need especially for managers of “young” clusters.

A multilateral international workshop gives cluster managers the opportunity to get in contact with colleagues and find out about activities and structure of clusters in other countries. It will help to define a common picture of the network and the fields of future co-operation.

In order to further develop project ideas collected at regional level in the preparation phase, cluster managers discuss the main contents and agree on focal points in international working groups.

VI. Agreement on project ideas by Steering Committee

In this stage of the concretion process the amended projects ideas are presented to CEE-ClusterNetwork partners to integrate their strategic interests of cluster development and to reach an agreement which project ideas will be supported and thus transformed into concrete project proposals. Project ideas with less priority are kept in a form of the project pipeline pending later implementation.

FEEDBACK LOOPS TO COLLECT NEW PROJECT IDEAS

For the future definition of new potential project ideas feedback is collected two months prior to the steering group / committee meetings twice a year. During these meetings itself, new ideas will be presented, discussed and – if appropriate – integrated into the pool of project ideas.

DEVELOPMENT

VII. Forming of working groups

In order to implement 2-3 project ideas out of the agreed list of activities as first pilot actions it is crucial to identify CEE-ClusterNetwork partners, who commit themselves to be a coordinator (lead partner) of a pilot action, take responsibility to find appropriate and qualified partners, organise workshops and work on joint activities.

VIII. Identification of funding possibilities and orientation towards sustainability

An external expert identifies and prepares a list of relevant and actual funding sources (ongoing or upcoming calls for proposals) matching from the thematic and content perspective all project categories approved by the CEE-ClusterNetwork Management Team for the prospective implementation specifying title of the programme, objectives, supported activities, eligibility of participants, etc.

Altogether, the aspect of sustainability of project ideas has to be taken into consideration from the very first start when defining pilot actions: Alternative (public, private or public-private) ways of financing apart

from the above (mainly EU based) identified funding sources are important in order to sustain what has been achieved once funding is running out.

IX. Development of pilot actions

Lead partners of pilot actions supported by working groups (see VII.) define objectives and activities of pilot actions and develop road maps for the implementation while taking into account respective funding provisions and requirements contained in particular calls for proposals.

IMPLEMENTATION

X. Implementation of pilot actions

Lead partners of pilot actions are responsible for management and coordination of particular project phases in close cooperation with the working groups.

In order to provide homogeneity and content accuracy of the outcome, continuous feedback to the work package leader is necessary. For each pilot action a contact person has to be nominated to provide information on the progress to the work package based on an agreed communication plan.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION BY WORK PACKAGE LEADER

For successful implementation of the projects there is continuous evaluation and companionship of respective projects necessary in order to avoid possible setback of realisation of particular activities / milestones, secure sound financial management of the projects and thus to attain their overall sustainability.

This is to be done through regular evaluation of realized activities according to the project plan, monitoring of outputs/results/deliverables and control of financial flows.

5. Trans-regional Cluster Projects

The representatives of the CEE partner regions have elaborated a broad range of project ideas covering both hard and soft measures to be realised, aiming predominantly at development of innovation and cluster policies at different levels. Their impact can be boosted in the framework of the trans-regional cooperation, taking advantage of positive synergy effect while covering consecutive core themes:

- platform of all European cluster initiatives
- closer cooperation between universities, R&D institutions and companies
- high qualification for cluster companies
- access to global markets
- high quality trainings for cluster managers

The above mentioned themes are deduced from CEE Cluster Agreement's key strategic interests (see 1. *Preamble* for further details). Out of these, the following sub-themes can be formulated:

DEVELOPMENT OF TRAINING COURSES AND PROGRAMMES

Cluster Academy

Interested regions: Czech Republic, Tyrol, Slovenia, Salzburg, Croatia, Westpannon, Lower Austria, South-Tyrol, Upper Austria

Currently there is no standardised way of education for cluster managers in Europe and every region establishing clusters has to develop/provide its own training/qualification seminars due to lacking common cooperation in this field.

This means there is no standard job profile or job description. A cluster manager has to bring soft skills as well as hard skills with him for carrying out his tasks (e.g. networking, communication, mentoring, and conflict management).

Therefore the aim of the project idea is to establish standards for the qualification of cluster managers and develop training courses for cluster managers for specific topics to assure human resources for cluster initiatives. These courses should be held on a regular basis in partner regions or through e-learning. To ensure that graduates are prepared for future as well as for current demands, transferable and learning skills will need to be developed

Long term objective is to establish a "Master of Science Programme" and foundation of Cluster academy.

These objectives will be achieved through:

Analysis of initial state

- finding partner institutions (education centres);
- evaluation of actual training possibilities;
- analysis of the education and training needs of the cluster by field visits (from management and governance perspective).

Development of training programme

- development of topics;
- development of courses (e.g. content, duration);
- identification of experts and lecturers;
- definition of necessary “training infrastructure” (Rooms, IT, etc.).

Development of University programme

- reviewing college courses to review curricula and levels of student achievements;
- proposal for courses und curricula based on analysis;
- setting up necessary “training infrastructure”;
- gathering best practice reports on training;
- preparation of a “Master of Science Programme” (theoretical and practical focus of training sessions).

By targeting staff of cluster initiatives – and on the long run even post graduate students and high and middle executives of cluster initiatives – the project can significantly contribute to:

- Increasing the qualification of cluster management staff;
- Increasing the service quality for cluster members;
- Increasing the effect/benefits of the Cluster Initiatives.

Project duration: 2 – 3 years

Possible funding sources:

- Interreg IVC (Medium projects);
- Interreg IV B Central Europe (Measure 1.3);
- Interreg IV B South East Europe (Measure 1.1);
- Lifelong Learning Programme (DG Education) – Sub-Programme Gruntvig: Multilateral Projects.

CREATION OF CO-OPERATION AND COMMUNICATION PLATFORMS

Co-operation and communication platform

Interested regions: Slovenia, Upper Austria, Croatia, Westpannon, Lower Austria, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia

The development of cluster initiatives became in the recent years an important tool for every region in increasing the regional economy and regional competitiveness. Every cluster initiative, however, needs to be initiated, developed and managed in appropriate way. This way the representatives of various initiatives have a strong need for exchange of information concerning cluster development and management processes and want to learn from the best.

Exchange of information, know-how, competences and experiences between clusters is of high importance for their development. Cluster initiatives can hence benefit from establishing of the trans-regional cooperation and communication platform performing those tasks.

Furthermore, there is still a need to promote cluster concept at local, regional and national level by stressing its role and importance for economy and competitiveness of participating entities.

The aim is to establish a cooperation and communication between cluster initiatives for an ongoing exchange of experiences, information, know-how, competences as well as personal exchanges at cluster initiative level and promotion of clustering concept.

The project idea aims at fostering development of cluster initiatives through:

- creation of a cooperation platform (Internet basis);
- encouraging mutual cooperation among clusters and relevant key players;
- sharing information about actual and upcoming cluster initiatives, support programmes and projects;
- regular meetings of cluster members;
- organisation of study trips and company visits within clusters;
- exchange of staff of the cluster members;
- holding sector specific qualification events;
- involvement of new players (universities, R&D centers, regional authorities, etc.) in clusters and clustering policy;
- promotion of cluster concept at local, regional, national and international level (e.g. road shows, conferences, workshops, etc.);
- awareness rising of elaboration of cluster development policies in the regions;
- common appearance at events, fairs, etc.;
- dissemination of documents (reports, newsletters, etc.).

Project duration: 3 years

Possible funding sources:

- Interreg IVC (Medium projects);
- Interreg IV B Central Europe (Measure 1.1, 1.2);
- Interreg IV B South East Europe (Measure 1.1).

FOSTERING DEVELOPMENT OF CLUSTERS (strategies for their establishment, sharing knowledge and experience)

Strategy for development of “twin clusters”

Interested regions: Poland, Westpannon, Croatia, Lower Austria

The aim of the project idea is to develop a strategy for establishment of new clusters by using experiences and methods from well managed clusters within the same sector. These new clusters specified within the same branch are called “twin clusters”.

Through development of the strategy for “twin clusters” the following objectives should be achieved:

- acceleration and facilitation of the process of cluster development using assistance from more experienced clusters;
- fostering cooperation between clusters and their members within the same branches;
- coordinated approach to clustering policy and its promotion.

This way the project can provide:

- effective and efficient development of cluster initiatives;
- development of trade and cooperation between “twin clusters”;
- possibility of implementation of common actions/activities of “twin clusters” (technology transfer, technology foresight, R&D, etc.);
- enlargement of markets (new business contacts, sale opportunities, etc.).

Strategy on transformation from technological parks to cluster initiatives

Interested regions: Poland, Westpannon, Croatia

The aim of the project idea is to develop a strategy (road map) showing all steps necessary for transformation of a technology park into a cluster initiative in order to accelerate and strengthen these processes (initiation of the „clustering effect“). Some countries (e.g. Slovenia) have already gained some experiences, which should be integrated in the strategy.

The project will contribute to:

- identification of the common process for technology parks which are on the way to cluster initiatives (road map);

- preparation of a common strategy (based on analysis of processes and tasks, establishment of working groups, interviews with experts and documentation of good-practice-examples;
- fostering exchange of experiences;
- becoming a source of inspiration for other regions.

JOINT MARKETING ACTIVITIES (e.g. for opening new markets, etc.)

Joint marketing activities and networking

Interested regions: Slovenia, Croatia, Westpannon, Poland, Upper Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Salzburg, Lower Austria

Cluster initiatives from different regions – but within a certain sector – usually have their own marketing and especially networking activities for their cluster members in order to enter new markets. However – e.g. in certain sectors such as bio-plastics – a common and more open approach in order to create a larger platform between regions would make sense first in order to close the “gap” between Europe (here: CEE countries) and world market leaders such as Japan and the US.

Based on the current and previous experience from cooperation projects with partners from EU countries (e.g. within bio-plastics) the idea is to extend marketing / networking activities beyond the current number of 400 cluster members/companies from Lower Austria to the CEE regions in various fields through:

- identification of available but not used know-how (i.e. research expertise) in certain sectors – e.g. bio-plastics;
- development of joint marketing activities for opening new markets;
- corporate and joint appearance (events and fairs, etc.);
- identification of new contacts for clusters and their members (i.e. opening of new sales and market opportunities for cluster member companies);
- increase in the CEE’s world market share in particular sectors (e.g. bio-plastics) compared to leaders such as US/Japan (up to 10%);
- development of marketing database and online portal for offers of cooperation and cluster members with their products and information on R&D.

The above-mentioned goals will be pursued through:

- realization of a survey / study on the CEE regions and their respective strengths in specific sectors (e.g. bio-plastics) from the research and market perspective;
- elaboration of the “CEE map of branch expertise” based on the results of the survey / study identifying which knowledge, market opportunities and cooperation possibilities are where available;
- identification of good-practice-examples and definition of potential future networking and cooperation in specific fields;
- development of marketing / networking activities during workshops;

- creation of the common “platform” for marketing and networking (i.e. elaboration of a roadmap, development of success indicators, setting up of bi- or trilateral cooperation project ideas).

The project will target cluster members along the whole value chain, regional government, and staff of cluster initiative and provide:

- new opportunities for SMEs;
- possibility to become member of a bigger “alliance”;
- creation of the common marketing strategy.

Project duration: 2 – 3 years

Possible funding sources:

- Interreg IVC (Medium projects);
- Interreg IV B Central Europe (Measure 1.1).

EXCHANGE OF STAFF

Exchange of young professionals

Interested regions: Tyrol, Croatia, South-Tyrol, Upper Austria, Czech Republic, Westpannon, Lower Austria, Slovenia

The aim of the project idea is to create and establish an education programme for young professionals from cluster members. Within this programme the hard and soft skills of the participants would be trained according to demands of the market, thus fostering education willingness among “young workforce” of the CEE regions and improvement of their language knowledge based on:

- identification of interested regions and companies based in these regions willing to realize “inter-company-exchanges”;
- setting-up contents for exchange programme;
- organisation of the one week project related training sessions (e.g. camps) either at national or cross-border level;
- pre-running of language courses/seminars for preparation of candidates for exchange among CEE regions;
- creation of “CEE exchange teams” between companies.

Possible funding sources:

Lifelong Learning Programme (DG Education), Sub-Programme Leonardo da Vinci

ACCESS TO INFORMATION, KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCES

Joint development of trans-regional and cross border competence centres

Interested regions: Westpannon, Slovenia, Poland, Croatia, Lower Austria

The aim of the project idea is a development of trans-regional and cross border competence centres (service centres equipped with modern laboratories and offering specialized techniques for improving productivity, quality and innovativeness) through coordinated activities and exchange of experiences. Through these competence centres R&D activities, quality control as well as training programmes (qualification of engineers) should be carried out.

The project activities would imply:

- identification of the regions suitable for establishing of competence centers;
- identification of financing possibilities for competence centers;
- identification of key sectors (branches) and innovation potentials of particular regions;
- identification of key players / institutions prepared to provide support;
- setting-up and launch of operation of competence centers based on transfer of knowledge and experience from Lower Austria;
- networking of existing and new competence centers and fostering mutual cooperation.

Network analysis

Interested regions: Upper Austria, Slovenia, Westpannon, Tyrol, Croatia, Lower Austria

The Mechatronic Cluster of Upper Austria builds a small network analyse over a specific branch as a special service for their cluster service with aim to have a detailed overview about their cluster members and their networks.

Following the first network analysis of Upper Austria a bigger, deeper and trans-regional network analysis could be developed, based on cross-border cooperation between Cluster Initiatives between CEE ClusterNetwork regions.

The network analysis shows connections and interrelations between companies and their partners at different levels, within different branches and characteristics of these relationships (e.g. information on the value chains, co-operations, competences, suppliers, customers, etc.).

As a result there would be an Illustration (based on a database) developed. This illustration would enable to find new partners (cooperation, supplier, customer, etc.) or identify the business relationships and contacts of the cluster members. It should be an easy upgradeable tool.

Innosearch - Methods and Tools to foster Innovation in SMEs through access to R&D results in Universities

Interested regions: Slovakia, Salzburg, Slovenia, Croatia, Westpannon, Lower Austria, Poland, Upper Austria, Czech Republic, South-Tyrol

In the last years South Tyrol region began to close the “gap” between industry and R&D in the energy sector by offering SMEs services such as latest news about technologies, innovation and innovative products and establishing contact to researchers.

The aim of the project idea is to enlarge the scope of services offered by the South Tyrol region to other European regions with a long term objective to establish regional contact points for innovation and R&D to foster innovation in SMEs through access to R&D results and innovations. These regional contact points will provide services as follows:

- information about new technologies, products, R&D through personal talks, workshops, working groups mailing;
- identification of company needs and problems through regular company visits;
- support to find appropriate R&D-partner.

All gathered information will be collected in the database accessible to all participating regions and SMEs.

COMPANY BENCHMARKING WITHIN CLUSTERS

Company Benchmarking within clusters

Interested regions: Westpannon (PANAC, WPRDA), Slovenia, Upper Austria, Croatia, Lower Austria

In 2002 Pannon Automotive Cluster (PANAC) in Hungary has elaborated methodology for benchmarking of automotive clusters, which can be applied in other clusters as well.

The aim of the project is the adaptation of existing company benchmarking within automotive clusters to other industrial sectors (aerospace, electronics, plastics, machinery, etc.). Company benchmarking should become a very successful cluster service oriented on the company needs.

The benefits of the project are:

- no need to elaborate new company benchmarking within clusters;
- only adaptation of existing methodology for benchmarking of companies needed;
- broad range of industrial branches can be targeted;
- taking advantage of PANAC’s experience gained from company benchmarking within automotive clusters (PANAC);
- international application of benchmarking and exchange of information;
- training on cluster managers facilitates application of adapted company benchmarkings within various clusters.

FOSTERING NON-TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION

Fostering non-technological innovation in SMEs

Interested regions: Westpannon (WPRDA), Upper Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Lower Austria

Existing programmes that support innovation in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) focus on technological innovation rather than on fostering innovation in organisational, management or marketing tools. Nevertheless improved production or organisation processes and new marketing tools can be considered as important innovation.

The objective of the project is to bring this form of “tools” / models also to other CEE regions while checking which actions are being introduced by other CEE regions/responsible institutions in order to improve internal processes and to foster non-technological innovation in SMEs in the regions . Furthermore, the evaluation of internal effects of activities within a region and comparison of activities in other regions will be carried out.

The overall objective of the project is to foster innovation in SMEs by using new organisational and/or marketing methods.

- Identification of appropriate knowledge & methods to improve SME's innovation performance
- training of 2-3 intermediaries (consultants) per region to implement new methods identified
- pilot actions: testing new methods in 3-5 SMEs per region
- evaluation and documentation of internal effects of pilot activities
- preparation of a handbook
- web page for SMEs interaction (contains the tutoring material, SME e-club to share relevant info)

International industry monitoring system

Interested regions: Croatia, Westpannon, Poland

The aim of the project is to gather and share data and information about economy and industry of the various countries at micro and macro levels to obtain overview of the latest trends (e.g. economy) and development. As an additional cluster service this should be offered to the cluster members for orientating their company activities on new trends. The project will provide:

- concise overview of the other states' economies and industries;
- information on the latest trends and progresses in various industrial branches;
- sharing knowledge on the latest trends, R&D results and achievements among participating parties and benefiting from it;
- fostering progress and industrial development in the participating countries;
- exploitation of R&D results and achievements in different countries.

Monitoring of R&D programmes

Interested regions: Salzburg, Slovenia, Croatia, Westpannon, Upper Austria, Czech Rep., Slovakia

The aim of the project idea is to develop a comprehensive CEE-ClusterNetwork platform monitoring all relevant R&D programmes and the latest calls as well as to provide project support to prospective candidates in building up of project consortia.

The objective is to create a monitoring team and a web-based monitoring platform informing cluster members about ongoing activities. The created structure would act as contact point for cluster members as well as cluster managers and provide:

- Identification of international R&D programmes and projects;
- Identification of potential clusters within CEE Cluster Network with capacity to participate in the R&D programmes / projects;
- Support for participation in international projects of cluster members and cluster initiatives;
- Increase in competitiveness of the clusters;
- Support for cooperation within CEE-ClusterNetwork;
- Common information events.

SUMMARY

During several feedback sessions with the consortium partners and also stakeholders from the regions it became clear that from the project ideas described above the ones for

- creating a platform,
- developing a Cluster Academy,
- joint marketing,
- arranging exchanges for young professionals and
- Methods and Tools to foster Innovation in SMEs through access to R&D results in Universities

have reached the by far highest level of interest.

Nevertheless, all ideas have been given the same level of priority to be followed and implemented accordingly as pilot projects.

6. Conclusion / outlook

Cluster cooperation positively correlates with economic growth, welfare and innovation. Cluster initiatives facilitate and accelerate innovations and then bring them to market maturity, thus ensuring the long-term, economic success of the companies involved. They contribute considerably to the competitiveness of the regions in terms of creation a regional profile and fostering sustainability and research by supporting especially SMEs.

CEE Cluster agreement as a commitment of 11 central and eastern European regions/countries on common strategies and objectives for the future innovation and cluster policy, confirmed the intention on coherent policy development by high political representatives via fostering internationalisation of economies at regional, national and European level.

Nevertheless, this document in its merit does not guarantee accomplishment of these commitments in the real life. They can be put into practice only by the project partners and relevant stakeholders through fulfillment of concrete actions identified in the CAP, leading to implementation of the pilot projects in the first phase and their complementation by other projects in the following phases while considering participation of the new regions / stakeholders.

Only this way the deepening (targeting of the new themes) and expanding (involvement of the new regions/partners) of cooperation among the CEE regions will be secured and prerequisites for their sustainable development can be created.

The CEE Cluster Network will hence contribute to:

- development of human resources through improvement of qualification of cluster members through introduction of training courses and programmes and exchange of staff
- creation of cooperation and communication platforms
- fostering development of clusters (strategies for their establishment, sharing knowledge and experience)
- better marketing and PR measures
- measures leading to opening of new markets or strengthening the market position
- advancement of cooperation between clusters
- provision of access to information, knowledge and competences (e.g. results of R&D activities)
- enhancement of efficiency of companies within cluster through the benchmarking process (quality management)
- fostering non-technological innovation (continuous internal improvement processes within SMEs)
- better overview of R&D programmes and industry
- networking, trust building among members
- better information and communication among clusters , sharing knowledge and experiences
- Initiating, stimulating and managing innovation projects and technology transfer between SMEs, large companies, universities and R&D institutions and increasing competitiveness of the CEE regions.

ANNEX I: Cluster Supporting Programmes – selected funding schemes

(Status: April 2008; list is not exhaustive – further amendments may be necessary due to upcoming funding possibilities)

INTERREG IVB

Operational Programme Central Europe

- Launched on 3 July 2007 in Vienna

The new Central Europe Programme includes eight Member States (Czech Republic, parts of Germany, parts of Italy, Hungary, Austria, Poland, Slovenia and Slovak Republic) and one permanent observer (Ukraine).

Overall goal:

Strengthening territorial cohesion, promoting internal integration and enhancing the competitiveness of Central Europe

Priority 1 – Facilitating Innovation across Central Europe

- 1.1 Enhancing Framework Conditions for Innovation;
- 1.2 Establishing Capabilities for the Diffusion;
- 1.3 Application of Innovation, Fostering Knowledge Development).

Programme budget: EUR 298.295.837

ERDF contribution: up to 85% of eligible expenditures incurred by Lead Partners and project partners located in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia and up to 75% in Austria, Germany and Italy.

Project budget: ca. 1 to 5 million EUR

First calls for proposals: launched 3 March 2008, deadline 14 April 2008

Second call for proposals planned for autumn/winter 2008.

Further information

http://www.cadses.net/en/New_Programmes_2007_2013/Central_Europe.html

South East Europe (Transnational Co-operation Programme)

Approved by the European Commission on 20 December 2007.

Overall goal:

Improvement of the territorial, economic and social integration process and contribution to cohesion, stability and competitiveness through the development of transnational partnerships and joint action on matters of strategic importance.

Priority 1: Facilitation of innovation and entrepreneurship

- 1.1 Development of technology and innovation networks in specific fields;
- 1.2 Development of enabling environment for innovative entrepreneurship;
- 1.3 Enhancement of the framework conditions and pave the way for innovation.

The **eligible area for SEE** comprises Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, FYR Macedonia, Greece, Hungary, parts of Italy, Serbia, Montenegro, Slovakia, Slovenia, Moldova and parts of Ukraine.

ERDF budget: EUR 206.691.645

Co-financing:

- 85% ERDF (Austria, Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Slovakia, Slovenia);
- 85% IPA (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, Turkey).

Calls for proposals: 14. April – 23. Mai 2008

Further information

http://www.cadses.net/en/New_Programmes_2007_2013/South_East_European_Space.html

INTERREG IVC

1st call for proposals closed on 15 January 2008

Types of intervention:

- **Regional initiative projects (Type 1)**

Exchange of experiences dedicated to the identification and analysis of good practices + production of concrete documents e.g. good practice guide / recommendation paper

Supported activities:

- Pilot experimentations (e.g. in the context of a transfer of practice);
- Development of regional policy tools (methodologies, software);
- Thematic seminars, Study visits, Exchanges of staff, Conferences;
- Web sites, newsletters, brochures;
- Production of good practice guides.

Recommended budget: Min. ERDF €500.000, Max. ERDF €5 million

Partners: according to level of intensity of cooperation; recommended 8-20 (at least from 3 countries, from which at least two partners must be from EU Member States and financed by Interreg IVC Programme).

- **Capitalisation projects (Type 2)**

Exchange of experience dedicated to the transfer of good practices into the Structural Funds mainstream programmes + production of concrete action plans

Supported activities (similar to Type 1):

- Seminars
- Workshops
- Study visits
- Staff exchanges

Recommended budget: Min. ERDF €300.000, Max ERDF €3 million

Partners: no specific requirement in terms of number or partners, but in terms of countries represented the project consortium should range in between 6-10

For both types of intervention the following applies:

Eligibility:

- EU 27 Member States, Norway and Switzerland (participation of other countries on their own costs);
- Only public authorities and bodies governed by public law (also called public equivalent bodies).

Co-financing: **75% ERDF** (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, UK);
85% ERDF (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia);
50% Norway.

The 2nd call is envisaged to be published in September/October 2008.

Further information

www.interreg4c.net

Lifelong Learning Programme – GRUNTVIG (adult education)

Gruntvig - Multilateral Projects are undertaken by institutions/organisations from different participating countries working together, pooling knowledge and experience, in order to achieve concrete and innovative results/products with indisputable European value. In many cases, this will involve piloting experiences in strategic areas and producing teaching products of high quality. These projects also seek to strengthen the European dimension in the field of adult learning.

General call for proposals: **Multilateral Projects**

Deadline: 29 February 2008;
new calls not scheduled yet (probably 2009)

Supported activities:

- Improving the content and delivery of adult education;
- Improving adult education at a system/policy level;
- Improving the accessibility of learning opportunities for adults;
- Improving the management of adult learning.

Budget (for 2008): EUR 16.500.000

Co-financing: up to 75% of all eligible costs

Maximum duration: 2 years

Maximum Community grant: EUR 150.000 / year

Eligibility:

- 27 EU Member States; at least one country must be an EU Member State
- Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway;
- Turkey.

Further information

http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/index_en.html

FP7**FP7 Capacities Work Programme: Part 3 – Regions of Knowledge****Regions-2008-1. Analysis, mentoring, integration of research agendas and definition of Joint Action Plans**

- Call identifier: FP7-REGIONS-2008-1
- Date of publication: 30 November 2007
- Deadline: 14 March 2008, at 17.00.00, Brussels local time
- Indicative budget: EUR 9.3 million from 2008 budget

In the 2008 call, proposals should address one or both of the following topics:

- Maximising the benefits of research infrastructures for regional economic development;
- Regional contributions to the reduction of CO2 emissions.

Maximising the benefits of research infrastructures

An integrative approach towards research infrastructure projects in a way that maximises the economic benefits for the regional economy is central in both Convergence and Competitiveness and Employment Regions in the Member States and Associated countries. Benchmarking exercises on this issue will be one of the targeted objectives of this action and form part of the SWOT analysis. The potential for mutual learning among regions is enormous in this field with potential benefits for both regional competitiveness and integration of the European Research Area.

Funding scheme: CSA

Maximum duration: 3 years

Maximum contribution: EUR 200.000

Participants:

Consortia of a minimum of two regional research-driven clusters or a cross-border cluster composed at a minimum of six participants from at least two different European countries, consisting of research entities, business entities and regional/local authorities.

Regions-2008-2: Facilitating the emergence of new regional research driven clusters and mutual exchange of information



- Call identifier: FP7-REGIONS-2008-2;
- Date of publication: 30 November 2007;
- Deadline: 14 March 2008, at 17.00.00, Brussels local time;
- Indicative budget: EUR 0.8 million from 2008 budget.

In the 2008 call, proposals should address one or both of the following topics:

- Maximising the benefits of research infrastructures for regional economic development;
- Regional contributions to the reduction of CO2 emissions.

Examples of activities:

- Facilitating the creation of new regional research-driven clusters through the analysis of the economic and R&D's strengths and weaknesses of the region, the formulation of a regional research agenda as well as of an action plan of research and technological development activities. This might include mentoring activities by a more mature cluster;
- Analysis, workshops, conferences, roundtables, expert group meetings and dissemination activities, including web-based initiatives.

Funding scheme: CSA

Maximum duration: 2 years

Maximum contribution: EUR 200.000

Participants:

The minimum number of participants must be: at least 3 participants (one research entity, one business entity and one regional/local authority) coming from the same region for "facilitating the emergence of new research driven clusters" or one research driven cluster for "exchange of mutual information activities".

Further information

www.cordis.lu

Overview on co-operation possibilities within INTERREG IV

	Upper Austria	Salzburg	Tirol	Poland	Croatia	Lower Austria	Slovenia	Western Slovakia
Westpannon					H: Vas, Zala, Baranya and Somogy HR: Osječko-baranjska, Virovitičko-podravaska, Koprivničko-križevačka, Međimurska, Varaždinska, Krapinsko-zagorska, Zagrebačka (without the capital city of Zagreb), Karlovačka, Primorsko-goranska and Istarska. www.interreg-slohuuro.com/index.php?lang=eng	A: Wiener Umland Süd, H: Győr-Moson-Sopron, Vas, Zala www.at-hu.net	SI: Regions of Pomurje, Podravje, Savinjska, Spodnjeposavska, Jugovzhodna Slovenija, Notranjsko-kraška, and Obalno-kraška H: Vas, Zala, Baranya and Somogy www.interreg-slohuuro.com/index.php?lang=eng	H: Győr-Moson-Sopron, Komárom-Esztergom, Budapest főváros, Pest, Nógrád, Heves, Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg SK: Bratislavský, Trnavský, Nitriansky, Banskobystrický, Košický, Prešovský kraj www.interreghsu.com/huskua
Czech Republic	A: Mühlviertel CZ: Jihočeský, Vysocina, Jihomoravský kraj www.at-cz.net/			CZ: Liberecký, Královéhradecký, Pardubický, Olomoucký and Moravskoslezský PL: The regions of Jeleniogórsko – Wałbrzyski, Opolski, Rybnicko – Jastrzębski, Bielsko - Bialski. www.interreg3a.cz		A: Weinviertel, Waldviertel CZ: Jihočeský, Vysocina, Jihomoravský kraj www.at-cz.net		CZ: Moravian-Silesian, Zlín and South-Moravian SK: Žilina, Trenčín and Trnava www.build.gov.sk
Western Slovakia				SK: Žilina and Prešov www.build.gov.sk PL: Bielsko-bialski, Nowosądecki and Krośnieńsko-przemyski subregions www.plsk.wwpwp.gov.pl		A: Weinviertel, Wiener Umland SK: Bratislava, Trnava www.at-sk.net		
Slovenia					SI: Regions of Pomurje, Podravje, Savinjska, Spodnjeposavska, Jugovzhodna Slovenija, Notranjsko-kraška, and Obalno-kraška HR: Osječko-baranjska, Virovitičko-podravaska, Koprivničko-križevačka, Međimurska, Varaždinska, Krapinsko-zagorska, Zagrebačka (without the capital city of Zagreb), Karlovačka, Primorsko-goranska and Istarska. www.interreg-slohuuro.com/index.php?lang=eng			
South-Tyrol		IT: Autonome Provinz Bozen-Südtirol A: Pinzgau-Pongau hwww.interreg.net/	IT: Autonome Provinz Bozen-Südtirol A: Tiroler Oberland, Innsbruck, Tiroler Unterland, Osttirol www.interreg.net/					

