

WHAT'S NEXT

The ALPlastics project gave very useful results and we are nearly finished the activities. But what's next? The partnership was improved during the project and, as the article on the final conference in Fribourg shows, the concept of meta-cluster is starting to grow. Some of the ALPlastics partners applied for a second project on the Alpine Space call, and they succeed! So the aim is to go on, to capitalize the work done and to push more and more the integration of our clusters.



summer school
NEW TRENDS
IN PLASTICS ENGINEERING

ALPLASTICS SUMMER SCHOOL

the first transnational academy of students targeting the latest trends in polymer engineering



The first ALPlastics Summer School took place from the 9th to the 11th of July, in the French "Plastics Valley" in Oyonnax. During 3 days, 25 students from European Universities, as Politecnico di Torino, INSA de Lyon, Sophia Antipolis, University of Würzburg, HES-SO, alternated lab visits and classes on the latest trends in plastics industry. The program addressed, thanks to expert speakers from across Europe:

- Innovative plastic materials
- New trends in injection molding processes
- Post-treatment and composites technologies



During this Summer School, a networking event has been organized thanks to the participation of INSA Lyon, ECNP, PEP, and the Communauté de Communes d'Oyonnax. This event has gathered more than 50 people, allowing the students to meet with local representatives of the plastics community, training centres and related teachers.

Given the success of the first summer academy, the ALPlastics partners plan on duplicating this event next year.



CLUSTER MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP



The **Cluster Management Workshop** has been held in Turin on 13th of June and it counted of the participation of more than 20 persons among clusters managers and policy makers from Italy, France, Austria, Germany and Switzerland.

The workshop, together with the Whitebook, is part of the capitalisation process set up in Alplastics with the aim to collect the relevant outcomes of the clusters and policy analysis and transform into durable tools and relationships the work done at piloting level during the project life.

Furthermore, the Cluster Management Workshop confirmed the already tested cooperation among two Alpine Space Projects, in fact it has been organised in tight cooperation with Alps4EU project in order to guarantee to the participants a wider perspective on cluster management and more fruitful exchanges.

The topics discussed in the workshop have been identified by Alplastics partners and have been confirmed as important topics from clusters benchmarking a held few months ago. In fact the topics discussed are general concepts related to a general perspective and can apply to the management of any kind of industrial clusters and they definitely respond to current trends in cluster management excellence.

EACH OF THE FOLLOWING SUBJECTS HAS BEEN PRESENTED BY A CLUSTER MANAGER AND DISCUSSED AMONG THE WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS:



SYSTEMIC NETWORKING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

The module explains how important are relations with Triple Helix actors: industrial committees, networking with academy or training institutions, policy makers and how to manage networking.

Networking with stakeholders is essential to foster the development of clusters and allow clusters to become more valuable and recognized. The benefit of networking for affiliated companies is significant in terms of awareness, marketing, business and cooperation opportunities. Who should manage this process and how, are the challenges tackled in the open discussion.



INNOVATION BY COOPERATION

The main topic of this module is the importance of collaborative R&D and technology transfer projects for clusters and their members. A cluster must be able to propose new innovation paths in a cooperative frame. The module offers inputs on how to initiate a collaborative project and how to build the proposal. Several best practices have been presented during the workshop in order to underline the impact on cluster development.



HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT COMPETENCE BUILDING

Human resources development includes knowledges on collection of needs, organisation of training and organisation of recruitment services for members. The training set up goes from understanding the needs, evaluating the knowledge gap, designing the activities to cover the gap and managing the activities. Setting up a fidelisation of members through training and recruitment activities can contribute to have a direct access to skilled students and collaborators.



INTERNATIONALISATION

The importance of trust in the process of internationalisation is known and clusters could offer to their members a specific service helping them to get international: transferring trust. Clusters can allow new relations to be established among companies, shortening the physiological time needed to create a solid relationship despite the intercultural gaps.



FINANCING OF CLUSTER ORGANIZATION

How to be self-sufficient and to generate incomes. What is the vision for the future Business models? What are the advantages and disadvantages of public funding, public/private funding, temporary public funding, complete private funding? Market-oriented activities are a possible answer towards sustainability? It is not possible to provide a unique answer but the debate can be developed with a wide range of best practices from Alpine Space Area.



MARKETING & PR KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

The module provides information and suggestions about marketing and PR tools to strengthen the image and awareness degree of the cluster partners and their industrial sector, setting up communication concept for cluster and network organisations, customer relationship management. Key words are: visibility, success stories, selling services.



EVALUATION & MEASURING TOOLS OF OUR CLUSTER ORGANIZATION'S PERFORMANCE

What should be considered when evaluating the performance of clusters: indicators mix, monitoring and reporting targets and systems, customer satisfaction analysis. Different reporting tools and systems need to be established to meet various interests. Evaluation is now not only at local level but internationally recognized evaluation and benchmarking methods have been created.

All the topics presented during the **Cluster Management Workshop** are available in the Cluster Management Booklet that, together with the Multilevel Benchmarking are part of the Whitepaper on preconditions, policies and best practices published under Alplastics. The workshop has been an excellent opportunity for clusters managers and policy makers to examine and compare different cluster strategies and create a common path towards an effective inter-cluster cooperation at international level.



HOW META CLUSTERS CAN CREATE VALUE

The 2nd International Cluster Conference in Fribourg (Switzerland) discussed policy and impact issues of the Alps4EU and ALPlastics Meta Clusters. Communication, clarifying the innovation process and smart specialization are the key issues that all have to address.



Can European Clusters get together and create more value for local economies by exchanging best practices? And if so, how should they do it? Organised in Fribourg (Switzerland) on the 26th of March 2013, the 2nd International Cluster Conference aimed to find answers to those two questions. No easy solutions rose from the debates. Mainly because of big differences in Cluster policy definition, financing and innovation processes between countries and economic regions. There is however a mutual need in Europe for Cluster benchmarking. Policy makers and Cluster Managers can learn a lot from one another, whatever the differences in size or in economic activities. Piero Cavigliasso, Coordinator of the Proplast Cluster in Tortona (Italy) says: "Cluster Managers need advice on how to be more competitive, how to fight crises, how to adopt new technologies and how to transfer the key enabling technologies".

A good example of these cross-national needs and learning processes is the Alps4EU project, a Meta Cluster covering 2 Regions (Piemonte/IT and Rhone Alpes/FR), 7 local development agencies and 4 organisations representing enterprises. Rossana Borello, responsible for the Piemonte activities in Alps4EU, points out that "the modern innovation processes are international". Although Business/market and user knowledge are context specific and thus hard to move across borders, "specific innovation technology and Management best practices can improve existing tools or provide new ones through the transnational approach".



EXCHANGE STAFF, IDEAS AND PRACTICES

The Alps4EU Project aims to be a transnational network of at least 3 clusters of the same or complementary technological field. Being part of the network enables the Clusters to exchange staff, ideas and practices; outline common action plans and roadmaps and create joint communication tools. A SWOT Analysis of Clusters in the Alpine Area (published in November 2012) shows a high level of diversification within the Clusters, with leading companies and market leader SME's showing the way and pulling the rest of the innovation process forward. On the downside, Cluster companies in the Alpine region are too small to compete internationally and have difficulties transferring results into finished products. Alps4EU aims therefore to map out key competences and strategic priorities so to build critical mass to gain international visibility.

Good examples of the kind of results Alps4EU are looking for are the two Meta Clusters ALPlastics and the Star Dust Meta Cluster of the Baltic Sea region. At ALPlastics, they start by analysing and benchmarking existing conditions at 3 levels (industry, cluster management and regional policies). They then design pilot activities which are transformed into durable inter cluster activities focused on innovation and knowledge transfer. Tangible results? Piero Cavigliasso, responsible for the ALPlastics Meta Cluster, answers: "We have designed a technology roadmap for the future, itinerant seminars to help companies transfer the new technologies and have started work on an open innovation platform. We also published a cluster management booklet which addresses international management needs".

In the Baltic Sea Region, the Star Dust Meta Cluster covers 10 countries and targets innovation environment, clusters and SME Networks. At the core of the Start Dust project are five pilots in cross-sector domains (Clean Water, Comfort in Living, Active for Life, Mobile Vikings and MarChain). Program Manager Erik Bunis outlines the 3 support activities the Meta Cluster has been working on: "We address project management issues such as reporting and a web platform, we look into communication with marketing and branding advice and we provide Process support and facilitation with coaching, advisory boards and specialised support when needed". Erik Bunis points out that, "it takes time to build trust between Cluster initiatives from different countries". He also advises to work on strong leadership and active dialogue between and within the Clusters of the Network. "The support tools need to be tailored to the different project needs, may small collaborations or larger consortia with more strategic goals".



GETTING FUNDS FROM THE EU

Getting Clusters and Meta Clusters more effective shall also make them eligible for public funds from the EU Alpine Space Programme 2014-2020. Also present at the Conference, Dr. Christian Salletmaier, General Programm Manager of the Alpine Space Program, insisted on “increasing Regional Competitiveness and building on Regional Competencies”. A quick look at the Alpine Space website, gives interesting insight into what kind of projects will be supported between 2014 and 2020. The Commission will be, “concentrating funding on a smaller number of priorities better linked to the Europe 2020 Strategy, maximizing synergies, focusing on results, monitoring progress towards agreed objectives, increasing the use of conditionalities and simplifying the delivery.” The choices will be tough. As Dr. Christian Salletmaier concluded, the European program will be looking for “issues which can best be dealt with at a macro-regional level”. “Clusters must be project-partners within the scope of thematic objectives”, he continued. But when asked if the EU Program was going to dictate the specialisations of different European regions, Dr. Christian Salletmaier backed down and assured that the selection process was “bottom up” rather than “top down”.



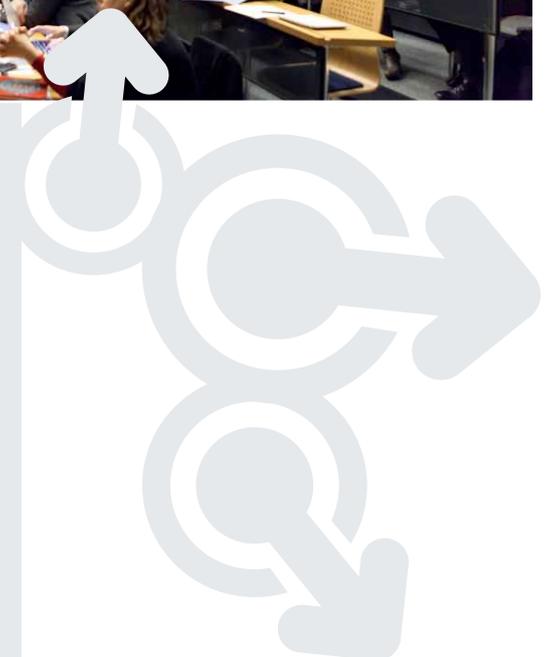
STRONG COMPETITION AND GOING GLOBAL

The competition between European regions will be strong. In the Rhone Alpes Region for example, 24 Regional and National Clusters have sprouted in the last 10 years. Perspectives for 2013-2020 is to go towards more Smart specialization, explained Christine Picard, Cluster Policy Manager for the Rhone Alpe Region. “We shall invest massively on key technologies (research equipment) and work on the effectiveness of our innovation ecosystem, which means facilitating technology transfer and promoting market/user driven innovation”. This new effectiveness will be measured through the number of co-build R&D and innovation projects and the impact of interclustering work and projects delivery. But reducing the European Cluster policies to a fierce competition between regions would be a biased summary. As shown by Dr. Philippe Gugler, the innovation process of the swiss pharmaceutical region of Basel is mainly based on international networking. In a global economy, innovation is very often the result of overlapping clusters, multinational’s and leading SME’s who put innovation and R&D results together on a global level. In his presentation, Dr. Philippe Gugler showed how the Basel Pharma Cluster interconnected clusters and companies in North and South America, Europe, South Africa, Australia and India with big results. Between 1977 and 2008, the Basel pharma cluster issued 66 % of the 7126 patent applications during that period. Which seems to indicate that going global and getting it right on a Meta Cluster level is going to be more and more relevant in the future.



“50 % OF EUROPEAN CLUSTERS SHOULD CLOSE DOWN”

Are European Clusters ready to enter cross boarder Meta Clusters? Measuring the impact of Cluster initiatives on a regional level gives a good idea of their readiness to move up to an international level. Director of the Institute for Innovation and Technology in Berlin, Dr. Gerd Meier zu Köcker gave a very interesting presentation on Cluster effectiveness in Europe. He says: “To measure and compare impacts is difficult. If Clusters often have similar, long term goals, they differ considerably in how to meet these objectives. Establishing international indicators is virtually impossible.” But individual impact measures remain possible. The Aviation Cluster of the Hamburg Metropolitan region received of 40 Mio EUR for R & D and has managed to become the Airbus Center of Aviation Training. Two key indicators of Cluster impact in a region. “Good management of cluster initiatives is a key for high impact”, says Dr. Gerd Meier zu Köcker. “It is essential to focus on what is really important for cluster actors. Another key factor is a high involvement of key actors of the Cluster. And last but not least, Cluster initiatives should be built on regional strengths, Smart Specialization can be an option”. Asked on how many Clusters are having a real impact in Europe today, Dr. Gerd Meier zu Köcker shocked his audience by saying that, in his mind, “50 % of European Clusters are ineffective and should close down”. In Switzerland, this percentage of “dead wood” Clusters is estimated at 30 %, adds Christoph Beer, Cluster Manager of the ICT Cluster Bern.



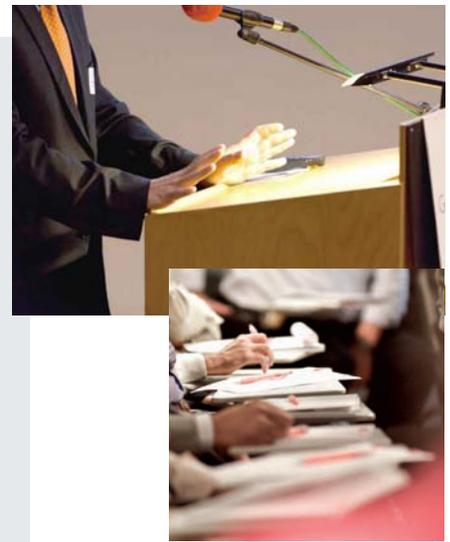
CLUSTER MANAGEMENT: 3 KEY COMPETENCIES

Werner Pamminger, General Manager for Clusterland Oberösterreich in Linz (Austria) gives his ingredients for effective cluster management.

Be good with people. Cluster managing means getting very different types of companies to collaborate together. Big ones with small ones, famous ones with unknown ones and sometimes companies who don't really want to work together. A Cluster Manager must therefore be good with people. He or she will be spending most of his or her time meeting new people, engaging with them and trying to understand their needs. Soft skills are a must.

Know who knows what. A good cluster manager knows the companies of the network, what they do, what they are good at and what their needs are. A cluster is effective if the information circulates and the partnerships and collaborations become effective. Therefore a good cluster manager needs to know who knows what. Which doesn't mean that he or she must be a technology freak but he or she must know who to turn too to find a solution.

Work with groups of companies. The biggest enemy of Cluster management is lack of confidence and trust between the companies of the network. Getting different businesses round the same table can take months or even years. Sometimes you may even have to give up on the idea. An effective cluster manager has the patience and the skill to get people round a table, communicate, even out differences and look for synergies. It can be a tough job. But a very rewarding one if the mixture starts to gel.



SESSION 3B – ESTABLISHING META-CLUSTERS – LEARNING FROM EUROPEAN EXPERIENCES

The parallel session “Establishing Meta-Clusters – Learning from European Experiences” focussed on the question: How and with which means can the international cooperation of clusters be triggered? The aim of the workshop was to exchange on good practices in projects focusing on meta-cluster development, to learn from each other and to share methodologies.

33 participants were involved in the workshop that consisted of four presentations on good practices of European projects on meta-cluster development, followed by a debate on meta-cluster concepts with two more project participants from other similar European projects. Presented were the projects Alps4EU (Alpine Space Programme), Alps Bio Cluster (Alpine Space Programme), Stardust (Baltic Sea Region Programme), ALPlastics (Alpine Space Programme), as well as ClusterCOOP (Central Europe programme) and IN2WOOD (FP7).

During the session it became clear that there is no “universal” definition of a Meta-Cluster - it is rather used to refer to cooperations of different regional clusters, be it within the same thematic focus or in complementary fields.

The participants agreed that in order to foster cross-border cooperations between clusters and their members it is important to share a common and clear vision about the objectives and activities of the cooperations. Furthermore, it is necessary to know about the strengths and weaknesses of the different regions and actors in order to fully exploit their complementary competencies. At the core of such activities lie, of course, also personal partnerships: in order to build up a “meta-cluster” network and to make it sustainable, trustful partnerships need to be established.

While the majority of cluster managers is interested in international activities, barriers of international activities exists, especially for small and medium sized SMEs. Different business cultures and also language problems can hinder international cooperation. In order to convince SMEs of international activities, very concrete topics of collaborations must be identified that demonstrate clearly the added value of such collaborations. This can also contribute to the sustainability of international networks and cooperations.



Please contact your national contact:

CARMA

Jean-Claude Giannotta
+33 (0)493004381
giannotta@carma.fr
1, traverse des Brucs
06560 - valbonne - Sophia Antipolis
FRANCE

CUSTERLAND

Juergen Bleicher
+43732798105116
juergen.bleicher@clusterland.at
Hafenstraße 47-51
4020 - Linz
AUSTRIA

PLASTIPOLIS

Patrick Vuillermoz
+33 (0)474121923
patrick.vuillermoz@plastipolis.fr
BP 10 029 Bellignat
01115 - Oyonnax Cedex
FRANCE

RESEAU PLASTURGIE

Jacques Bersier
+41 79 218 89 78
Jacques.Bersier@hefr.ch
c/o EIA-FR, Bd de Pérolles 80 - CP32
CH-1705 - Fribourg
SWITZERLAND

PROPLAST

Laura Fusani
+39 0131 1859734
laura.fusani@proplast.it
Strada Comunale Savonesa, 9
15057 - Rivalta Scrivia
ITALY

CHEMIE - CLUSTER BAYERN

Magdalena Appel
+ 49 89 189 4169 30
appel@chemiecluster-bayern.de
Frundsbergstr. 33
80634 - München
GERMANY

REGIONE PIEMONTE

Rossana Borello
+39 011 4324285
Rossana.Borello@regione.piemonte.it
Via Pisano, 6
10152 - Torino
ITALY

