



Political-Strategic Cluster Working Group of PA8

12 September 2013, 9-12:00; Vukovar, Croatia: Hotel Lav Vukovar, Ulica Josipa Jurja Strossmayera 18, 32000 Vukovar

Goal of the meeting:

To learn more the situation of clusters in Danube Region, in order to understand their most urgent needs with regard to a common cluster strategy for the region.

Participants

Ljubomir Aleksic (Provincial Secretariat for Economy Vojvodina/RS), Karlheinz Bechtle (Coordinator Team PAC 8 EUSDR, MFW Baden-Württemberg/DE), Pavla Bruszkova (National Cluster Association/CZ), Genoveva Christova (Bulgarian Furniture Cluster/BG), Daniel Cosnita (Romanian Cluster Association/RO), Christina Leucuta (Ministry of Economy/RO), Zorica Maric (Ministry of Economy/RS), Zdenka Mesic (Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Crafts/HR), Danka Milojkovic (Cluster House/RS), Slobodan Moraca (Center for Competitiveness and Cluster Development/RS), John Murray (Growth Clusters/BG), Aleksandar Nikolic (Chamber of Commerce/RS), Alan Paic (OECD), Ivana Podhraski (European Commission), Petra Püchner (Steinbeis Europa Zentrum BW/DE), Mirjana Radenovic Ratkovic (Center for Competitiveness and Cluster Development/RS), Sigrid Winkler (TMG/AT)

Meeting Minutes

Progress of the Working Group

Sigrid Winkler reported about the kick-off of DanuClus at the conference “Boosting Innovation Policies with Clusters Along the Danube” on 27 June in Linz. DanuClus was launched with the political backing of governor Josef Pühringer and state minister for economy Michael Strugl, both from Upper Austria, as well as Peter Friedrich, minister for European and international affairs from Baden-Württemberg.

In the name of DanuClus, and in coordination with PAC 8, Sigrid Winkler applied for the Technical Assistance Facility for Danube Region Projects, which offers consultant services for making Danube Region projects fundable. The required consultant services for DanuClus are related to funding programs, state aid rules for clusters and SMEs, and networking with EU institutions, policy makers, and persons involved in the programming processes for EU funding



programmes. A decision on whether the application was successful, will be available in early November 2013.

The working group also established a cooperation with the European Cluster Collaboration Platform, where in the near future, clusters of the Danube Region will be portrayed as a group and forum space will be made available. The members of the working group are asked to register clusters, which have not yet done so, on the website www.clustercollaboration.eu

Sigrid Winkler presented the draft of the final analysis of a survey on clusters in the Danube Region. Members of the working group present at the meeting were asked to give their comments about the study, which resulted in minor corrections of some tables of the survey.

Roundtable on Strategic Development of WG Clusters of Excellence / DanuClus

A number of economic sectors with top clusters per country present at the WG meeting were identified, which are most ready for international cluster cooperation in the Danube Region.

HR: Wood, agricultural equipment

CZ: Manufacturing, ICT

RS: Automotive, agricultural machinery, ICT, apparel, construction

RO: Creative industries, ICT/electronics, energy, automotive

BG: ICT, furniture, automotive

In the discussions, a cross-sectoral approach for transnational cluster cooperation in the Danube Region/DanuClus, that should include both high-tech and low-tech clusters based on grand societal challenges, was identified as most beneficial. With such an approach, key enabling technologies will be transferred to traditional industries which results in an increased potential for innovation, and would enhance formerly low value-added clusters. Furthermore, solutions to grand societal challenges have enormous market potential, which corresponds to the wish to increase sales and exports for the clusters and their member companies in the Danube Region. In order to avoid duplication, innovation and value chains from different countries must be integrated according to the various regional economic strengths in the framework of an integrated smart specialization strategy for the whole Danube Region.

Areas that were identified by the participants as most suitable for such an integrated approach in DanuClus: active ageing/social innovation, green technologies/climate change, service innovation, creative industries, sustainable manufacturing.

Furthermore, it was the wish of the participants to establish a common cluster accreditation system for the Danube Region or to at least work towards amending the current benchmarking and labelling standard in the EU. Criticism was raised about the current system of bronze and gold labels for cluster management. Bronze labels are currently awarded to clusters which have the funds to undergo a confidential benchmarking process without regard to the actual quality of the clusters, while a gold label is out of reach for most clusters in the Danube



Region due to quality requirements. Nevertheless, these labels have become pre-selection criteria for some EU funding schemes. Hence a number of weakly institutionalized clusters have obtained bronze labels in order to apply for project funding, but these clusters are not actually able to implement the funded projects and disappear again after funding has ended, while more sustainable clusters cannot not compete for such funding opportunities.

Therefore participants at the working group meeting suggested that:

- at least a silver label as a quality indication should be introduced
- benchmarking should go further than just cluster management in order to find out which clusters are reliable to cooperate with
- the benchmarking methodology which was developed with EU funds should not be in the hands of a commercial institution, as otherwise the submitted data is lost for the Danube Region clusters which participate in the current labelling process
- a joint accreditation system based on quality criteria for clusters should also serve as a tool for national policy makers when distributing national/regional cluster funding.

As a model for an EUSDR cluster accreditation system, the Hungarian national accreditation scheme was proposed.

The participants agreed that cluster management skills as well as the knowledge among stakeholders and policy makers on how to use clusters as instruments for innovation were still insufficient in some countries in the Danube Region. It was therefore concluded that DanuClus should also include cluster training courses with new curricula, geared towards the target groups of cluster managers, cluster associations, and governments.

MoU of national cluster associations

Following the working group meeting, national cluster associations from CZ, SK, HR, RO, BG and RS decided to jointly sign a Memorandum of Understanding to cooperate on matters of cluster internationalization, exchange of knowledge and data, boosting the factors of cluster excellence, and developing cluster strategies in the framework of DanuClus.

Next steps and open questions

1. Develop methodology on how to form cross-sectoral cluster project consortia oriented at the issues agreed upon in this meeting. Decide upon funding for matchmaking sessions.
2. The automotive industry is strong in most Danube Region countries, it is by definition cross-sectoral, comprising economic sectors such as metal, plastics, electronics, ICT, textiles etc., and automotive clusters exist in most Danube Region countries. Therefore a number of automotive clusters have already expressed their interest in forming a Danube Region automotive meta-cluster, integrating their value chains and jointly develop cooperation projects. The formation of this automotive meta-cluster is currently under preparation in DanuClus.