

ClusterPoliSEE Project

Smarter Cluster Policies for South East Europe

Cod. SEE/C/0008/1.3/X

WP 3 – SEE Cluster Policy Learning Platform

act. 3.1 – Platform concept generation through WGs

CONCEPT PAPER

DRAFT 1

SEE CLUSTER POLICY LEARNING PLATFORM

The learning platform is the main element of the Cluster Poli SEE project that is helping the achievement of the project objectives and ensures the sustainability of the project partners' actions during the implementation period and future forward.

Developed under WP3, the first content work package of the Cluster Poli SEE project, the platform is a **collaborative, learning** and **information** instrument, available to the cluster policy makers and interested multi level stakeholders in South East Europe area, designed in such manner to offer perspective for extension at EU level.

The platform must respond to the following questions:

1. Why it was created?

PPs are committed to the development of this multifunctional instrument because with the purpose to learn from policy mechanisms already implemented in SEE Area and generate a collaborative framework, where cluster policies' performance can be improved (cluster development, cluster leveraging and cluster facilitating policies).

The assessment of the already implemented, existing and under preparation policy mechanisms must cover the assessment of *the policy* (the objectives and the motivation of the strategic commitment), *the programme* (funding scheme and organizational responsibilities) *and the implementing agency*¹.

The cluster policies in Member States and Associated Countries (PPs) varies, some countries having a long tradition with cluster policy design, accompanied with financing instruments for cluster development, monitoring and evaluation. Some countries had only recently developed cluster associations and other support organizations or just mapped the cluster project initiatives. As PPs are of different levels of representation (national, regional or local) it is essential to determine the role of each in the cluster policy management cycle (the dialogue with PPs is essential) and their expectations from the ClusterPoliSEE project.

¹ Cluster Policy in Europe – Europe Innova Cluster Mapping Project, Oxford research AS (January 2008)

All PPs have to face the same main challenges in order to position their role in competitiveness and innovation policies: assess clusters role in the knowledge economy, formulate proposals for the future evolution of clusters, generate integrated approach for cluster policy on regional, national and EU level, improve financial practices on clusters support, find the specialization that will offer to clusters in SEE area a competitive advantage and improve performance management of the cluster policy.

The platform has to ensure networking and communication between PPs (partner to partner), between PPs and cluster representatives (PPs with SEE cluster managers). The policy learning mechanism involves change in thinking and doing. Therefore the existing theory in cluster policy implementation, the identified best practices, with the support of the platform (the interaction and communication between stakeholders) should generate learning mechanisms experimented through specific pilot actions.

2. What we want from it?

It is obvious that apart the general purpose of information support, learning at distance and communication this platform can have more significant and added value role if people behind it (WG members and PPs representatives mainly) could create the environment for generating the knowledge and launching new cluster initiatives in perfect coordination with other EU initiatives (JRC IPTS S3 platform, Pro-INNO Platform, European Cluster Alliance). Correspondence with them should be ensured along the entire project implementation (LP leading the role).

SEE Cluster Policy learning platform aims at improving SEE cluster policies through cooperative learning, policy transfer and information interchange between SEE policy makers exploring the added value of transnational cooperation using web-based support for mutual learning.

Cluster Poli SEE Learning Platform is a **policy learning system** across all project countries, including the institutional, organizational, design and implementation aspects that intend to develop as a competence centre in SEE for cluster stakeholders, to spearhead and test the advantages of the smart specialization model as a guideline for R&D and competitiveness policies.

The platform is a system because

- involves juridical persons with specific roles in the identification and development of the New Cluster Policy mechanisms the PPs representatives, the associated members, the regional stakeholders involved in cluster policy development and implementation process;
- there are specific structures with specific roles appointed to keep the platform functional: the Scientific and Technical Committee and the 6 thematic WGs, each of them expected to deliver specific inputs to the platform activity;
- there are specific functions of this platform that are not competing in the SEE area with other organized/recognized partnerships.

The objective is to create understanding about the project among those that will likely affect or interest, to learn how these external parties view the project and its impacts and opportunities. The ICT platform must realise best practice transfer and get valuable feedback from and to public authorities and innovation actors involved in cluster policies and programmes at national and regional level.

How it is going to work?

The platform will have to be effective when analyzed from 3 different perspectives: *from the dimension of the responsibility* (to provide sufficient input and support both to national and regional

members) *from the type of the intervention* (to provide support both at strategic level and at operational levels and finally *from the perspective of target group* (PPs' members and the associated members – public section). To this end, the platform coordinator (LP), the WP3 coordinator (ADR Nord-Est) the TSC and the WGs members will have to cooperate and deliver their tasks professionally and in due time.

The platform should seek to exemplify as in practice the S3 concept implementation, mainly:

- the New cluster policy mechanisms developed are based on existing/under preparation S3s in PPs regions and encourage investments in programs that complement productive assets, to create future domestic capability and interregional comparative advantage;
- the policy development and implementation mechanisms analyzed, collected and transferred emphasize on the RDI domains in which PPs regions through their clusters can hope to excel;
- entrepreneurs are engaged in the learning process together with policy makers, pursuing identification of the future specialization areas, for that proposing adaptation to local skills, market access and environmental conditions, propose specific incentives, assess effectiveness of these areas, identify complementary investments associated with the emerging specializations, etc.

The smart specialization concept provides guidance on how to initiate and push forward the structure, underlining the strategic aims of the platform and lists the activities the latter should be carried out for the achievement of these aims, including insights to activate relevant EU and SEE level initiatives in order to ensure a positive buy-in and implement platform results to attract stakeholders and achieve sustainability.

Recommendations will be included in order to provide further input to work on the *six central topics for cluster policies improvement* (International Cluster Cooperation and networking, Financial Framework Improvement Sustainability through Cluster Development, Innovation, R&D driven Cluster Development; New skills and Jobs creation, Cluster and Regional Specialization).

3. How we measure the performance of our platform?

The way new policy development tools will be elaborated will indicate how we see the future cluster policy in SEE Area. A specific set of performance indicators for the platform activities should be set-up together with the WG leaders to define activities conducted in each of the 6 thematic areas in correlation with the entire policy cycle management (preparation, implementation, monitoring).

Performance indicators could be:

- Number of qualitative and quantitative assessments on cluster policy implementation collected or produced by the platform members
- Number of pilot actions implemented
- Number of guidelines, reports and recommendations produced by platform members
- Number of best practices identified and collected on the platform (all together 6 thematic areas)
- Number of cluster policy makers in SEE area connected to the platform
- The dimension and number of international cooperation networks
- Competitive advantage sectors based on excellence identified
- Increased capacity of SEE clusters to provide innovative services, including to develop and assess S3 cluster development policy model
- Increased quality management of the cluster policy makers in SEE area

Simple to access and use design

Design (operational plan and functional architecture) of the platform must be simple to use and to provide secured on-line access of the users.

The learning platform will be supported by off-the-shelf collaborative software providing solutions for content and document management within virtual communities of practice and intranet tools to facilitate networking, knowledge exchange and empower policy makers to connect and deepen their relationship based on wiki modalities, social networking solutions and live communications systems.

Users will be supported by background documents, source databases and dedicated search engine on cluster and innovation policies further to project management functions in order to provide good practices and transferability assessments on the main six pillars. Each WGs will be supported by a workspace facilitating exchange, versioning and document management workflow.

The platform will provide different levels of security in terms of communication, authentication and data protection and will be defined by a strong syntactic interoperability to effectively integrate software applications, data exchange and information resources and flexibility to easily integrate new functionalities.

The platform also foresees a public section dedicated to finalized deliverables, outcomes, interest group documents and papers, database of relevant institutions providing elements of Knowledge for cluster policies in the SEE area and calendars of EU relevant events, workshop and linked initiatives.

Clear management rules

At strategic level the platform operation will be managed by the Scientific and Technical Committee (STC) providing inputs and constant feedback during the whole project duration, ensuring strategic relevance of the platform content and activities within SEE area and that its direction is consistent with European Union policies and concerned initiatives focusing on S3 and how to use clusters within the strategic process for regional innovation strategies.

Full members of the platform are the partnership members (including ASPs), Associated members (involved in all the activities of the platform with the exception of decision-making) are representatives of regional/national public institutions responsible for cluster policy development and implementation, academic and research departments involved in cluster studies; R&D transfer and innovation promotion bodies and cluster associations, confederations of clusters and networks; Partner members (eligible to participate on a case-by-case basis in specific activities) include a wide range of stakeholders (international organizations, financing institutions and representatives of civil society).

The platform foresees the establishment of an on-line repository of results and best practices from the ClusterPolISEE project to help the relevant cluster stakeholders to extract and learn from project outcomes, facilitate transnational transfer of cluster policies, fostering cross-sectoral cooperation thus contributing to the implementation of thematic-based strategies and the setting-up of regional competitive advantage.

Operationally the platform will make available some standard CMS functionalities such as: user registration and self profiling, file archiving and cataloguing, search, location, download and upload of files, private messaging, discussion forums, planning instruments, integration with functionalities of video and audio conferencing etc.

The on line repository will be structured along the six central topics for cluster policy improvement and is going to link relevant audiences and stakeholders to the project outputs. Stakeholders will be involved into the Platform development through 6 cluster policy public consultations. Six questionnaires on the central topics will collect relevant data on innovative measures supporting cluster development, detect needs and feed the activities of the Working Group, thus guaranteeing the uptake of project results. The questionnaires will be directed both to policy makers/institutional actors and the private sector. The questionnaires will be made available in all the PPs languages and in EN in order to foster cross-fertilization and efficient exploitation of synergies with other EU relevant Cluster Initiatives.

The technical management of the platform, including selection of the preferred solution after a cost-benefit analysis, will be assigned to the LP. It will also include the necessary degree of interaction with IPTS and the other EU level institutions involved in the S3 platform. All partners will be simultaneously and seamlessly held responsible for both inputs and outputs, including evaluation of interim and final results.