

Introduction

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.

Long experience has shown that the application of cluster tools also makes sense in smaller regions. Even from comparatively limited strengths and potential, clearly-defined economic profiles may be cultivated which in turn flow into trans-national areas of innovation.

So far, clusters have mainly operated at a regional/local level and only started recently to facilitate cross-border cooperation on a case-by-case project basis. As clusters have an impact on employment growth and the creation of the well being prosperity of people residing in the region. Now, more than ever, the potentials of cross border cluster networks are higher and still not exploited.

The PRO INNO Europe initiative as a focal point for innovation policy analysis, learning and development in Europe

In order to improve innovation policy analysis and development throughout Europe, the Directorate-General for Enterprise and Industry started the **PRO INNO Europe** initiative, mobilising over 200 innovation policy makers from 33 countries. PRO INNO Europe is composed of eight building blocks that form a wider integrated policy approach to develop new and better innovation policies. Each building block contributes to a „life cycle“ of *policy analysis, policy learning and policy development*.

In the field of policy development, the **INNO-Nets** play an important role for cluster policy cooperation, support to knowledge-based SMEs and start-ups, trans-national knowledge valorisation, the links of industry and research as well as innovation in services. The four INNO-Nets focusing on cluster policy cooperation form the European Cluster Alliance.

The EUROPEAN CLUSTER ALLIANCE bringing together 55 cluster regions

The European Cluster Alliance is an umbrella initiative that brings together a number of cluster initiatives supported under the Pro INNO Europe and Europe INNOVA initiatives with the objective to develop an open platform for cooperation in the area of cluster policy.



CEE-CLUSTER NETWORK sets a sign for a strong and innovative Central and Eastern European Economic Region.

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

The consortium of the CEE-ClusterNetwork agreed on specific Quality Guidelines for effective cluster management

On February 27th, 2007 at the 2nd Steering Committee Meeting in Lipot-Győr, Hungary the Steering Committee members of all participating regions elaborated and agreed on following common Quality Guidelines for effective cluster management on policy and management level.

Quality guidelines on policy level

1. Cluster initiatives and company networks are important instruments for economic development and innovation policy especially in case of SMEs.
2. Strategic linkage of European, national and regional policies is crucial for dynamic and sustainable development of clusters.
3. Regions of CEE-ClusterNetwork actively strengthen cross-regional co-operation to leverage the benefit of technology transfer and competitive value-chain. This is the basis for internationally competitive "European innovation areas".
4. Key success factors for cluster policy are active participation of cluster companies, clear organizational structures, and long term strategic financial support

Quality guidelines on management level

1. Success of cluster management bases on the consensus on cluster strategy
2. Recommended services of cluster initiatives are in the field of:
 - Networking, trust building among members
 - Information and communication

