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ACENET

ACCELERATING THE ESTABLISHMENT
OF CLUSTERS AND COMPANY NETWORKS

ACENET is a Thematic Network, that brings together 11 regions with a common interest in how clusters and company networks can be stimulated, developed and promoted. In total, seven events will be arranged over a period of 2 years, so as to learn about successful industrial cluster schemes and make contact with important support organisations and companies in the different regions. ACENET is supported by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Enterprise as part of the Innovation and SMEs programme and is member of the Innovating Regions in Europe Network.

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Upcoming events

- 3-4 March: IRE Workshop on Regional Foresight, Ljubljana. The event will provide participants with practical methods, real examples and EU support information on how to implement Foresight activities. Read more: www.innovating-regions.org
- 26-28 March: 5th ACENET meeting, Plastics Valley, Tarnow, Poland.
- 10-11 April: IRC-IRE conference "Knowledge transfer from university to industry", Balearic Islands, ES. The conference brings together University-Industry co-operation schemes that have been successfully implemented in several European regions. Read more: www.innovating-regions.org
- 11-13 June: 6th ACENET meeting in Oslo, Norway, partly together with the Metropolis network.
- 17-19 September: 6th Global Conference "Innovative Clusters – A New Challenge!", Gothenburg, Sweden. The Competitiveness Institute, together with the leading authorities in Sweden, is arranging an international conference on clusters. Read more: www.competitiveness.org/gothenburg
- 8-10 October: 7th ACENET meeting in Schwarzwald-Baar-Heuberg, Germany.

Rhône-Alpes: 200 years of cluster building

The fourth ACENET meeting in the Rhône-Alpes region took place between the 4th and 6th of December 2002. At the ACENET meeting, presentations by regional policy makers, such as the president of the Chamber of Commerce in Lyon, and representatives of the different clusters were made on several locations throughout the beautiful landscape of the Rhône-Alpes region.

The aim of the meeting was to communicate the experience of the different clusters in the region to all the attendants. Study trips were made to "Cluses" in "Haute Savoie" in order to visit two screw cutting companies, as well as a trip to Renault Trucks in "Bourg en Bresse" and a Bus Tour in the "Health and Biotechnological cluster" area.

The history of Cluster-building in the region starts around 200 years ago as a humble collaboration of textile processing companies. Although that situation can not be compared to the complex structures of today, this first cluster made the pioneering brick-laying in the wall of the Regions current Cluster structure.



Renault Trucks have acquired the status of a major international player within the Volvo group and are ranked second in the world and number one in Europe for heavy goods vehicles. In Europe Renault has a 26.5% market share whereas Mercedes have 19.3%.

A main objective for the region Rhône-Alpes is to reinforce the competitiveness of the Industrial Vehicles Cluster. The project itself is divided into three different phases: First of all is the establishment of a common view on the challenges that the companies are facing. Second, the creation of a shared vision, which means that companies' demands are thoroughly analysed and international differences are mapped. Third, the action lines, which are meant to implement the



Participants from 11 cluster-regions in Europe gather for the 4th ACENET meeting.

defined strategies into the real process. The action lines proposed are: international alliances, international expansion, collaborative development and sophisticated demand.

Another cluster-area growing in importance is the screw cutting cluster in the "Arve Valley". It is the largest concentration of screw cutting companies today. The technical expertise of all these companies are recognized throughout the world.

To assure the pursuit of "zero defects", the Technical Centre of the Screw Cutting Industry is an important support in order to reach that goal and was the First French Industrial Technical Centre to receive the ISO 9001 certification.

The Lyon Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) is the main cluster stimulator in the region and was founded 300 years ago. They represent 52,600 companies today, of which the majority are small and medium sized. Today there are in total 12 CCIs in the region. The CCI act as information provider on various topics, facilitator for training and education centres, and stimulator for business start ups, -acquisitions and -internationalisations. Above all, the CCI offers individual customised support to companies in the region.

Perhaps most helpful for the many small companies is the technology transfer activities within the "Présence Rhône Alpes" initiative, where the 12 CCIs in the region collaborate to mediate contacts between support organisations and companies. The initiative have helped increase transparency between supply and demand of innovation support services to one of the highest levels in Europe.



News from the members



Learning, growing in Oslo

Success demands failure, as innovators well know. It also requires resilience, as Oslo's research community is learning. In the hunt for dynamic innovation, even a tightly-knit city with high levels of education and research investment can have a hard time getting the right people together.

Back in the nineties, Oslo's research triangle, defined by the University of Oslo, Gaustabekkdalen and Rikshospitalet (the National Hospital) was touted to become a national centre for innovation under the name "Kunnskapsparken," or "Knowledge Campus."

But the collapse of a key player in the mix, Norsk Data, followed by the establishment of a new ICT centre on the site of the old Fornebu International Airport west of town, stole the Knowledge Campus's thunder and hollowed out its core. As a result, the cluster lost its common direction, leaving its collective capabilities underutilised, while the so-called IT-Fornebu campus struggled to attract viable players.

How can a compact, homogeneous city like Oslo end up with such a fragmented research community? Does location really have such a dramatic impact on collaboration? Answers to these and other questions are beginning to emerge as Oslo takes its own medicine, striving to learn and grow from a failed experiment.

The main players now realise that they must accommodate and compliment each other's strengths and weaknesses in order to gain maximum effect from their total knowledge base. Among new initiatives offering proof that Oslo is coming back strong are establishment of a multi-discipline micro-technology research centre in Gaustabekkdalen, and establishment of five "Centres of Research Excellence" within the Knowledge Campus. These and other measures are helping Oslo's research community revitalize and refocus, and should help Oslo reach its stated goal of becoming "one of the most innovative regions in Europe within the next ten years."

Kevin Gallagher, Information Consultant, Oslo Teknopol IKS

6th GLOBAL CONFERENCE Innovative Clusters – A New Challenge!

Since five years, "The Competitiveness Institute" is arranging yearly international conferences on clusters. In this context, the world is divided in three zones: America, Europe/Africa and Asia/Australia. The conference is held every three years in the same zone. This year's conference, the sixth, is held in Gothenburg, Sweden, on the 17th-19th of September. Gothenburg is situated in a dynamic region with many of Sweden's leading companies, for example Astra Zeneca, Saab Automobile, Saab-Ericsson, SKF and Volvo.

Clusters have revolutionised our view of regional development. Growth policy has got a new, constructive dimension. With clusters as a point of departure new working methods and new tools are being developed. Exciting cluster projects are being planned, set up, and conducted in many different parts of the world. This year it is time to face new challenges.

- A first challenge is that established theories and working methods must be confronted with new perspectives. The views of researchers and the experience of practitioners must be tested and reconsidered.
- A second challenge is to try to design and develop models for innovative clusters. The innovative power and dynamics must primarily be derived from Triple-Helix models, which involve interaction between companies, R&D environments and governmental initiatives.
- A third challenge is the new dialogue on innovative clusters. The conference participants are expected to take an active part in the programme. They will have a decisive influence on the form and content of the agenda. Well-known researchers, experts, and entrepreneurs will be invited to give inspiration.

Some sessions will focus on how governments can help clusters to become more innovative and how growth can be attained at regional as well as national level. In Sweden the Government has now decided to invest in a national programme on clusters and innovation systems. Next year it will be possible to report on a great deal of new experience in this area.

Next year's conference in Gothenburg will be arranged by, among others, the Invest in Sweden Agency (ISA), the Swedish Agency for Innovation Systems (VINNOVA), the Swedish Business Development Agency (NUTEK) and the Swedish Institute for Growth Policy Studies (ITPS) in close cooperation with the Swedish Ministry of Industry, Employment and Communications.

The bodies arranging the conference will offer study visits to Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. The conference will be held on a river shore in Gothenburg where 30 years ago three large shipyards were operating. Today it is a dynamic environment for enterprises, universities and organisations working in the spirit of the knowledge society. This environment is a shining example of how new great challenges can mobilise creativity, political commitment and economic resources.

*The programme will be available on
www.competitiveness.org*

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"The Competitiveness Institute (TCI) is a non-profit, global network of cluster practitioners dedicated to facilitating the spread and success of cluster-based competitiveness initiatives through networking."

"Exciting cluster projects are being planned, set up, and conducted in many different parts of the world. This year it is time to face new challenges."

News from the members



Investments and innovation to re-launch the regional industrial districts

The industrial district development model asks for constant and attentive corrections in order to keep the entrepreneurial system of Friuli Venezia Giulia, one of the Regions of the well-known North-East Italian area, competitive in the international scenario. In this context the 'district' turns out to be still effective because it allows SMEs to count on advanced services both material and non-material such as infrastructures as well as know-how and marketing actions, which, according to a different model, would be available only to big enterprises, able to perform consistent investments.

The Friuli Venezia Giulia Region has four main 'targeted product districts', initially supported by public funding, which could be taken now as good examples to be reproduced all over the world. This is the case of the Manzano 'chair district' and also the one of 'knives', 'agro-food' and 'furniture regional districts'.

The *district model* has always been working effectively and it still does, under the condition of being continuously updated in order to avoid the risk of economic and geo-politic changing conditions which may lead to the disappearing of local companies. The Friuli Venezia Giulia productive system requires to re-position both its integrated system of companies complementary one another in their shared manufacturing cycle and the relevant single products quality level.

This new approach should not involve external trading only but should extend to international investments, while mind and heart of the industrial system has to be kept in the Region.

The challenge of local companies future stays



between the substantial difference of 'suicide de-localisation' on one hand and of internationalisation re-launching on the other. It is clearly unbearable for local companies thinking of keeping competitiveness offering the same products or semi-finished products as those which are currently manufactured half-price in neighbouring or far from Europe emerging countries, which can count on prime material abundance and low cost of labour force.

As a consequence, local companies should improve their capacity to expand towards external markets, through investments and collaborations, and move the primary production phases to other countries, when not moving the entire productive cycle if considering low added value products. This would allow companies to amortise less specialised manufacturing costs being, at the same time, closer to new consumer markets.

Nevertheless, the Region should keep control on decision processes, high-specialised manufacturing, conceiving and design phases, trading and marketing structures; to sum up, everything which is able to produce profit for companies and a demand of specialised and well-paid labour force, as well as a positive impact on the local economic system.

In order to reach this result, industrial companies, supported by public institutions, should sensibly invest in terms of research, design and technological innovation. At this regard, *AREA Science Park*, the regional multi-sector science and technology park, stands as a good example of *cognitive district* devoted to help local territory in raising its competitiveness level on the basis of technological development. Acting as a bridge between academia and business, *AREA Science Park*, an integrated system composed of more than 70 high-tech companies and R&D centres, performs a strong action of technology transfer, innovation diffusion and exploitation of research results providing regional companies and industrial districts with new advanced processes, products and services.

Innovation is the strategic resource to help self-standing companies and industrial districts to keep their competitiveness in the international scenario. The increasing time constraints and pressure of the world market give not floor to indecision, useless considerations or doubts: prompt action is needed to point out regulation and financial tools to go for concrete results. This is the only way for the Friuli Venezia Giulia to succeed, keeping a virtuous entrepreneurial dynamism and thus ensuring progress to its citizens. These premises given, ACENET network turns out to be an appreciable tool to connect and share the most valuable experiences concerning creation and development of industrial districts at international level.

Written by Daniele Macorig, Major of Manzano (Udine, Italy)
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Useful websites

Reports on Cluster:

Innovative Clusters - drivers of national innovation systems, OECD 2001
<http://www.dialogic.nl/download/OECD-InnovativeClusters-II.pdf>

Report 2002 / No. 3: Regional clusters in Europe, European Commission
http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/enterprise_policy/analysis/doc/smes_observatory_2002_report3_en.pdf

Policy for Inter-firm Networking and Clustering: A Practitioner's Perspective, June 2000
<http://www.clusternavigators.com/portal.asp> (go to Useful Material/Cyber Library/Bologna OECD Ministerial Conference on SMEs)

Industry Cluster Progress Reports, Connecticut Industry Clusters,
<http://www.state.ct.us/ecd/Clusters/images/Cluster%20Progress%20Report%20June2000.pdf>
<http://www.state.ct.us/ecd/Clusters/images/Cluster%20Progress%20Report%20Nov1999.pdf>
<http://www.state.ct.us/ecd/Clusters/images/cluster%20progress%20report%20feb%202001.pdf>

Innovative clusters in Sweden, NUTEK 2001
http://www.nutek.se/kluster/pdf/innovclust_swe_1022.pdf

Prospects for growing knowledge-based industrial clusters in atlantic canada, Final report
PART 1 - Concepts, Analysis and Recommendations
PART 2 - Six Cluster Profiles
http://www.acoa.ca/e/library/reports/knowledge_industrial_pt1.pdf
http://www.acoa.ca/e/library/reports/knowledge_industrial_pt2.pdf

Assisting Cluster Development and Networking in Regional Economies of South Australia, The University of Adelaide, Centre for Labour Research, January 2000
http://www.scrn.sa.com.au/bnrd_project/documents/pract_report5.pdf

Cluster Mapping Report - Business Clusters in the UK - A First Assessment, Department of Trade and Industry, February 2001
<http://www.dti.gov.uk/clusters/map/>

Other reports

Report on national networks of innovating regions, Prepared by the IRC-IRE Central Unit
http://www.innovating-regions.org/download/National_network_report.pdf

Other sites of interest:

IRC-IRE Central Unit
<http://www.innovating-regions.org>
(Innovating Regions in Europe)
<http://irc.cordis.lu>
(Innovation Relay Centres)

OECD
<http://www.oecd.org>

RSC, the Regional Service for Clustering in the UK
<http://www.clustering.org.uk>

Netwin - methodological guide to networking and cluster development
<http://www.aditec.org/netwin/>

The Competitiveness Institute
<http://www.competitiveness.org>

The Cluster Competitiveness Group
<http://www.competitiveness.com>

Cluster Navigators
<http://www.clusternavigators.com>

Next event in Poland

The sixth ACENET event takes place between the 26th and the 28th of March in Tarnow, Poland. The event is hosted by the Plastics Valley cluster and will encompass both study visits to companies, meetings with regional players and internal sessions for development of the ACENET network.

The meeting takes place at the same time as an annual national conference on SMEs with national media coverage. Because of that there will also be possibilities to have informal chats with Polish Economic Ministry representatives and Polish press.

The Plastics Valley Cluster is now a key element in the Tarnów municipality's strategy document (2000-2015) and a major "strength" in the SWOT analysis of the city. It also plays a significant role in the development strategy of the Malopolska region (3.2 million inhabitants).

Most companies in the cluster are in plastics processing. Many basic polymers for processing can be acquired from a local chemical company, and a precision engineering company supplies machinery and equipment for the processing of plastics. The cluster is in a growth phase, and recently two major international corporations have invested in Tarnów.

Innovating Regions in Europe

The Network of Innovating Regions in Europe (IRE) is the joint platform for collaboration and exchange of experiences in the development of regional innovation policies and schemes. The IRE Network is open to all European regions, including those in Central and Eastern Europe and Cyprus. Since 1994, more than 100 European regions have received support from the European Commission for the formulation of regional innovation strategies. 13 Thematic Networks bringing together over 250 innovation stakeholders throughout Europe have been set up to exchange good practice on regional innovation policy topics.

A number of IRE regions will fund the implementation of specific actions developed during the formulation of their regional innovation strategies through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Innovative Actions. The new ERDF Innovative Actions aim to enhance innovation and R&D activities in less favoured regions as well as their use of new information and communication technologies. The Innovative Actions focus on three strategic themes:

-Development of the regional economy based on knowledge and technological innovation.

-e-Europe Regio: information society serving regional development.

-Regional identity and sustainable development.

The first strand (knowledge and technological innovation) will offer regions the possibility of funding the implementation of actions stemming from regional exercises such as RITTS and RIS.

All NUTS II regions at least partly covered by Objective 1 or 2 programmes can submit programme proposals, focusing on one single strategic theme or on a combination of them. EU contribution per regional programme will range from € 300,000 to 3 million. The funding rate will vary from 50% in Objective 2 areas and areas that are not covered by the Structural Funds to 80% in Objective 1 regions. Programmes can be submitted each year (until 2005) by 31st May. Key issues will be the innovativeness of the proposal for the region and the transferability of the results to the mainstream programmes.

To get more information on the IRE Network and activities, and to download reports and newsletters go to:

<http://www.innovating-regions.org>

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