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EUROPEAN CLUSTERS ALLIANCE

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CLUSTERS SHAPING INDUSTRIAL STRATEGIES:

GOOD PRACTICES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Antonio Novo Guerrero, President of the European Clusters Alliance

EUROPEAN CLUSTERS ALLIANCE

1. FOREWORD

Clusters today stand as a cornerstone of Europe's industrial and innovation strategies. In an era defined by rapid technological, economic, societal and environmental transformation, clusters have become true catalysts of competitive growth, bringing together the key actors of the quintuple helix: industry, academia, public authorities, civil society and the environmental dimension.

Through this collaborative structure, clusters cultivate robust innovation ecosystems capable of accelerating technological development and generating sustainable value.

Their contribution to strengthening SMEs is particularly significant. Clusters enhance SMEs' capacity for innovation, job creation and market development, while enabling their integration into broader value chains and strategic partnerships. By bridging the gap between research and the market, clusters ensure that scientific advances are transformed more rapidly into real economic impact, supporting regional competitiveness and the broader goals of the European Union.

Moments of crisis reveal the true resilience of clusters. The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, together with the disruptions triggered by current geopolitical tensions, has shown that clusters are able to anticipate value-chain shocks, respond quickly to emerging challenges and help companies adapt to rapidly changing conditions.

Their role as sensitive market sensors – analysing trends, identifying disruptions early and coordinating collective responses – has proven to be a strategic asset for Europe.

Looking ahead, this role becomes even more relevant in the context of the new EU instruments proposed under the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF). Instruments such as the *Single Market value chains builder, EU Tech Frontrunners*, the *Scale-up Facility* and the future *EU for Business Network* will only deliver their full potential if they are anchored in real ecosystems.

Clusters are uniquely placed to make this happen:

- as ***value-chain builders***, mapping capabilities across regions and connecting SMEs with larger companies, investors and testbeds;
- as ***innovation orchestrators***, forming cross-border consortia around technology frontrunners and helping them to bring solutions to market;
- as ***trusted intermediaries for start-ups and scale-ups***, improving investment-readiness and linking entrepreneurs to finance; and
- as ***local entry points to EU support***, helping SMEs navigate complex instruments through simple, hands-on guidance.

At the same time, clusters contribute to the modernisation of public policy, connecting domains that are traditionally treated separately and supporting regional smart specialisation strategies. They build bridges between societal needs and industrial development, enabling innovative approaches in areas such as smart cities, social innovation, gender equality, skills development, or the green and digital transitions. Many of these initiatives are only possible because clusters provide the collaborative infrastructure required for multi-stakeholder engagement.

This guidebook – which will ultimately gather more than sixty good practices from across Europe – illustrates how clusters already perform these roles in practice. Even in this short version, the examples range from regional innovation networks and cross-sectoral HR and gender initiatives to integrated national ecosystems and specialised technology campuses.

They show clusters:

- aligning companies, universities and public agencies around shared priorities.
- supporting SMEs to innovate, internationalise and join European value chains.
- building skills, attracting talent and fostering more inclusive workplaces and
- mobilising investment and public support to deliver concrete industrial projects.

We invite policymakers, cluster managers, SME leaders and other stakeholders to use this publication as a ***practical reference***. Each case offers ideas, methods and governance models that can be adapted to different territories and sectors, including for the design and implementation of future ECF actions. The message is clear: whenever Europe faces a challenge – from decarbonisation to digitalisation, from supply-chain security to social cohesion – there is almost always a way for clusters to contribute.

Through talent development, investment attraction, capability building and ecosystem strengthening, clusters are not simply groupings of companies and institutions, but engines of economic transformation and territorial cohesion. By learning from the experiences collected in this guidebook and by connecting them with the emerging EU policy instruments, we can ensure that clusters remain a driving force linking Europe's industrial base with the opportunities of the future.

2. EUROPEAN CLUSTERS ALLIANCE

The ***European Clusters Alliance (ECA)*** is the common voice of the European cluster community. It brings together national and regional cluster associations and ***over 1000 cluster organisations*** from across Europe, representing tens of thousands of innovative companies alongside universities, research centres and public bodies. From its base in Brussels, ECA provides a structured way for this community to act together at European level.

ECA's core mission is to ***connect, coordinate and represent*** clusters. It offers a platform where national cluster organisations and their members exchange experience, develop joint initiatives and identify common positions on issues such as industrial transformation, skills, digitalisation, internationalisation and the green transition. Through thematic task forces and regular community meetings, ECA helps cluster managers and their members to learn from each other and to launch cooperation projects that go beyond regional and national borders.

At policy level, ECA acts as a ***bridge between clusters and European institutions***. It contributes to consultations and expert groups, provides evidence from the ground, and formulates shared recommendations that reflect the needs and potential of cluster ecosystems. In this way, ECA supports the design and implementation of EU initiatives where clusters can play a delivery role – from industrial alliances and value-chain initiatives to future instruments under the European Competitiveness Fund and the EU for Business Network.

ECA has also shown its added value in moments of disruption. During the COVID-19 crisis and subsequent supply-chain shocks, the Alliance mobilised its members to share information rapidly, identify critical bottlenecks and facilitate collaborations across sectors and borders. This experience has reinforced ECA's function as a ***coordination hub*** whenever fast, collective responses are needed.

Today, by connecting ecosystems, facilitating strategic partnerships and amplifying the results of cluster organisations, the European Clusters Alliance helps to ensure that the work of clusters is visible, coherent and impactful at European scale. In doing so, it contributes directly to a ***more competitive, sustainable and cohesive European economy***, and supports clusters in taking an active role in the Union's evolving industrial and innovation agenda.

EUROPEAN
CLUSTERS ALLIANCE

3. CLUSTERS AT THE CORE:
Shaping Future-Ready European Industrial Strategies

- Clusters play a central role in fostering innovation and engagement among the quadruple and even the quintuple helix components (industry, academia, public agencies, society and environment).
- Can boost SME's capacity for innovation, employment and IP/trademarks.
- They serve as crucial conduits between Industry and Research & Development (R&D), facilitating a swift transition of research to the market.
- Clusters can avoid policy priorities being stuck, blocked by outdated ways of thinking or acting.
- Clusters are the best market sensors, enabling quick knowledge about real market variations, and fast and coordinated reactions to those changes.

EUROPEAN CLUSTERS ALLIANCE

3.1 Clusters play a central role in fostering innovation and engagement among the quadruple and even the quintuple helix components (industry, academia, public agencies, society and environment).

Innovation ecosystems
Innovation ecosystems are networks of actors whose main purpose is to support technology development and innovation. Clusters play a central role in building these ecosystems — such as incubators, science and technology parks, and Digital Innovation Hubs — while also integrating environmental sustainability. A sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem relies on strong pillars in which small, innovation-driven companies and their entrepreneurial capabilities are placed at the core of the innovation cluster.

Cluster-Based Economic Development Strategies
Public or semi-public entities utilize cluster strategies to enhance a region's economic situation by influencing how companies within a cluster use public resources, work together, or do business. This collaborative approach within clusters could lead to the translation of business needs into coordinated research efforts and industrial strategies.

Clusters build social good at the territory
Clusters can develop and support local initiatives using technology and innovation tools for social cohesion and local prosperity. Clusters of social and ecological innovation are mentioned as ideal vehicles to align various stakeholders, including SMEs, social enter-prises, citizens' initiatives, local - regional governments, and research, to facilitate digital and sustainable transition. Clusters can contribute to social good by fostering collaboration and innovation within a specific territory.

Reference Sites for Scalable Disruptive Innovation
The European Commission and the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing (EIP on AHA) established Reference Sites to promote scalable disruptive innovation across Europe. An example of such a site is Ageing@Coimbra1, which exemplifies how clusters and regional level collaborations among the quadruple helix entities can foster innovation.

Clusters attract investments
Clusters attract investments by directing private capital toward sustainable projects and fostering collaboration between public and private sectors. They create favourable conditions for innovation and economic growth, generating attractive opportunities for businesses and investors, including those focused on the circular economy. Through their “gravitational” effect, clusters draw companies from the value chain; the BMW example shows how targeted investments and incentives can strengthen an industrial cluster. Clusters also help attract talent and capital by prioritizing key sectors, mapping strengths, and developing innovation hubs.
The intentional design of clusters, as seen in major innovation ecosystems, demonstrates their ability to mobilize substantial investment. Moreover, clusters can facilitate Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) by enhancing an economy’s productive potential.

Smart City Projects
The Quadruple Helix innovation approach has been employed for co-producing smart city projects to better capture their impacts. This approach involves co-producing assessment criteria and indicators with a full set of stakeholders from enterprises, academia, public agencies, and civil society, demonstrating how clusters can serve as platforms for multi-stakeholder engagement and collaborative innovation.

3.1.1 Regional Innovative Network of Veneto

Name of the cluster/association:
RIBES PER L'ECOSISTEMA SALUTE E L'ALIMENTAZIONE SMART

Country: Italy

Industrial ecosystem: Health

Contact:
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segreteria@ribesnest.it
www.ribesnest.it

Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
RIBES-Nest is an Innovative Regional Network, recognized by the *Regional Council of Veneto* with Resolution No. 1967 (2016). It brings together local companies operating in the Smart Health and Nutrition Ecosystem, as well as "knowledge entities," such as research Institutions, Universities, Research Centres, and Business Schools.
RIBES-Nest was established to implement innovation in its new science-based products or production processes, which are often characterized by cross-disciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches; participate in inter-company research projects eligible for regional, national, or European funding; foster interaction and dialogue between the industrial and research worlds; support the economic development of the regional territory; and establish partnerships that help address the global market in a more competitive and structured way.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
RIBES-Nest consists of 6 Knowledge Entities and 47 Companies (SMEs and large enterprises).
The Regional Innovative Network model has enabled its members to collaborate by pooling diverse expertise and creating synergy between companies and research entities.
This model effectively merges skills and fosters new synergies within a multidisciplinary logic and an "innovation chain" framework that is essential for leading the transition toward more sustainable economic models.

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
The network focuses on complex and articulated fields, broadly defined as Life Sciences. Its numerical size, in terms of participating production entities, and the diverse scales of its members, combined with the chosen legal structure, made the start-up phases particularly challenging.
Today, however, the network operates as a complete and efficient organization; indeed one of the most difficult actions the network had to manage was maintaining its activities during the lockdown and pandemic emergency in 2020.
For a network of businesses and research institutions, member interaction is fundamental, and the inability to organize meetings and events certainly impacted its activities. We had to exercise our resilience and quickly shift from physical to virtual and hybrid modes of interaction.
Nevertheless, following the health emergency, Regional Innovative Networks were called upon to continue their work, focusing on specific needs that could improve the scientific response to the pandemic and prevention activities.
RIBES-Nest initiated a process of scouting and dialogue dedicated to critical issues emerging during the pandemic phase.
These were identified with sector-specific macro-objectives, allowing the network to develop according to members' new needs and to adapt research projects to the changed context.

Results and benefits
Please describe the result/outcome/impact of your actions and why it is considered a success/good practice.
RIBES-Nest's activities have created an ecosystem of shared values and objectives and developed new significant partnerships among companies, universities, research institutes, and businesses of different sizes and sectors.
The seven research projects launched to date have enabled participants to identify emerging and innovative technologies for the development of new sustainable solutions, products, or services.
Over the years, RIBES-Nest has acted as a "radar" for emerging technologies and a catalyst for development, generating significant competitive advantages for the network and its individual companies.

RIBESNEST®

3.1.2 KOMPASS - Competence Centre for Maternity Leave and Career Management

Name of the cluster/association:
Business Upper Austria-OÖ Wirtschaftsagentur GmbH

Country: AT - Austria

Industrial ecosystem: cross-sectoral

Contact
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www.kompass-ooe.at

Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
It is becoming increasingly important for companies to position themselves as attractive employers to secure qualified and motivated staff. Family - and women - friendly policies play a key role in this. Companies that actively support employees in balancing career and parenthood gain a clear competitive advantage through higher retention, loyalty, and overall success. To strengthen this approach, *KOMPASS*, the *Competence Centre for Maternity Leave and Career Management*, was established in Upper Austria to coordinate and implement support measures for companies.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
KOMPASS is implemented on behalf of the Women's Department of the Province of Upper Austria (www.frauenreferat-ooe.at) and the Women's Advisor of the Provincial Government, Christine Haberlander (www.christine-haberlander.at) in cooperation with the Upper Austrian Chamber of Commerce (www.wko.at/ site/fiwoberoesterreich).
KOMPASS is based in the Upper Austrian location agency Business Upper Austria (www.bizup.at).

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
- Advice and support for the introduction of company-run childcare facilities
- Financial support for company-run childcare projects during the school holidays
- Award for outstanding activities and special commitment to gender equality in Upper Austria through the Upper Austrian Women's Promotion Award StarkeFrauen. StarkesLand
- Through the expert platform "www.ooe.speakerinnen.org", Upper Austrian women are made visible both locally and internationally as experts, speakers and representatives
- Free working and information material in the form of numerous brochures and practical guides
- The entire working and information material of KOMPASS is available for download on our website.

KOMPASS
Kompetenzzentrum für Karenz und Karriere

Results and benefits
- KOMPASS has established itself in Upper Austria as the competence centre for the topics of reconciliation and women's empowerment.
- The number of counselling sessions in companies is constantly increasing.
- The number of company-run childcare facilities is rising sharply.

3.1.3 Sharing Best Practices

Name of the cluster/association:
Develop HR Cluster

Country: CZ - Czechia

Industrial ecosystem: Cross-sectoral

Contact
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www.rhrklastr.cz

Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
The starting point was the idea of transferring Best Practices among company owners and directors, especially SMEs, and not only in the field of HR, current trends, and other topics related to company development and HR work.
An invaluable benefit is stepping out of their stereotypical, often "blind spots." Company owners and top management are exposed to a high degree of responsibility and pressure, which they often have no one else to consult about. They cannot afford to show even the slightest doubt downward or admit wrong decisions.
That is why we founded this platform, where these top managers can share their experiences and mistakes with peers in absolutely confidential surroundings. In addition, each member brings their own individual topics, which are democratically chosen for discussion in the plenary. These meetings are therefore a great source of inspiration for all participants.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
These meetings are attended by cluster members and guests, for example from the university or the technology innovation centre, representatives of other clusters, or guests from stakeholders.

ROZVOJOVÝ HR KLASTR

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
We regularly organize thematic events for cluster members and stakeholders. There are many events, so here we will give just a few examples for illustration.
For instance, a meeting of company owners and top management at *Sonnentor* (an organic producer of teas and spices with a philosophy of sustainable business), or a meeting at the *Polymer Systems Centre* of *Tomas Bata University* (hereinafter CPS – a research and development centre).
Our goal is always to bring participants to an interesting and inspiring location. The main theme of the event is always set in advance. At the Sonnentor event, the topic was “Harnessing the potential of employees and using their support to drive the development not only of the manufacturing company but also of its surroundings.”
At the CPS event, the theme was “Sharing experiences on cooperation with secondary schools and universities in the region.”
The activities of the cluster are so far mainly concentrated in the Zlín Region, which is why we often focus on issues of companies tied to the region, as illustrated by the CPS event. It has already become a good tradition that at each of these events, guests bring their own current topics for discussion.
Through a democratic process, 1–2 topics are selected for in-depth discussion in plenary. We see the greatest potential in events of this type.
Thanks to the confidential and relaxed atmosphere they foster, natural and direct networking arises. We know that some participants have already established cooperation as a result of them.
Another activity of the RHR cluster is workshops for members.
These workshops are organized based on member demand for expert topics. They are smaller-scale events, allowing us to address selected issues in detail.

Results and benefits
Despite the cluster’s very short period of active operation, we can already see that the association brings value to its members as well as to the region. This assumption is reflected both in the growing demand for membership and in the increasing interest of non-member organizations in participating in cluster events.
A very good indicator is also the natural feedback we receive after events. Furthermore, organizations have begun approaching us with an interest in cooperation. Even with almost no marketing support, the number of our social media followers is naturally increasing. However, we see the main benefit in successful networking meetings, from which the first collaborations are already emerging.

More information about the best practice

3.1.4 Integrated Ecosystems. The example of Romania

Name of the cluster/association:
Romanian Cluster Association

Country: RO - Romania

Industrial ecosystem: Cross-sectoral

Contact
Daniel Cosnita
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www.clustero.eu

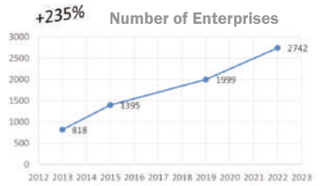
Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
Romania has been constantly scoring as an emergent innovator over more than a decade. In order to increase the level of innovation in SMEs an integration of targeted SME innovation support was needed and then triggered and accelerated by the clusterisation process. Romanian clusters cover 12 out of the 14 industrial ecosystems (excepting Retail and Proximity, Social Economy, and Civil Security), most of them in AgriFood and Digital (12), Energy / Renewables (10) and Construction (8).

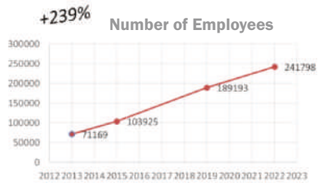
Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
CLUSTERO, Romanian Cluster Consortia, EEN, RDAs, Romanian Ministry of Economy, The National Network for Innovation and Technology Transfer, E-dihs.

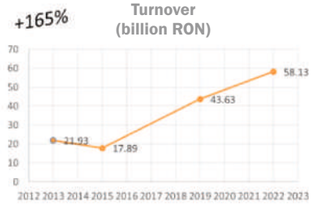
Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
The Ministry of Economy records 77 cluster initiatives, with 49 belonging to CLUSTERO out of which 55 are CLUSTERO members. Furthermore, 7 have been awarded the Gold, 13 the Silver and 41 the bronze labels for cluster excellence by ESCA. To better support SME innovation and internationalisation, CLUSTERO has formed 7 regional and 6 thematic consortia, each operating autonomously with their own competitiveness and innovation agendas (ICT, wood & furniture, agri-food, bio-agriculture, textiles, health). To accelerate SME digitalisation, 12 new DIHs have received national accreditation, and 6 were granted E-DIH status; 4 of these were created around the regional cluster consortia. The Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation manages ReNITT, a network of 49 technology transfer and innovation organisations. Among these, 2 are EEN regional points, 13 are cluster members, and another 6 are both EEN points and cluster members. These 21 organisations (43% of the network) generate 60% of the technological transfer, 90% of innovation services, and 44% of internationalisation services within ReNITT. The thematic focus of regional clusters, DIHs and technology transfer centres aligns with regional smart specialisations defined through the entrepreneurial discovery process led by the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs). Seven of the eight RDAs are EEN members, bringing together 37 support organisations, of which 18 are clusters or active cluster members, while the others cooperate closely with clusters to deliver SME support services.

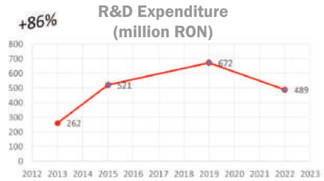
Results and benefits
The impact of the integrated ecosystem approach is to be seen at the level of SMEs which are members of Romanian clusters. At the end of 2022 Romanian clusters accounted for 2.742 enterprises, 241.798 employees, 61.85 billion RON Turnover (around 12 billion EUR), 8 billion EUR Exports, 607 million RON (120 million EUR).
These mark significant increases as compared to 2013 ranging from +131 % in the case of R&D expenditures and +245% in the case of number of employees, the former being a most remarkable result as Romania is constantly on the last place in European innovation Scoreboard. The results show the role of clusters in triggering innovative processes at SME level.

More information about the best practice









3.1.5 OTC-PromOcean

Name of the cluster/association:
Ocean Technology Campus Rostock

Country: DE - Germany

Industrial ecosystem: Cross-sectoral

Contact
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www.oceantechnologycampus.com

Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
The Ocean Technology Campus was founded as a network of research institutions, companies, and associations to position Rostock as an international hub for underwater technology, promoting training, research, economic utilization, and societal transfer. Close collaboration between science, business, and public administration fosters innovation, start-ups, and regional value creation.
Funded with €15 million over three years by the Future Cluster Initiative of the Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR), the campus entered its second funding period in October 2024, which will run until September 2027. It continues to focus on sustainable, environmentally friendly and autonomous technologies.
Initially, the cluster lacked cross-institutional equality structures, gender data, and awareness, with high male dominance typical of STEM fields. Recruiting female specialists was challenging due to few role models and the general shortage of skilled labor, highlighting the need for targeted support for women. The Ocean Gender project addresses this by providing expertise in governance, recruitment, marketing, and talent promotion, aiming to attract young female talent to underwater technology and Rostock.
It supports the cluster in identifying and eliminating structural discrimination, ensuring that the innovative potential of all genders is fully utilized.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
- Steering committee, advisory boards
- Partner projects (open lab, cluster management, Rostock Business)
- Executives, HR departments, interest groups
- Politics, BMFTR, PTJ
- Female professionals
- Pupils, schools, parents
- Mentees, mentors - media / journalists, press spokeswoman, film production enterprise

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
The project focuses on four main areas:
- Governance and gender mainstreaming: establishing a cluster equality network, providing gender training, creating an advisory board, and integrating gender aspects into strategic planning.
- Recruitment and marketing: offering recommendations for female recruitment, producing the image film “Making Waves for the Oceans” with female role models, and raising awareness through expert advice, social media, and PR.
- Promotion of young female talent: organizing inventor camps for schoolgirls (15–18) and mentoring/lecture programs connecting female STEM students with mentors to build networks and empower participants.
- Data analysis: collecting and analysing statistical data to guide recommendations and improve cluster practices.

Results and benefits
·The initiative significantly strengthened public visibility and positive perception of the cluster’s commitment to gender equality. This was achieved through the image film “Making Waves for the Oceans” and the creation of a dedicated careers section on the cluster’s website, as well as recognition as a good practice example in the Gender Equality Training Handbook for European Clusters. Additional media coverage, including the ZDF feature “How does a female ocean scientist work?” (2023), further increased outreach and awareness.
Within the cluster, gender awareness and competence were enhanced through participation in steering committees, the integration of gender expertise, and the publication of guidelines on recruitment channels, fair hiring, and keynote representation. Advisory boards developed checklists to ensure gender aspects are systematically considered. The availability of gender statistics now provides a concrete basis for strategic decision-making.
New governance structures were established, including a gender equality network and gender and sustainability advisory boards, ensuring long-term anchoring of the topic. Young female talent is actively promoted through mentoring programs focused on skills development and networking, lecture series for female students, and inventor camps for female pupils.
As a result, Ocean Gender has established itself as a key actor and expert in gender equality within the cluster ecosystem, strengthened its reputation, expanded its network nationally and internationally, and successfully integrated gender perspectives into central processes and structures. Its work is recognized through active participation in committees and working groups, and the good practice has been featured in the PENELOPE Gender Equality Training Handbook, developed with the support of the Erasmus+ programme.

More information about the best practice

Our imagefilm *Reel on Public TV* *Training handbook*

3.1.6 The Clean Team Project Ltd

Name of the cluster/association:
Green Energy Cluster

Country: RO - Romania

Industrial ecosystem: Energy-renewables

Contact
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www.greencluster.ro
https://www.facebook.com/CleanTeamProject

Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
Located in Covasna County, Ghelinta is a small village that produces and uses most of its energy demand from local biomass sources (agriculture, forestry and waste) using the "1 village 1 MW" concept. In order to promote this concept, Green Energy Innovative Biomass Cluster Romania developed a R&D project that aimed to transfer and adapt experiences gained in countries where bioenergy villages already existed (Germany and Austria).
This project aimed to strengthening the role of locally produced biomass as a main contributor for energy supply on a local level, considering opportunities of market uptake or expansion for local farmers, wood producers or SMEs. Core activities of the project included the technological and economic assessment of the village, the involvement and active participation of stakeholders and citizens, the development of local bioenergy value chains and technologies, as well as capacity building about financing schemes and business models.
Local community involvement was a key part of the project, including info days on switching from traditional wood stoves to small or medium biomass heating systems, site visits, and discussions with local authorities and policymakers about incentives and support options.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
Green Energy Regional Cluster, Clean Team Project Ghelinta Commune

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
The establishment of 'The Clean Team Project' start-up was financially supported by a FSE Project run by Green Energy Cluster (2018-2021). The company is the very first social economy structure in Ghelinta Commune from Covasna County based on in-depth analyses of the current socio-economic situation which has outlined a well-defined need in the locality both economically and socially.
The basic activity of the newly established structure is landscaping services, public space arrangement and maintenance of green spaces in Ghelinta Commune and its surroundings starting with a team of 5 people. At the same time, the green residuals and waste collected from the public space maintenance activities are converted into biomass fuel and commercialized on local biomass fuel markets.
It has created 5 jobs within the company with a flexible work schedule, adapted to the needs of the vulnerable group involved in the company. The employment of 4 people belonging to vulnerable groups - Roma, socially marginalized people, poor people, the elderly - is intended to create an example to follow in the community.
This proposed approach directly contributes to the integration of the marginalized population.

Results and benefits
The direct beneficiaries of the social-economic structure are:
- 15 families benefiting from firewood annually.
- 20 blind people receiving support around the houses, and firewood/yearly.
- 19 children benefiting from tablets for digital education.
- 2 awareness events/year on the environment and community sustainability.
- Minimum 2 school activities organized for children and young people on environmental protection.
- 4 people employed from vulnerable/marginalized groups in the first year of implementation.
- Improving the standard of living of at least 3 local families by hiring a member.
- Waste collection at the commune level together with the local community minimum 1 / year.

Other impacts on a local level:
- A stronger and greener community through the creation of socializing places and awareness events.
- Reduce segregation and strengthen inclusion between vulnerable groups and the broader local community through the enterprise's activities.
- Reducing migration among young people following an example of good practice in setting up a business based on personal knowledge and ambition.
- Valorisation of an annual 1000 m3 green waste, production of biomass fuel.

LANDSCAPING
CLEAN TEAM
EST. 2020
GARDENING

3.1.7 Virtual Demonstrator of Solutions for the Mountains of Tomorrow - Cluster Montagne Solutions

Name of the cluster/association:
Cluster Montagne

Country: FR - France

Industrial ecosystem: Tourism

Contact
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www.cluster-montagne-solutions.com

Challenges

What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?

Cluster Montagne Solutions aim to achieve:

1. Identification of Solutions: It helps players in the sector to discover and identify innovative solutions to meet the specific challenges of mountain regions.

2. Promotion of Innovation: It offers a showcase to highlight technical and organizational innovations developed by different companies, thus encouraging innovation and creativity in the sector.

3. Sharing of Best Practices: It facilitates the sharing of good practices and experiences between stakeholders in the sector, thus allowing them to learn from each other and build on successes and lessons learned.

4. Networking and Collaboration: It promotes networking and collaboration opportunities between companies, organizations and institutions working in the mountain sector, which can lead to successful partnerships and joint projects.

5. Access to Information: It serves as a centralized source of information on solutions for mountain regions, making it easier for stakeholders to access relevant resources. Cluster Montagne Solutions also fosters innovation, promotes collaboration, and strengthens the capacities of sector actors to tackle the challenges of tomorrow's mountains.

Stakeholders

Who was involved in the development of the good practice?

The collaboration between the Cluster Montagne and the French Ministry of Sports created Cluster Montagne Solutions to promote French mountain solutions, foster innovation, and showcase regional know-how.

Actions

What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.

We developed an approach that adapts the experience to users' knowledge of mountain challenges and solutions. **Beginners:** follow guided educational content with solution categories, detailed descriptions, how-to videos, and additional resources to deepen understanding. **Experts:** can search for solutions by geographic location using an interactive map of projects and initiatives across mountain regions, offering a clear visual overview of who implemented what and where, making it easier to explore and compare solutions.

Results and benefits

Cluster Montagne Solutions offers a platform showcasing over 500 innovative solutions and the work of 200+ experts, highlighting expertise and initiatives that support the sustainable and competitive development of mountain territories.

Cluster Montagne
Le collectif de l'excellence française

3.1.8 Attracting FDI via Building up an Innovative Manufacturing Ecosystem

Name of the cluster/association:
Ukrainian Automotive and Mobility Cluster

Country: UA - Ukraine

Industrial ecosystem: Mobility-Transport-Automotive

Contact
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www.automotivecluster.org.ua

Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
The Ukrainian Automotive and Mobility Cluster (UAMC) was created in 2018 by the leading component manufacturers for the automotive industry.
The Vision of Ukrainian Automotive and Mobility Cluster: Ukraine as a good location for the automotive manufacturers, a reliable partner, an attractive employer and driver for innovation development.
Mission: Driving and creating favourable conditions for automotive business resilience in Ukraine.
Strategic Goals:

- Enhance the global visibility and competitiveness of Ukraine's automotive and mobility industries
- Promote production localization and integration into European value chains
- Support the development of smart mobility and infrastructure
- Strengthen capacities, innovation, and skills across the Ukrainian ecosystem

After the full-scale war began in Ukraine, UAMC focused on keeping foreign automotive companies, preserving jobs and expertise. The cluster's main priorities were to relocate production from Russia and Belarus to Ukraine, attract new industry players, and strengthen business engagement to support the country. UAMC also opened up to the entire sector and began cooperating with all national clusters.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
Cluster members - SMEs, large businesses, start-ups and scale-ups, municipal authorities, international organisations and networks, UCA, ECA, ECCP events and activities, European clusters, EIT Manufacturing, DG Grow.

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
Since March 2022, UAMC has held regular meetings with the European Automotive Cluster Network (EACN) and became a co-founder of the Ukrainian Cluster Alliance (UCA). UCA became a full member of the European Cluster Alliance (ECA) and was registered on the ECCP platform. The cluster organized four online matchmaking events with Polish automotive clusters (April–May 2022) and delivered a keynote speech at the Automotive Procurement Forum in Stuttgart.
UCA became a network partner of EIT Manufacturing, and UAMC took part in major international events such as Manufacturing Day (Vienna), Economic Global Impact Forum (Istanbul), EU Cluster Conference, and Automotive Supplier Summit (Wolfsburg). Participation in Clusters Meet Regions (Košice) provided new opportunities for cooperation. Since 2023, UAMC has been part of the Automotive Skills Alliance and the Pact for Skills, expanding its focus to capacity building for Ukrainian automotive companies.
It secured GIZ funding to launch the Automotive-SkillsHub e-learning platform for upskilling and reskilling.In 2023, UAMC joined EIT Urban Mobility and the EIC Scale Up Club and participated in IAA Mobility (Munich) and International Mobility Days (Vienna). It co-organized Manufacturing Day Ukraine (Uzhgorod, November 2023) and BoostUP! Ukraine (Lviv, March 2024) with EIT Manufacturing. In March 2024, UAMC led a business mission to Japan, including a booth at SMS (Nagoya) and meetings with JAMA and JAPIA.

Results and benefits
UAMC has organized 40 offline and 50 online events, held 500 B2B meetings, and attracted 50 potential investors. The cluster is a member of 8 international organizations, has 10 cooperation memorandums, 5 submitted project proposals, and partnerships with 30 clusters and associations. It also created 3 new project consortia, increased visibility of the Ukrainian automotive industry. Supported by Volkswagen and Škoda, UAMC expanded projects in 2023–2024 and signed an agreement with Škoda to develop new suppliers in Ukraine. About 200 participants joined Automotive Skills Hub and go through 10 training programs which cover the topics from quality management to digitalisation and internationalisation.
In 2025 UAMC has launched B2Match platform https://www.b2match.com/e/automotive-ukraine and engaging the stakeholders of the ecosystem to cooperate.
In May 2023, UAMC met the European Cluster Excellence Initiative (ECEI) criteria and achieved the Cluster Management Excellence Label – Bronze.
UAMC expresses gratitude to ECA, DG Grow, and ECCP for their support and opportunities.
Other projects we are involved in:

- ***Development Data Exchange*** - Interreg Danube Region Programme – Fostering cross - border data integration and innovation in automotive supply chains
- ***Central Ukraine EDIH*** – UAMC is a core partner in this European Digital Innovation Hub, driving digital transformation for manufacturing SMEs
- ***RESIST II Euroclusters*** – Participation in EU-wide Euroclusters programs to strengthen innovation, supply chains, and resilience

To support Ukraine – Do business with Ukraine!

More information about the best practice

3.1.9 Partnerships for Horizon Europe (P4HEU) on Smart Cities and Communes

Name of the cluster/association:
Italian Technology Cluster for Smart Communities (SmartCommunitiesTech)

Country: IT - Italy

Industrial ecosystem: Cross-sectoral

Contact
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Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
The Italian Technology Cluster for Smart Communities is a national association of over 150 members from industry, research, and public administration.
It promotes innovation in urban areas through smart mobility, secure living, and inclusive government. Supporting members in EU calls often requires forming consortia with other clusters, which is time-consuming. To expand collaboration and EU-level impact, SmartCommunitiesTech launched the Partnerships for Horizon Europe (P4HEU) initiative — a European event organized to support the development of Horizon Europe proposals on smart cities and communities.

The initiative aims to:
- Gather project ideas and competencies from cluster members
- Facilitate contacts and partnerships at EU level
- Strengthen inter-cluster collaboration

The initiative highlights clusters' key role in driving innovation and engagement by facilitating idea exchange, partnerships, and knowledge sharing among companies, research centres, universities, and municipalities. P4HEU promotes cross-border collaboration, industry-academia-public synergies, and addresses challenges in the twin transition, society, smart cities, and the environment.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
The Partnerships for Horizon Europe (P4HEU) initiative involves clusters from across Europe.
The first edition was launched by the Italian SmartCommunitiesTech Cluster together with three others: NextMove (France), CLUSTERO (Romania), and the Basque Country Mobility and Logistics Cluster. 15 clusters have participated in the five editions to date. The brokerage event is co-organized with the Enterprise Europe Network.

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
Launched in 2021 by the Italian Cluster for Smart Communities, P4HEU supports members in developing European collaborations through Horizon Europe calls. The initiative gathers project ideas and competencies from SMEs, large companies, research centres, universities, and public entities via a Call4Ideas, with proposals selected collaboratively to ensure balance across countries and topics.

The event features two plenary sessions:
- Keynote presentations on trends and insights in smart cities and communities
- Pitches of selected ideas and competencies, organized by thematic areas (smart mobility, energy, health, tourism, environment, data economy). In collaboration with the Enterprise Europe Network, a brokerage session facilitates partnerships, while a Panel of Municipalities allows city representatives to share experiences. All editions are online and free, with clusters tracking impact and supporting ongoing collaboration.

Results and benefits
The program has had a significant impact by:
- ***Facilitating collaboration:*** enabling clusters, companies, research organizations, and other entities across countries to work together on projects.
- ***Idea generation and dissemination:*** stimulating innovative ideas through Call4Ideas and pitch presentations, encouraging further development.
- ***Knowledge exchange:*** providing a platform for discussions, presentations, and B2B meetings, sharing best practices among participants and municipalities, advancing research and innovation.
- ***International networking*:** creating opportunities to establish contacts and partnerships, expanding networks and fostering future collaborations.
- ***Promoting Smart Communities:*** supporting innovative solutions that enhance quality of life and sustainability in communities across Europe.

Key achievements across 5 editions:
- 20 cluster organizers
- 1150 entities engaged (companies, research organizations, public & private)
- 1496 participants from 35 countries
- 286 ideas and competencies collected
- 159 speakers, including 11 keynote speakers and 16 public administration representatives
- 61 ideas showcased, 98 competencies presented
- 957 one-to-one brokerage meetings

More information about the best practice

Smart Communities Tech
Italian Technology Cluster for Smart Communities

3.1.10 Clusters as Value Multipliers

Name of the cluster/association:
Clust-ER Innovate Emilia-Romagna

Country: IT - Italy

Industrial ecosystem: Digital

Contact
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Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
The Clust-ER Innovate of Emilia-Romagna launched a mission to enhance inclusiveness and gender equality in the ICT sector, addressing critical gaps in talent attraction and retention.
Recognizing that gender balance boosts competitiveness, innovation, and wellbeing across organizations and regional ecosystems, the initiative aimed to integrate equality into one of the region's key sectors, mitigating talent shortages and strengthening regional competitiveness.
The strategy focused on two areas: *ICT Attractiveness,* targeting women under 20 through career guidance, mentorship programs, and collaborations with schools and universities; and *ICT Productivity*, engaging women over 20 and regional companies, especially SMEs, to implement equality measures and improve work-life balance.
Aligned with international efforts like the DEBUTING Interreg Project, Clust-ER Innovate mapped needs, shared best practices, and engaged stakeholders, supporting SMEs and bridging policymakers and businesses.
By addressing both tangible and intangible impacts, the initiative positions Emilia-Romagna as a leader in equitable and sustainable innovation.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
The BP engaged multiple stakeholders, including regional companies, particularly SMEs in the ICT sector, policymakers, schools, universities, and research centres.
AT-ER is a key partner for the entire initiative, both as a reference point for regional best practices and as a connector with the regional public ecosystem.
The initiative also aligned with international efforts, notably through participation in the DEBUTING Interreg Project, which brings together 12 European partners with the aim of rethinking and improving policy instruments to support businesses and SMEs in fostering inclusiveness and gender awareness.
Collaborative efforts ensured the practice addressed regional and international needs effectively

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
The Clust-ER Innovate of Emilia-Romagna implemented a strategy to enhance inclusiveness and gender equality in the ICT sector, leveraging regional collaboration and international frameworks.
The initiative focused on two objectives: increasing ICT career attractiveness for young women and boosting productivity by fostering equality within companies.
ICT attractiveness: inspired women under 20 to pursue ICT careers through mentorship programs, career guidance, and awareness campaigns, aiming to break stereotypes, showcase female role models, and highlight ICT's potential for innovation.
ICT productivity: ICT Productivity: engaged women over 20 and SMEs to implement gender equality measures and improve work-life balance through workshops, training, and best-practice sharing.
International alignment: coordinated with initiatives like *DEBUTING Interreg Project* to exchange experiences and methodologies, fostering understanding of gender equality's value for businesses and regional development.
Bridging policy and business: acted as a link between policymakers and companies, integrating inclusiveness into ICT sector growth strategies.

Results and benefits
The Clust-ER Innovate of Emilia-Romagna achieved significant results in promoting gender equality and inclusiveness in the ICT sector. Key outcomes:

- Increased awareness among young women of ICT career opportunities through mentorship, hackathons, and school / university collaborations.
- Showcased ICT as an attractive and viable career path.
- Enabled SMEs to adopt gender equality policies, improve work-life balance, and access a more diverse talent pool.
- Gender Certification Working Group: supported SMEs in benchmarking and adopting gender certification, including comparisons with multinational companies.

International dimension: aligned with the *DEBUTING Interreg Project*, promoting exchange of best practices with European partners.
Overall impact: tangible results include addressing ICT talent shortages; intangible results involve stronger collaboration between policymakers, academia, and industry, embedding inclusiveness as a core value in regional development.

More information about the best practice

CLUST-ER INNOVATE
INNOVAZIONE NEI SERVIZI

3.1.11 R_Lab Mobility

Name of the cluster/association:
Cluster Mobility & Logistics

Country: DE - Germany

Industrial ecosystem: Mobility-Transport-Automotive

Contact
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www.mobilitylogistics.de/en/mobility/data-networking/r-lab-mobility

Challenges

What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?

The *R_Lab Mobility* living lab was established to address urban mobility challenges in Regensburg, Germany, a historic city with over 30,000 students and a high number of daily commuters. The lab focuses on reducing congestion, improving traffic safety, lowering CO_2 emissions, and testing innovative smart city and mobility solutions in real-world conditions.

The project was initiated to modernize and make urban mobility more sustainable. Through the *Horizon 2020 RECIPROCITY* project, Regensburg explored various mobility solutions, learned from other cities' experiences, and identified gaps in efficiency, safety, and environmental performance.

R_Lab Mobility provides a collaborative platform to test and refine new mobility concepts before scaling them up. It brings together city authorities, companies, researchers, and citizens, fostering a learning process that transforms existing transport systems into smarter, data-driven, and more sustainable urban mobility solutions.

Stakeholders

Who was involved in the development of the good practice?

The R_Lab Mobility managed by Cluster Mobility & Logistics is a collaborative initiative involving multiple stakeholders from different sectors and quadruple helix. Here's a breakdown of the key partners: City of Regensburg, Cluster Mobility & Logistics, Public transportation provider, das Stadtwerk Regensburg Companies (especially SMEs), universities, and others interested in testing innovation.

Actions

What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.

The R_Lab Mobilität in Regensburg serves as a real-world testing ground for innovative urban mobility solutions from 2024-2026.

Future infrastructure: a future-ready infrastructure of skills, technology, organization, and processes was built to enable digitalization and Smart City applications in public spaces. A complete process, from defining challenges to project funding and implementation, was created and applied in the first pilot projects.

Data collection and infrastructure development: the R_Lab installed various smart sensors, including LIDAR systems and cameras, at key traffic points to collect real-time data on vehicles, pedestrians, and congestion. A central data hub was created and continues to be developed to store and process this mobility data.

Pilot Projects and Testing: five pilot projects have already been implemented, from environmental sensors to digital analysis of stationary traffic.

Public awareness and collaboration: campaigns were carried out to promote the benefits of smart mobility. Workshops and conferences with stakeholders shared best practices, identified urban mobility challenges, and connected them with technological solutions from regional companies.

The project is part of *Regensburg's Smart City* Initiative *R_NEXT* and receives funding from the Federal Ministry for housing, urban development, and building.

Cluster Mobility & Logistics

Results and benefits

The lab has become a core value of regional development. Through diverse projects, the lab achieved key outcomes supporting Regensburg's sustainable growth and smart city goals.

Digital analysis of stationary traffic (DARuV): digitally analysed parking behaviour with mobile sensors without changing infrastructure. Produced detailed parking data, with a focus on utilisation curves and the detection of risky parking patterns.

ReSense3D: used real-time 3D city data to enhance transparency and street safety. Created a 3D model of the university's central bus station, optimizing public transport and identifying hazards. Real-time insights improved efficiency and safety through collaboration.

Environmental sensor boxes: monitored environmental conditions through energy-autonomous sensors, reducing maintenance and ensuring continuous data collection. Integrated results into the developing Mobility Data Hub for future analysis and applications. These initiatives represent an important step toward transforming Regensburg into a smarter, greener, and more liveable city.

Regensburg AI Driver's Licence: an innovative learning programme that takes citizens on a 20-minute virtual journey of discovery through the world of AI by taking a virtual bike tour through the city of Regensburg and explaining the R_Lab mobility projects along the way. Available in English.

More information about the best practice

3.1.12 One village, 1MW

Name of the cluster/association:
Green Energy Innovative Biomass Cluster

Country: RO - Romania

Industrial ecosystem: Energy-Renewables

Contact
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Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
The Green Energy Biomass Cluster was established to preserve the environment, address waste issues, and provide clean, affordable energy for communities. Its vision is to help build a sustainable economy and a society living in harmony with nature, using renewable energy and managing forests and agriculture responsibly. The main goal is to promote the production and use of solid biofuels from local biomass sources. Romania's green waste potential allows communities to produce their own heating fuel and move toward energy self-sufficiency, supporting small biomass heating systems up to 1 MW. This sustainable approach relies on cooperation among stakeholders:
a) businesses along the value chain, including fuel producers, technology, and service providers for harvesting, processing, storage, and transport,
b) research and education institutions to identify innovative solutions and support technology transfer in bioenergy,
c) local public authorities to adopt adequate policies for implementing integrated bioenergy solutions.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
Biofuel producers, heating system manufacturers, local authorities, research institutes, and public institutions. The Cluster has a large territorial coverage, leading various bioenergy-related projects across Romania and cooperating with international partners within the EU and beyond. Businesses are mainly represented by the energy willow cultivators, as well as by companies involved in the harvest and processing of wooden residues and industrial wooden residues.

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
The concept focuses on small-scale, community-based systems that harness local potential and create value for communities.
These systems help protect the environment, generate local jobs and business opportunities, and ensure energy from local biomass resources.
It represents a sustainable business model that benefits both nature and people. For example, in a village, a 1 MW capacity can heat public buildings such as the town hall, school, cultural centre, kindergarten, library, police station, and post office. The system includes about 1200 meters of pipeline, a single biomass storage facility, and equipment for handling, unloading, and combustion.
Technical solutions include individual heating systems using wood waste or biofuel for private homes and small-scale biomass systems connecting nearby public buildings.
The concept involves identifying local wood waste from forests, orchards, parks, and households, collecting biomass with the involvement of vulnerable groups, cultivating energy crops, and managing logistics for milling, storage, and transport. It also covers manufacturing, installing, and commissioning biomass boilers and connecting users, especially public buildings, to the heating network.

GREEN ENERGY
Romanian Innovative Biomass
CLUSTER

Results and benefits
The Cluster facilitated the implementation of over 200 small-scale bioenergy systems in nearly 80 localities across Romania, totalling about 30 MW. All initiatives are mapped on the www.biovillmap.ro website.
These community-based systems consider local potential, creating value by protecting the environment, generating jobs and business opportunities, and providing energy from local resources, mainly waste wood and other biomass.
To implement such integrated and sustainable systems, it is essential to raise community awareness, build local capacity, and engage decision-makers, public authorities, and local stakeholders in sector development. Woodchips are obtained from landscape maintenance, green area cleaning, and orchard pruning, adding an important environmental dimension. Energy is supplied to households, industries, and greenhouses.
The model is tested, scalable, and replicable. The Cluster offers guidance for implementation and organizes study visits to existing systems in Ghelinta, Estelnic, Locodeni, Baia Mare, Bretcu, and Borsec.
To realize these investments, financial support from funding schemes or local budgets is needed, along with incentives for biomass harvesting and ecological maintenance. Collaboration with local authorities and communities includes public meetings, local working groups, and direct communication through info offices and helpdesks.

More information about the best practice

3.1.13 Light Design Village & Light & Green Lab

Name of the cluster/association:
Rete di Imprese Luce in Veneto

Country: IT - Italy

Industrial ecosystem: Cross-sectoral

Contact
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Challenges

What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?

The establishment of the Innovation Lab by the Luce in Veneto Cluster with the IUAV University of Venice was a major effort requiring strong coordination and strategic planning. One key challenge was preparing a competitive proposal for regional funding, which involved aligning multiple stakeholders with the Veneto Region's Operational Programme. Beyond securing funds, the cluster had to obtain co-financing by attracting private investments from members and gaining support from public authorities and regional partners.

Ensuring financial viability demanded negotiations, trust, and shared commitment. Finding and preparing suitable locations for the two laboratories — at IUAV University in Mestre and Villa Cà Marcello in Piombino Dese — posed additional logistical and technical challenges, from infrastructure upgrades to compliance with equipment standards.

Legal and assurance agreements were also essential to ensure transparency, define responsibilities, and secure longterm sustainability.

Despite these difficulties, Luce in Veneto succeeded through collaboration and innovation, establishing the Innovation Lab as a strategic hub for research and development in the lighting sector.

Stakeholders

Who was involved in the development of the good practice?

The Innovation Lab, developed by Luce in Veneto in collaboration with IUAV University of Venice, is cofinanced by the Veneto Region under PR Veneto FESR 2021-2027 funds. It emerged from Luce in Veneto's initiative and a robust network of partners, including the Veneto Region, Veneto Innovazione SpA, Chambers of Commerce Padua, Venice-Rovigo and Treviso-Belluno, Unioncamere, IPA Camposampierese, Municipality of Piombino Dese, University of Padua, Galileo Science Park, ELCA, and associated SMEs.

Actions

What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.

Rete di Imprese Luce in Veneto is one of the initiators, financial supporters, and developers of the Innovation Lab, created in collaboration with the IUAV University of Venice and regional authorities. The project established two facilities for innovation in the lighting sector:

a) Light & Green Lab – within the Technical Physics Laboratory at IUAV University in Mestre, dedicated to lighting fixture certification and electrical safety testing,

b) Light Design Village – at Villa Cà Marcello in Piombino Dese, Luce's headquarters in Veneto, offers over 300 m² for training, experimentation, and prototyping in lighting design.

The Innovation Lab enhances competitiveness and innovation capacity by combining research, training, certification, and testing. Both spaces represent a strategic investment for sustainable, energy-efficient, and digital lighting development, increasing the competitiveness of local companies in international markets.

Results and benefits

This investment connects the business, academic, and training sectors, fostering innovation in the lighting industry. The Innovation Lab will act as a meeting point between academia and industry, creating an ecosystem that promotes collaboration among universities, research centres, science parks, and companies. It will develop advanced lighting solutions and training programs that prepare new professionals for evolving market needs.

The Lab also aims to engage local secondary schools, offering students hands-on experience and interaction with industry players, while providing companies with a new generation of skilled professionals.

Companies will have access to advanced technologies for experimentation, transforming ideas into practical solutions focused on sustainability, well-being, and safety. Collaboration between businesses, academia, and training institutions will sustain continuous research and innovation across the sector.

The Innovation Lab will function as a platform bringing together research, technology, and creativity to support lighting companies, especially SMEs and professionals driving the sector's growth, leveraging digital transformation opportunities.

The project was presented to the authorities on December 18, 2024, while the inauguration is scheduled for July 2026.

3.1.14 E-DIH Dante: The evolution of the cluster ecosystem

Name of the cluster/association:
SMILE: National Technological Cluster on "Smart Living Technologies"

Country: IT - Italy

Industrial ecosystem: Cross-sectoral

Contact
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Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
The National Technological Cluster SMILE is one of twelve clusters funded by the Italian Ministry of Research, specialized in *smart living technologies.* It addresses key challenges related to active and healthy aging, smart living environments, and digital transformation for healthcare, social care, and the Silver Economy.
Mandated by the Ministry, SMILE acts as a national collector and driver, a role received after a public selection process. Its main mission has been to build a national ecosystem, a structured public-private aggregation of companies, research centres, universities, caregivers, users, policymakers, and other stakeholders, acting as an engine of sustainable economic growth for both its focus areas and the national economy.
Thanks to coordinated activities and the ecosystem created, SMILE successfully evolved from a cluster model to the establishment of a European Digital Innovation Hub (EDIH), under the *Digital Europe Programme*.
The resulting EDIH, called *DANTE* (*Digital Solutions for a Healthy, Active and Smart Life*), is funded by the European Commission and represents a best-practice example of how a national cluster can grow to provide advanced services for SMEs, public administrations, and end users. Through its leadership in DANTE, SMILE continues to address key challenges in smart living and active aging, promoting digital transformation.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
The development of the DANTE EDIH has involved a diverse group of stakeholders: National Institutions, Industry partners and SMEs, Academic and research organizations, social care providers, users' organisations.

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
The Cluster SMILE has coordinated multiple initiatives, including both completed and ongoing projects, all contributing to its mission of integrating innovative technologies into daily life. In its institutional role, SMILE focuses on coordinating activities, building partnerships, and guiding its members' participation. It strongly supports the digital transition of SMEs, public administrations, and professionals in the fields of active and healthy aging, *Ambient Assisted Living (AAL),* and smart environments by promoting digital solutions that enhance safety, reduce loneliness, and support individuals with physical or mental health conditions. It also provides caregivers with digital tools for continuous patient monitoring and more efficient care delivery. To achieve this, SMILE has built a national ecosystem — a distributed network with a central hub in the Puglia Region and nine interconnected regional nodes. Under its leadership, stakeholders have successfully tackled challenges such as integrating advanced technologies (AI, cybersecurity, and HPC), improving accessibility for vulnerable populations, and supporting caregivers through digital innovation.These coordinated actions promote economic sustainability while offering scalable, high-quality solutions that improve healthcare and living conditions.

Results and benefits
First of all, we consider the entire process itself a success story. Through SMILE's strategic vision and leadership, the Cluster achieved the ambitious goal of creating a European Digital Innovation Hub (EDIH), a key European Commission instrument for accelerating digital transformation across SMEs, scale-up companies, and society, moving toward *Transition 5.0* and *Society 5.0,* with a focus on *Digital Healthcare* and *Digitalising SMEs* and *scale-ups companies*.
The DANTE EDIH, led by the National Technological Cluster SMILE, has delivered significant results in promoting digital transformation for healthy, active aging and smart living environments. It has strengthened the connection between social and health policies at regional, national, and international levels, fostering collaboration among citizens, professionals, and companies.
This ensures that technological innovation is effectively embedded in public services and policy frameworks. Through these accomplishments, SMILE and DANTE EDIH stand as a model of success in digital transformation.

SMART LIVING TECHNOLOGIES

3.1.15 The MEDIC NEST Model for Sustainable Cluster Collaboration

Name of the cluster/association:
Imago-Mol Cluster

Country: RO - Romania

Industrial ecosystem: Health

Contact
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Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
MEDIC NEST Meta-Cluster in Precision Medicine emerged from a COSME European Cluster Excellence Partnership led by IMAGO-MOL (Romania), together with MEDVIA (Belgium), Hellenic BioCluster (Greece) and Cluster SIVI (Spain). Although Europe has recognised strengths in precision and digital health, the partners observed fragmented innovation, uneven regional capacities and difficulties for startups to test, validate and commercialise their solutions across borders.The MEDIC NEST COSME project highlighted several shared gaps: the absence of interregional value chains, limited access to testing and validation infrastructures, insufficient regulatory expertise and disconnected support services.
To address these challenges, the collaboration evolved into a broader European initiative, now comprising 20 members and reinforced by the InnoMedCatalyst (I3 Programme) and Clusters4Health (COSME EU-UA) projects. As an open, voluntary alliance without membership fees, MEDIC NEST demonstrates how trust-based cooperation can strengthen Europe's capacity to innovate in precision and digital medicine.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
MEDIC NEST was developed with the support of North East RDA (Romania) as facilitator and expanded through its members participating in the InnoMed-Catalyst and Clusters4Health projects.

MEDIC NEST

InnoMedCatalyst is coordinated by North East RDA and implemented in partnership with IMAGO-MOL, BIOVIA, Hellenic BioCluster, Cluster SIVI, Clust-ER Health, Health & Life Sciences Cluster Bulgaria, Health Cluster Portugal and LifeScience Kraków Cluster, BIOCAT, InPULSE Partners, Startup Madeira and EUREGHA. ***Clusters4Health***, implemented by IMAGO-MOL and CLUSTERO, supports the capacity building of Ukrainian clusters—Rivne Interregional Medical Cluster (Rivne TACMED) and ProMedMan—together with ClustER Health, LifeScience Kraków Cluster, Oslo Cancer Cluster and BIOCAT.
Through MEDIC NEST, a wide set of ecosystem actors collaborate: innovative companies and startups, universities and research centres, hospitals and clinical providers, testing and validation infrastructures, public authorities, investors and accelerators. Together, these stakeholders contribute to shaping and strengthening the Meta-Cluster.

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
The initial collaboration between four clusters developed into a structured Meta-Cluster through continuous knowledge exchange, mapping of regional capabilities and the identification of cross-border synergies. These steps built trust and a shared strategic direction.
The partnership supported startup and SME mobility by facilitating participation in major European events, investor forums and matchmaking activities, improving access to partners, testing infrastructures, clinical environments and investors.
A key milestone was launching the ***InnoMedCatalyst Startup Accelerator*** under the I3 Programme, offering tailored regulatory, clinical and business mentoring, technical validation and investor-readiness support. Twenty-one startups advanced their solutions and established new collaborations through this programme.

Within ***Clusters4Health***, the ***EU–Ukraine–Norway Clusters Accelerator Lab*** enhances governance models and support tools for Ukrainian clusters. Additionally, MEDIC NEST clusters cooperate with Rubik Hub to support ***15 Ukrainian startups*** in digital health, healthtech and medtech, providing mentoring, networking and visibility opportunities.
Together, these actions laid the foundation for an ***agile, trust-based Meta-Cluster*** that accelerates innovation in precision and digital medicine.

Results and benefits
MEDIC NEST generated clear results, establishing a European good practice model for cross-border collaboration in health innovation. Through the InnoMedCatalyst Accelerator, ***21 startups*** benefited from specialised mentoring and investor-readiness training, with the ***Bologna Demo Day*** significantly boosting their visibility and connections with partners and potential investors. Clusters engaged in Clusters4Health are currently improving their governance and services through peer learning and the EU–Ukraine–Norway Clusters Accelerator Lab, strengthening their capacity to support innovators.
The collaboration with Rubik Hub enabled tailored support for ***15 Ukrainian startups***, reinforcing cross-border solidarity and contributing to the resilience of Ukrainian healthtech entrepreneurship. Overall, MEDIC NEST strengthened value chains, enhanced cooperation and facilitated knowledge transfer across regions, demonstrating that a light, open and trust-based Meta-Cluster can effectively connect eco-systems and accelerate Europe's innovation potential in precision and personalised medicine.

More information about the best practice

3.2 Clusters can boost SME's capacity for innovation, employment and IP/trademarks.

Boosting Innovation and Employment for SMEs

Clusters provide a conducive environment that propels SMEs towards higher levels of inno-vation and job creation. By being part of a cluster, SMEs can collectively be more innovative, create more jobs, and register more international trademarks and patents compared to operating independently. The cluster policy within the EU exemplifies this, where clusters account for almost 25% of total EU employment, indicating a substantial impact on job creation.

EUROPEAN CLUSTERS ALLIANCE

Empowering IP Utilisation for Innovation

SMEs collaborating in clusters are encouraged to leverage IP for innovation, which is a significant aspect of their growth and economic contribution. For instance, a study by the European Patent Office (EPO) and the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) demonstrated that SMEs with at least one IP right are 21% more likely to experience a growth period. The ability to leverage IP for innovation is a crucial element in enhancing the innovative capacity of SMEs.

Clusters facilitate cooperation between SMEs and large companies involving full value chains

Cluster's collaborative networks provide a platform for SMEs to engage with larger corporations, promoting linkages within global value chains, and creating "open spaces" for cross-sectoral fertilization and value chain innovation.

The integration of SMEs into global value chains can significantly contribute to global income, job creation, and economic development. Clusters, by fostering a collaborative environment, can ease the integration of SMEs into these value chains, enabling them to cooperate with larger corporations and mutually benefit from the shared value created.

Knowledge and Innovation Networks

Clusters facilitate the formation of knowledge and innovation networks, which are crucial for SMEs and startups. These networks can serve various purposes, including dealing with IP rights (e.g., patents, trademarks, designs), which are integral for protecting innovations and fostering a culture of innovation among SMEs.

3.2.1 The European Digital Innovation Hub in Transilvania

Name of the cluster/association:
Transilvania IT Cluster

Country: RO - Romania

Industrial ecosystem: Cross-sectoral

Contact
Laura Lamurean
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Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
Transilvania IT Cluster is the orchestrator of The European Digital Innovation Hub in Transilvania (TEDIHT), which was established in 2017 to support the digitalization potential of small and medium-sized companies and the public sector in the North-West Region of Romania and not only. The initiative was unique at the time, and *TEDIHT* managed to be a catalyst for regional innovation and a strategic point for Romanian companies to reach digital maturity. Transilvania IT Cluster managed to make TEDIHT a provider of competences, know-how, innovation programs, support for startups and SMEs, and also to have the vision of increasing competitivity through an innovative mix between technologies, skills, systemic approach, operational models, to engage relevant regional stakeholders and to proactively adapt to European and global trends.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
The project partners are Transilvania IT Cluster (orchestrator), OLI-Hygia, Babes - Bolyai University, the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, the National Research-Development Institute for Isotopic and Molecular Technologies.

TRANSILVANIA IT CLUSTER

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
TEDIHT, orchestrated by Transilvania IT Cluster, has strong expertise and extensive experience in digitalization. It provides services for testing advanced digital technologies, developing digital skills and training, supporting access to investments, and building an innovation ecosystem that fosters collaboration and networking.
The hub operates two active working groups — Digital Health and Industry 4.0 — and coordinates the national network of Romanian DIHs on the DIHNET.EU platform, while also initiating the national DIH association, RODIH. Recognized in 2019 by the European Commission's JRC as Romania's first “Fully Operational DIH,” TEDIHT is currently part of more than 12 international networks. To date, it has delivered innovation and digital transformation services to over 70 companies through three selection calls and is preparing to support more than 30 public institutions and authorities with digitalization services.
Through its Innovation Ecosystem and Networking activities, TEDIHT has organized numerous events to promote its services, including a launch event in Cluj-Napoca, more than 10 Digital Talks in Cluj-Napoca, Oradea and Baia Mare, onboarding sessions for beneficiaries, and two major international events — the IQ Digital Summit Cluj and IQ Digital Summit Oradea — organized in collaboration with Upgrade 100 and gathering over 2,000 participants.
In 2025, TEDIHT organized the Transilvania Digital Innovation Summit, attended by more than 530 participants. Additionally, the hub continues to run extensive information and awareness campaigns on digitalization, reaching over 1,500 companies and organizations.

Results and benefits
SMEs in Romania remain less digitalized compared to the European average. According to the European Commission's Country Report for Romania, only 53% of local SMEs have a basic level of digitization, with even lower rates for advanced technical capabilities.
In this context, TEDIHT acts as a “one-stop shop” for companies seeking to accelerate their digital transformation. Recent DMA assessments for companies that benefited from TEDIHT services show a ***12% overall increase in their level of digitalization***, with some companies even ***doubling their digitalization score within one year***, demonstrating the strong impact of the hub's interventions. In parallel, TEDIHT has carried out extensive ***information and awareness campaigns on the importance of digitalization***, reaching a wide range of companies and organizations across the country. To further support beneficiaries, TEDIHT experts have developed a ***Digital Transformation Guide***, which includes ***best practices from TEDIHT-supported companies and the lessons learned throughout these processes.***

More information about the best practice

Linktree *YoutTube*

THE EUROPEAN DIGITAL INNOVATION HUB IN TRANSILVANIA

3.2.2 French Initiatives and collaborations in EU Projects

Name of the cluster/association:
SAFE Cluster

Country: FR - France

Industrial ecosystem: Aerospace and Defence

Contact
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www.safecluster.com

Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
The 3 clusters, SAFE, SCS and SYSTEMATIC, in the South and Ile-de-France regions, have been participating in the SecurIT European cascade funding project (GA N° 101005292) since September 2021.
This 3-year project is an INNOSUP project led by SAFE, in conjunction with 7 other European partners including the 2 French clusters. This partnership is a collaborative project aimed at structuring a security value chain, and providing direct funding to European companies to develop prototypes or demonstrators of innovative security solutions for safer, more resilient and secure territories and cities.
The 3 French clusters have complementary expertise and an ecosystem that will provide high added value for this project, as they operate in different segments in terms of market applications and technologies.
The added value of this collaboration lies in the synergy and emulation created around this project, which acts at the direct service of companies and provides dedicated funding for European SMEs.
This project addresses more global issues, on a European scale, and includes European partners from different regions: Denmark, Belgium, Netherlands, Poland, and Lithuania.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
3 French clusters: SAFE, SCS and SYSTEMATIC

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
The innovative aspect of the approach lies in the partnership established at European level for interclustering, and in getting bodies that might normally be seen as competing or working in silos to work and collaborate together. The complexity of the approach lies both in the structuring of the project, which aims to enable the Clusters' ecosystems to benefit from funding tickets, while at the same time acting on a European scale.
SecurIT is a structuring project that aims to support cluster members. Two calls for projects were launched during the implementation of the SecurIT project, with the aim of selecting and funding 42 collaborative projects, led by a minimum of 2 European SMEs. A total of 95 European SMEs benefited from these European funds.

Results and benefits
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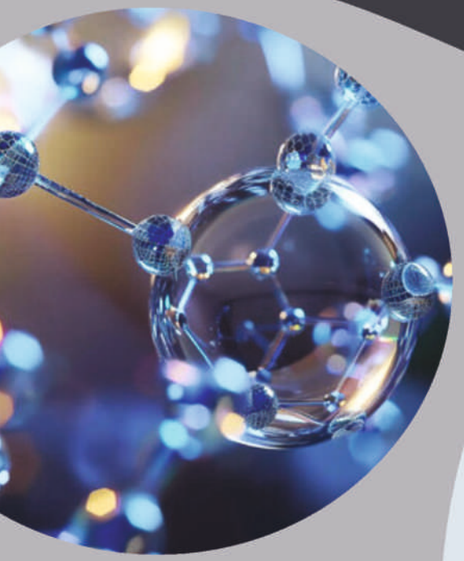
A total of 95 European SMEs benefited from these European funds.

3.2.3 Building a Sustainable European Ecosystem

Name of the cluster/association:
NANOPROGRESS, z.s.

Country: CZ - Czechia

Industrial ecosystem: Cross-sectoral



Contact
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www.nanoprogress.eu

Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
Establishing a legal entity involves navigating complex European and national regulations, requiring coordination and alignment among diverse stakeholders. SMEs often face difficulties accessing research and development funding, making investor and public program support essential. Influencing policy demands expertise and lobbying efforts to shape favourable regulations. Promoting achievements relies on strategic communication and engagement with key partners, while organizing events on digitalization and environmental technologies calls for relevant content and sufficient resources. Providing tailor-made services such as business setup advice and technology transfer support requires specialized knowledge, and staying up to date with technological progress is crucial for sustained success.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
Academia: Universities, R&D centres, KET centres; Civil society: National television; Industry: Cluster organisations, Startups, Spin-offs, Companies; Government and policy makers: Ministry of Industry and Trade, National business agency, Czech Invest, National cluster association, Water Smart Territories S3 platform, Municipalities, regional and national innovation councils.

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
Nanoprogress's journey began in 2014, with its first EU project proposal developed in collaboration with European cluster partners.
Since then, it has built strong Cluster strategic partnerships supporting SMEs, researchers, and key stakeholders in excellence, innovation, internationalization and smart specialization.
In 2018, these efforts led to the creation of the European legal entity Ad-Pack EEIG, securing the long-term sustainability of the partnerships. Later, to improve management and expand benefits, Nanoprogress aimed to nationalize Ad-Pack but instead co-founded CEDEG, a new entity ensuring ongoing European cluster cooperation, including ESCP-4i, ESCP-4x, ESCP-4s, and EUROCLUSTERS.
Today, CEDEG brings together over 2,247 entities, including 1,768 companies and 337 innovation actors from 16 countries, continuing to drive innovation, internationalization, and policy development across Europe.

Results and benefits
Innovation Support Activities (INGENIOUS and VIDA projects)
- Financial support for cross-border cross-sectoral innovation: 6,454,133 EUR
- SMEs benefiting from activities and innovation services: 1,990 from 16 countries
- Patent applications resulting from innovation projects: 8
- New/significantly improved solutions resulting from innovation projects: 64
- Attendees at international events: 661

Internationalisation Support Activities (GSSC and AdPack2 projects)
- Financial support for internationalisation: 1,015,135 EUR
- Highly engaged SMEs: 72 from 12 countries
- Cooperation agreements signed with international partners per country: 9
- Resulting cooperation projects between consortium partners' SMEs and international businesses: 12
- Events where the project partners participated and disseminated: 308

Policy Making & Excellence Support Activities (INNO-DROP and Blues projects)
- Financial support for excellence: 382,604 EUR
- Number of cluster organisations benefited: 68
- Number of exchanges through the ClusterXchange pilot scheme (including a breakdown by type of organisation: cluster organisations, SMEs, technology centres, other scaling-up support organisations): 53
- Number of strategic analyses produced (e.g. cluster Innovation and growth potential, value chain analysis, European and global, smart specialisation analysis): 21
- Bilateral meetings and peer learning meetings: 110

Why It Was a Success Story
- Harnessing the vast potential of key cluster organisations as engines for innovation, internationalisation and strengthening supportive policies for European SMEs and innovation actors to flourish and be more resilient.
- Very complex and demanding, impacting a high number of European SMEs, cluster organisations and innovation actors.
- Targeted approach for supporting innovation uptakes, boosting internationalisation, digital and green transition, and securing long-term sustainability.

NANOPROGRESS
THE NANOTECHNOLOGY CLUSTER

3.2.4 The Plant Intercluster

Name of the cluster/association:
VEGEPOLYS VALLEY

Country: FR - France

Industrial ecosystem: Agri-Food

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Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
Nowadays, agriculture is facing the global challenge to feed the world. Climate changes, reduction of pesticides, sustainable use of resources are strongly impacting our sector and particularly plant industry.
To overpass these barriers, several plant clusters decided to join their effort and facilitate the linkage between innovative projects.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
European Clusters from the following countries: France, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, Poland, Romania, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, in collaboration with clusters from Canada and Lebanon.

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
15 years ago, VEGEPOLYS VALLEY initiated an alliance of European clusters involved in plant innovation: the Plant Inter Cluster (PIC). Made up of participants covering 110 European countries, the PIC aims to:

- Promote exchanges of good practices in the organization and governance of clusters.
- Support businesses, with a particular focus on SMEs, based on a quadruple helix approach
- Support technological cooperation and partnerships for innovation.
- Promote the internationalization of our members and business opportunities
- Develop strong international network of clusters to strengthen the value chain of plant production in Europe, recognized as the leading cluster alliance for the plant industry by its members, partners and policy makers.

Results and benefits
The Plant InterCluster (PIC) network was created to represent plant expertise at the European level and to support the international development of clusters and their members, including companies, training organizations, and research centres. PIC members meet monthly to coordinate on international events, shared priorities, and joint projects aligned with European policies. The network gathers complementary skills in areas such as plant improvement, plant and seed health, plant-based, food/feed/health products, fresh product preservation, and innovative cultivation methods, serving as a gateway to European and international collaboration and funding opportunities. Through the PIC, the cluster has implemented beneficial actions and projects, including the SUAVE Eurocluster project led by VEGEPOLYS VALLEY, which supports innovation through cascade funding for SMEs.
In 2025 the PIC gathers 20 clusters, representing more than 1 000 members. PIC members are convinced that plant innovation and economic development are inseparable from agriculture, which is now absolutely essential for the future of the planet.

pic Plant InterCluster

VEGEPOLYS VALLEY
INTERNATIONAL PLANT CLUSTER

3.2.5 Start-up Internationalisation

Name of the cluster/association:
Smart Cluster - Start Up HUB

Country: SK - Slovakia

Industrial ecosystem: Cross-sectoral

Contact
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Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
Start-up companies became members of our Cluster. There were variety of business concepts from intelligent furniture, special food production, concept of sharing of sport equipment, intelligent packaging, or special sensors for public transportation, parking and traffic organization as well as intelligent vertical farming. However, there was a common problem typical for all beginning companies. There was lack of finances, international experiences and partners for exchange of experiences and cooperation. Managers of the cluster wanted to help them to overcome all these shortages and push them on higher level of activities supported by international best practices. Young companies are usually lacking finances and capacities for overcoming these obstacles .

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
We have used capacities and support of several institutions - Slovak Ministry of Economy, SARIO- Slovak Agency for Development of Investments and Trade, Taiwan Representative office in Slovakia, Taiwan Computer Association and its' specific soft-landing program - Start-up Terrace.

StartUP HUB
Smart Klaster

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
In 2023, start-ups had the opportunity to join the Taiwanese Start-up Terrace program and attend one of Taiwan's largest Smart City Exhibitions. However, they lacked information, funding, and experience with such international activities.
We combined several stakeholder support schemes to cover costs and guided companies through the administrative and organizational process. As a result, 10 companies and 12 representatives participated in the one-month program in March 2023, visiting leading tech companies, meeting successful start-ups, presenting their solutions to venture capital funds, and joining workshops and meetings with academia, industry, and consultants.
The program culminated with their participation in the Smart City Expo 2023 in the startup section.

Results and benefits
The main benefit for the start-ups was gaining practical exposure to the international startup ecosystem. Some established contacts with potential business partners, others with investors.
The most valuable outcomes were joint activities to improve their products and explore future collaboration. According to participants, the key benefit was experiencing how their ideas are viewed and evaluated in an international context.

3.2.6 SMEs Go Digital

Name of the cluster/association
Silesia Automotive & Advanced Manufacturing Cluster (SA&AM)

Country: PL - Poland

Industrial ecosystem: Mobility-Transport-Automotive

Contact
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Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
Digital technologies and sustainability are gaining increasing importance in the automotive sector. Previously, vehicle manufacturers required sustainability only from TIER 1 suppliers, but under the *EU Green Deal* they now expect it across the entire supply chain, including TIER 2 and TIER 3 suppliers. Automotive SMEs must therefore adapt by integrating social and environmental responsibility and business ethics into their operations.
This transformation requires investment in modern manufacturing technologies, real-time monitoring systems, new HR policies, and employee upskilling. To support this process, the cluster coordinator, together with advanced technology providers and integrators, launched the pilot programme "*Digital Transformation Evolutionary Industrial Modernisation for Revolution 4.0*" in 2020, targeting over 700 industrial SMEs with information on implementing Industry 4.0 solutions.
Because of the pandemic, planned physical meetings were replaced by online sessions where SMEs expressed concerns about digitalisation and competitiveness.
Many preferred individual consultations over group discussions, reducing the effectiveness of traditional approaches. As a result, a more practical model was proposed, aimed at bringing successful examples closer to companies and encouraging active dialogue on digital transformation.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
Silesia Automotive & Advanced Manufacturing Cluster staff and Advanced Technology providers and integrators – SA&AM Cluster Members

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
SA&AM Cluster has developed a new service called *SMEs GO DIGITAL*, created for small and medium-sized manufacturing companies to support their digital transformation and the implementation of Industry 4.0 solutions. The service combines two complementary areas, demonstration and training, and advisory and consulting. The demonstration and training part uses the Industry 4.0 Mobile Demonstration Centre and the Virtual Factory "Digital SMEs."
The Mobile Demonstration Centre is a 50-square-meter mobile space mounted on a semi-trailer, equipped to showcase the latest digital and automation technologies that increase production efficiency. The Virtual Factory is a two-level VR and AR environment that reproduces a real manufacturing enterprise.
The first level presents a complete digital factory, including warehouses, production halls for plastics and metal processing, and design, marketing, and management offices, while the second level contains case studies and interactive modules provided by cluster members, featuring videos, live demonstrations, and exercises that can be updated as new technologies are introduced. The advisory and consulting part offers personalized guidance from Industry 4.0 experts. In cooperation with each company, the expert develops a Digital Transformation Plan and guides the enterprise through a five-step methodology that helps assess current digital readiness, identify improvement areas, and implement tailored solutions effectively.

Results and benefits
In 2022 and 2023, during the implementation of the SMEs Go Digital service, nearly 400 participants from manufacturing SMEs benefited from demonstration workshops held at the Industry 4.0 Mobile Demonstration Centre and through the Go Digital Virtual Factory.
For eight SMEs, SA&AM Cluster experts developed detailed digital transformation plans that will serve as each company's digitalization strategy for the coming years. The SMEs Go Digital service has also been integrated into the Digital Innovation Hub managed by the SA&AM Cluster coordinator and will continue to be offered jointly within the SA&AM Cluster and the E-DIH Silesia Smart System.
This expansion will increase accessibility and impact for a broader group of SMEs in the region. As the first comprehensive service of its kind developed by the SA&AM Cluster, SMEs Go Digital has generated strong interest among SMEs, becoming a driving force for further development of the cluster's support services addressing 21st-century challenges.
The cluster is now extending the service to include automation, robotization, and digitalization elements focused on sustainable development, efficient resource and waste management, and sustainable product and process design.

More information about the best practice

silesia automotive & advanced manufacturing

3.2.7 Innovative Water Management Solutions

Name of the cluster/association:
CREA Hydro&Energy

Country: CZ - Czechia

Industrial ecosystem: Energy-Renewables

Contact
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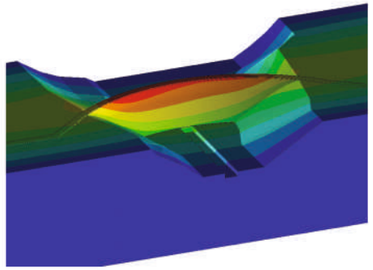
Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
CREA Hydro&Energy connected three Czech companies in a research project that developed a digital twin of a water management structure, which was then provided to the river basin authority for pilot testing.
The cluster, a long-standing member of the National Cluster Association, brings together 26 members and has completed 37 projects in the fields of water management technologies, water and waste management, and renewable energy. Its members work jointly on research, development, product innovation, and sector promotion both in the Czech Republic and internationally.
Between 2021 and 2023, the cluster implemented the Digital Twin of a Dam project in cooperation with VODNÍ DÍLA – TBD a.s., a company with extensive experience in water infrastructure, Designtec, s.r.o., specializing in numerical simulations and software development, and the state enterprise Povodí Moravy, responsible for river basin management.

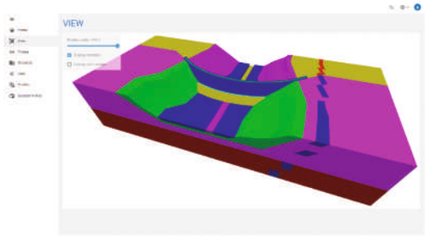
Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
CREA Hydro&Energy / VODNÍ DÍLA - TBD a.s. / Designtec, s.r.o. / Povodí Moravy

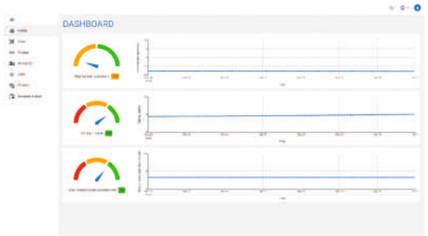
Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
Using the Bystřička water structure as an example, a digital twin was created and provided to the river basin authority for pilot testing. During the project, the quality of the digital twin was significantly improved through the application of machine learning. The digital twin is now being promoted at international conferences.

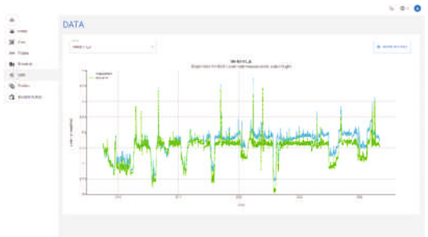
Results and benefits
Thanks to the ***CREA Hydro&Energy*** cluster, a multidisciplinary collaboration was created that enabled a technology company to enter the water management sector. A traditional organization gained a new tool that strengthened its professional services, and the state enterprise received a model that improves safety, operation, maintenance planning, and staff training. The model's applicability and efficiency are enhanced through machine learning. At a dam equipped with a digital twin, VODNÍ DÍLA – TBD can plan maintenance more effectively and monitor sensors to ensure functionality and immediate access to safety data. For Povodí Moravy, this leads to reduced operational and maintenance costs while ensuring higher safety standards. The consortium of VODNÍ DÍLA – TBD, Designtec, and ***CREA Hydro&Energy*** is now preparing the digital twin for the Dalešice Dam (EDA), currently under research and development with funding from the OP TAK Application program.

More information about the best practice









3.2.8 CyberFESTSPIELE

Name of the cluster/association:
CyberLAGO e.V. - digital competence network

Country: DE - Germany

Industrial ecosystem: Digital

Contact
Nicole Amann
nicole.amann@cyberlago.net
www.cyberlago.net

Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
As a network for the digital economy and IT in the international Lake Constance region, cyberLAGO e.V. partnered with Bodenseeforum Konstanz to create an all-day event combining inspiration, discussions, learning, and hands-on experiences. Entertainment was also part of the program, featuring theatre, art, and magic, all under the theme of digital transformation.
With cyberFESTSPIELE, cyberLAGO aims to guide companies through the complex landscape of digital transformation by showcasing current trends and their relevance, especially for SMEs, while fostering new skills in areas such as new work, leadership, and digital technologies.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
The cyberFESTSPIELE embody digital transformation and demonstrate how close collaboration and active co-creation can come to life, a concept developed jointly by cyberLAGO members and the Bodenseeforum Konstanz team.

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
With cyberFESTSPIELE, cyberLAGO e.V. organized far more than a typical digital transformation conference in March 2024. Combining learning, interaction, and entertainment, the event, developed with Bodenseeforum Konstanz and cluster members, brought together entrepreneurs, innovators, managers, and digital experts from business, science, and administration. The 190 participants engaged in diverse, hands-on experiences: acquiring future skills in the Future Skills Parcour, practicing co-creation and innovation in the Spring Meadow station, exploring multi-perspectivity through Breakfast Toast Painting, testing leadership in the Ubongo Mini Challenge, and teamwork in the Space Team. They also experimented with deepfake face alteration, fake news recognition, and password cracking against a chatbot, while exploring voice cloning and purchasing AI-generated artworks using cyberCOINs.

Results and benefits
The cyberFESTSPIELE were a clear success, with the new format enthusiastically received by participants. The innovative approach fostered strong knowledge exchange and engagement throughout the event. Nearly a year later, demand for the second edition remains high. By addressing current topics and presenting them in an inspiring way, each participant left with valuable insights — a key factor behind the event's lasting success.

More information about the best practice

cyberLAGO
digital competence network

3.2.9 Remote Healthcare Innovation

Name of the cluster/association:
Hellenic Digital Health Cluster - HDHC

Country: GR - Greece

Industrial ecosystem: Cross-sectoral

Contact
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https://hdhc.gr/en

Challenges

What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?

One of HDHC's main objectives is to foster collaboration in R&D initiatives and support the creation of meaningful synergies among its members.

Remote Care and Telemedicine are core focus areas for many of our members.

The starting point for this good practice was the invitation to join the IRHIS proposal during its development stage, a key opportunity to bring together cluster members already active in digital solutions for remote healthcare.

IRHIS (Interoperable Remote Health Innovation brought to Scale) responds to Europe's growing need for scalable remote care, particularly in the context of ageing populations and strained healthcare systems. It brings together 21 partners from 13 European regions, forming a strong interregional alliance.

Four HDHC members, Ergobyte Informatics S.A., Gnomon Informatics S.A., Affidea Greece and APOKATASTASI SA, which are MedTech SMEs, diagnostic and rehabilitation centers respectively, are involved contributing to the development of demonstration labs in Intensive Care, Musculoskeletal Disorders, and Neurological Rehabilitation.

Our goal was to help members scale their innovations, integrate into EU value chains, and strengthen their position in the global digital health market.

Stakeholders

Who was involved in the development of the good practice?

The IRHIS consortium consists of 21 partners, including EU clusters, MedTech SMEs, universities, hospitals, and rehabilitation centres.

Post-approval, the project actively engages SMEs, patients, caregivers, healthcare providers, regional authorities, R&D institutions, and EU networks as stakeholders and beneficiaries.

Actions

What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.

In the first year of IRHIS, HDHC has taken several concrete actions:

- Mapping the EU Remote Care Ecosystem: Coordinated the creation of a comprehensive EU-wide mapping of key remote care initiatives, startups, projects, and networks, including accelerators and funding bodies.
- Stakeholder Interviews: Conducted interviews with key ecosystem players from multiple regions, gathering insights on market access, policy gaps, and innovation barriers for European SMEs in Remote Care and RPM (Remote Patient Monitoring).
- Ecosystem Engagement: Actively contributed to the Ecosystem Building work package, including development of the S3 Policy Guide and planning of EU-wide policy workshops.
- Mobilizing National Stakeholders: Engaged Greek tech companies, public authorities, and ministries to map and promote the Greek remote care landscape.
- Consortium Meetings: Participated in ongoing partner coordination meetings to align deliverables and maintain progress.
- Visibility & Promotion: Promoted the IRHIS project and member innovations at national and EU events, expanding visibility and access to international collaboration.

Results and benefits

Through coordinated efforts, HDHC has supported its members to:

- Participate in EU-funded initiatives and expand their international footprint.
- Build long-term R&D partnerships across Europe.
- Engage in co-design with end-users and validate solutions in real-life pilot settings.
- Enhance their technological offerings and promote them across multiple EU markets.
- Access more innovation pathways and unlock new growth opportunities.

IRHIS stands as a milestone in HDHC's trajectory since its founding in 2021. It reflects a well-organized, outward-looking approach to EU R&D engagement, member support, and the broader effort to accelerate digital health innovation across Europe.

More information about the best practice

HDHC
Hellenic Digital Health Cluster

3.2.10 Internationalisation via Coopetition

Name of the cluster/association:
Bulgarian Furniture Cluster/ LIGNA GROUP

Country: BG - Bulgaria

Industrial ecosystem: Cultural and Creative Industries

Contact
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www.furnitureclusterbg.com

Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
Twenty years ago, my partner Anelia Kassabova and I founded Ligna Group, an interior design and FF&E procurement company focused on creating spaces that unite creativity, functionality, and quality. Early in our journey, we discovered that Bulgaria's furniture industry faced a significant challenge: it was deeply fragmented. Individual companies operated independently, making it difficult to meet the requirements of large European contracts or maintain consistent quality across multiple producers. This became especially evident as we began working for global brands such as Marriott, Hilton, and L'Oréal, where high standards and reliability were essential.
It soon became clear that the industry needed a new model—one built on unity, shared standards, and the ability to adapt quickly to changes in the international market. This realisation led to the creation of the Bulgarian Furniture Cluster, formed as a platform where companies could join forces, combine strengths, and act as a single, agile ecosystem capable of sensing market shifts and transforming them into opportunities.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
The Bulgarian Furniture Cluster grew from a belief that success is best achieved together. More than 70 companies—manufacturers, designers, material suppliers, and service providers—came together around shared values and the desire to build something stronger than any one of us could accomplish alone. International clients, partners, and trade organizations also became part of this collaborative network, built on trust, transparency, and a common goal of raising the profile of Bulgarian furniture production worldwide.

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
The evolution of Bulgarian Furniture Cluster is rooted in what we call “coopetition”—a meaningful intersection between cooperation and healthy competition. This approach became the engine of our internationalisation efforts, encouraging companies that once viewed each other as rivals to recognise the greater value of working together.
We began by creating an open structure where every member could contribute ideas and take responsibility for shared outcomes. Transparency, communication, and respect laid the foundation for trust. Once united, companies were able to pool resources, exchange expertise, and raise each other's standards, while still maintaining their individual identities and competitive spirit.
This coopetitive model allowed us to act like a single, highly responsive system. Together, we could detect global trends earlier, understand client expectations more deeply, and adapt our offer more rapidly than any company could have achieved alone.
By presenting integrated solutions—from interior concept and engineering to production, logistics, and installation, we gave international clients the confidence of working with one coordinated partner capable of delivering quality and reliability at scale.
Across the cluster, diversity of experience and background—both within Ligna Group and among members, became a source of creativity and resilience. Innovation flourished, not despite the differences between companies, but because those differences

Bulgarian Furniture Cluster

were brought together under a shared vision. Representing Bulgaria collectively on international markets further strengthened our position, making the cluster visible, trusted, and recognised worldwide.

Results and benefits
Today, Bulgarian Furniture Cluster is acknowledged as one of the strongest contract furniture group in Eastern Europe. We have delivered more than 300 hotels and 25,600 rooms for leading brands including Marriott, Hilton, IHG, Accor, B&B Hotels, Hyatt, Hoxton, and Circle Collection. The benefits of the coopetition model are evident in the performance of our members. By working together while keeping a healthy competitive edge, companies have improved their capabilities, expanded their reach, and significantly increased their competitiveness on the international market. Most members now export the majority of their production, supported by the cluster's unified market presence and the commercial representation of Ligna Group.
The cluster has become more than a business network—it is a living ecosystem that continues to sense market changes, adapt quickly, and bring Bulgaria's strengths to the global stage. What began as an effort to overcome fragmentation has evolved into a sustainable model of internationalisation, driven by the belief that cooperation and competition, when combined intelligently, can elevate an entire industry.

3.2.11 InnoDesign

Name of the cluster/association:
Lublin Medicine Cluster

Country: PL - Poland

Industrial ecosystem: Health

Contact
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Challenges

What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?

The starting point for the InnoDesign initiative (Lublin Medicine Cluster's internal project) was the recognition of needs and problems that require solutions and to network individuals and entities (Cluster's members and partners) capable of working on improvements or innovations within an open innovation model. This idea emerged from the growing demand to address specific technological, organizational, and social challenges identified by end users, including individuals with special needs.

The initiative was built upon the Cluster's unique capacity to connect a diverse range of stakeholders across the healthcare ecosystem and leverage their expertise for meaningful impact. The main goal of the InnoDesign project is to engage Cluster members and collaborating entities in the development of innovative solutions and improvements to respond to challenges faced by end users.

Through this initiative, the Cluster seeks to i.a.:

- Monitor and identify pressing needs and problems that require solutions
- Facilitate networking and collaboration between over 190 Cluster members, including over 150 businesses, 9 hospitals, 10 higher education and research institutions, and 12 business environment organizations, as well as third-sector partners.

Stakeholders

Who was involved in the development of the good practice?

The InnoDesign good practice involves a broad range of Cluster members and partners, who are selected based on the specific needs of the identified challenge. Key stakeholders involved in this type of initiative typically include, but are not limited to industry, healthcare providers, academic institutions, third sector, and local government.

Actions

What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.

Case study: Modernizing Outdoor Spaces at the University Children's Hospital in Lublin

Under the InnoDesign project, a collaborative initiative was launched by members of the Lublin Medicine Cluster to improve the outdoor spaces of the University Children's Hospital in Lublin for the benefit of young patients. This project brought together Simba Group, a Lublin-based producer of certified playgrounds, and experts from the Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture at Lublin University of Technology, who specialize i.a. in healthcare architecture and public spaces. The hospital's management also played an active role, ensuring the project aligns with patient needs.

One of the initial steps of the collaboration was the design workshops held on November 16, 2024, at the hospital. The workshop, organized by the newly formed Health Architecture Student Research Group at Lublin University of Technology, aimed to gather insights directly from patients about their expectations for the hospital's atrium spaces.

Participants included patients from the Rehabilitation Ward, hospital management representatives, and faculty experts. Together, they identified design preferences such as space layout, themes, colours, greenery, and artistic elements. The workshops emphasized Evidence-Based Design (EBD) and Healing Architecture principles, focusing on how well-designed spaces can promote wellbeing and healing.

The feedback collected will be used to create a conceptual design for modernized atriums that will serve as relaxation and play areas for patients.

Results and benefits

The initiative is considered a good practice due to its tangible outcomes and innovative approach, i.a.:

- Collaborative Innovation: the project exemplifies the power of open innovation by combining expertise from academia, industry, and healthcare providers.
- User-Centered Design: by actively involving end users the project ensures the designs will meet real needs.
- Educational Impact: students gain practical experience in applying architectural principles, bridging theory with real-world applications.
- Positive Impact on Healthcare: the project in this particular case will enhance the hospital environment, creating a more welcoming and therapeutic space, directly contributing to patient well-being.

3.2.12 Access to North American Market

Name of the cluster/association:
Rete di Imprese Luce in Veneto

Country: IT - Italy

Industrial ecosystem: Construction

Contact
Antonella Venza
antonella.venza@luceinveneto.com
https://www.luceinveneto.com/?lang=en

Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
At the beginning, many LIV companies, mostly micro and small artisanal enterprises, lacked experience in maintaining proper product documentation and cataloguing. As a result, their products often did not meet required standards, and companies struggled to obtain certifications due to limited knowledge of specific requirements and difficulties completing procedures correctly and on time. This situation encouraged the LIV cluster to develop a customized support service to help members comply with safety standards, improve production lines, and raise overall quality and safety levels.
Through rigorous testing, evaluation, and certification, the associated lighting SMEs have strengthened their quality and safety practices.
Collaboration with UL LLC played a key role in this progress, leading LIV to establish internal quality management regulations across the production chain. These guidelines help SMEs ensure and maintain consistent production standards.
The feedback received during the UL certification process also helps companies identify improvements in product design, materials, and manufacturing methods, fostering a shared culture of continuous quality improvement within the cluster.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
The Cluster Management and the Board of the Rete di Imprese Luce in Veneto were the primary initiators of this service. Its design and current implementation are further supported by a regulatory expert who provides tailored consultancy to guide LIV SMEs through the UL certification process.

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
Luce in Veneto supports its lighting companies, especially SMEs, in accessing the US and Canadian markets through a customized collaboration with the Italian branch of UL LLC. UL is a globally recognized organization for product safety certification, and the UL Mark confirms that a product meets the safety and quality standards required in North America. Without this certification, Italian lighting products may face regulatory barriers and cannot be legally sold or installed in these markets.
Through this collaboration, UL officially recognizes the LIV cluster as the UL applicant representing the products of its associated lighting companies under a shared trademark framework. This enables the opening of specific UL files for different lighting product types and allows companies to obtain and use the UL Mark under advantageous financial and administrative conditions. The certification process ensures compliance with safety standards and supports SMEs in improving documentation, production quality, and market readiness, ultimately enabling them to enter and compete in the North American market.

Results and benefits
This LIV Internationalization service, targeting the USA and Canada markets, has been available to its associated SMEs since June 2016.
Among the main benefits, we highlight the following:
- significantly advantageous financial conditions for obtaining UL marks,
- access to regulatory consultancy, and customized support with documentation and test verifications to ensure compliance with UL standards,
- strategic internationalization support, facilitating entry into new markets as UL certification aligns SMEs with international safety and quality bench - marks,
- protection against counterfeiting and support in customs procedures,
- products recognized as top quality in foreign markets.

To enhance support for its member companies, LIV offers the opportunity to join a framework insurance policy tailored for the USA and Canada markets, which provides additional guarantees and reassurances to North American customers, strengthening trust and confidence in the companies' products.
As of 2024, the following 10 UL files are open under the Luce in Veneto UL trademark:
- IEZR.E485360 – Incandescent Surface - Mounted Luminaires
- IEZR7.E485360 – Incandescent Surface - Mounted Luminaires Certified for Canada
- QOWZ.E485361 – Luminaires, Portable
- QOWZ7.E485361 – Luminaires, Portable Certified for Canada
- IFAM.E484590 – Light-Emitting-Diode Surface - Mounted Luminaires
- IFAM7.E484590 – Light-Emitting-Diode Surface - Mounted Luminaires Certified for Canada
- QOWZ.E514540 – Light-Emitting-Diode Luminaires, Portable
- QOWZ7.E514540 – Light-Emitting-Diode Luminaires Certified for Canada
- IFDH.E529304 – Landscape Lighting Systems
- IFDH7.E529304 – Landscape Lighting Systems, Low Voltage Certified for Canada

In 2025, 21 companies benefit from this service, collectively shipping more than 20.000 items to the United States and Canada.

3.2.13 Ecological Transition Cycle

Name of the cluster/association:
AKTANTIS

Country: FR - France

Industrial ecosystem: Digital - Cross-sectoral

Contact
Anaïs M
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https://www.aktantis.com/

Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
The ecological transition of companies in the digital sector and across all sectors is a key issue, posing major challenges for SMEs and start-ups. Digital deeptech companies need to adapt to a fast - growing worldwide demand and need to be aware of their global footprint which impacts their activity as well as all sectors.
The digital sector can at the same time avoid carbon emissions to the whole economy but also have a strong environmental impact due to electronic devices production, data - centers development, AI spread. In addition, SMEs and start-ups often lack awareness regarding new national and European standards and regulations, have difficulties in implementing them, and sometimes lack knowledge of existing support services.
The Ecological transition cycle, designed by AKTANTIS and implemented in partnership with several actors in the sector, was created to provide SMEs and start-ups with the keys and resources to better understand and initiate their ecological transition; to prepare them to meet the current and future demands of their partners (customers, investors, national and European regulations); and to help them promote their actions with regard to ESG criteria and commitments.

AKTANTIS
TECHNOLOGY PIONEERS TERRITORY

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
AKTANTIS with the support of expert partners: D-Carbonize, Rive Neuve, Lucie, Entrepreneurs pour la Planète.

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
The ecological transition of companies in the digital sector, as well as those in all other sectors, is a key issue. AKTANTIS provides access to cutting-edge information and case studies on ESG issues. In 2025, five digital workshops were organized that dealt with the following topics: hardware eco-conception; improvement of software energy consumption; digital frugality and decarbonisation; definition of the carbon footprint of digital or photonics start-ups; and regional ecological transition schemes.
AKTANTIS also offers startups and SMEs the opportunity to conduct a carbon footprint audit, providing an initial assessment and paving the way for stronger commitment to the ecological transition.
AKTANTIS has also introduced the 'TIC Durable' label to recognise innovative projects that contribute to preserving the environment. The Label's criteria are energy saving and energy efficiency, reducing pollution, and controlling waste management.

Results and benefits.
Each year since 2022, over 80 companies benefit from the information and advice provided through the series of digital events. About 10 to 15 SMEs and start-ups carried out a carbon footprint audit to strengthen their business development. 30 companies have benefited from the "Sustainable ICT Label" since its creation to meet the requirements of financial institutions.

More information about the best practice

3.2.14 Effective Leader

Name of the cluster/association:
Silesia Automotive & Advanced Manufacturing Cluster (SA&AM)

Country: PL - Poland

Industrial ecosystem: Mobility-Transport-Automotive

Contact
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Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
Companies being SA&AM cluster members directly (in the HR annual study) and indirectly (during the workshop organized by cluster coordinator) expressed the need for development and improvement of managerial competencies, including team management, initiative, communication, and entrepreneurship.
SA&AM members underlined that both male and female leaders, at various levels of organizational management, including the lower management, should be capable of building authority among employees, must be effective, and should have the right competencies to stimulate the team to achieve high performance at work.
Companies, mainly the small and medium sized enterprises, considered it important to develop competencies such as communication, assertiveness, and authority building among their managers in order to boost SME capacity for employment and establish the needed talent pool.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
SA&AM Cluster coordinator staff as a Trainers and SA&AM Cluster companies (middle and lower - level managers) as a Participants.

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
SA&AM Cluster developed the proprietary training cycle “Effective Leader”, which is a program focused on the development of managerial competencies targeted at lower and higher level managers in SA&AM cluster members.The training cycle is composed of various modules and is realised in the form of workshop work in a closed group, which strengthens the integration and helps develop common good practices. The workshop method of learning by doing, i.e., active participation, is strictly based on the participants' experiences and group exchange under the guidance of the trainer, who facilitates reaching conclusions and leads the entire training process.
We use interactive methods (small group work, discussion, brainstorming, simulation, case study, problem solving), which enable participants to participate personally and practically, to react and influence the course of the training. In the cycle, diagnostic tools and tests are used as a method to support the training process, which enables participants' self-knowledge and influences the development of their professional competencies.
All training programs are designed with a focus on efective and direct use of acquired knowledge in professional practice. Participants learn primarily through experience, analysis, and experimentation (simulations of professional situations).
Innovation, the ability to adapt to changing reality, good organization and work under time pressure, and the ability to make quick and effective decisions are competencies needed by every leader. However, the key element of a manager's influence on an employee is his or her own behaviour.

Results and benefits
The first edition of this program was launched in 2020 in response to members' needs and quickly became very popular. Since 2020, SA&AM delivered the 2021–2025 editions, each highly valued by stakeholders. To date, 95 participants have completed the cycle, which will be offered again in 2026. This practice is considered a success, as the customized training cycle has supported the development of over 90 emerging leaders from cluster organizations.

The program helped SMEs develop new internal leaders and strengthen skills in leadership, team, and task management. In the ongoing transformation of the automotive supply chain, a key sector in Polish industry, such support is crucial to maintaining SMEs’ ability to cooperate with international corporations. In a time of automation and robotization, many employees must take on new roles without having the necessary preparation.
The “Effective Leader” Training Cycle provided tailored content and methods to build essential competencies, improving the competitiveness of SMEs in the SA&AM Cluster.

More information about the best practice

silesia automotive & advanced manufacturing

3.2.15 Centre of Excellence for Furniture

Name of the cluster/association:
Transylvanian Furniture Cluster

Country: RO - Romania

Industrial ecosystem: Cross-sectoral

Contact
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Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
The Transylvanian Furniture Cluster (Cluster Mobilier Transilvan - CMT) initiated the Centre of Excellence for Furniture (CEM) as a strategic response to the structural challenges affecting the Romanian furniture industry.
Although the sector has a strong heritage and significant export potential, SMEs faced limited access to advanced research and development facilities, insufficient innovation capacity, and a lack of integrated collaboration across the value chain.
The creation of CEM aimed to address these needs by establishing the first national infrastructure dedicated to excellence in furniture innovation, strengthening CMT's role as an innovative cluster, and supporting members in developing high-value-added products and services.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
For the creation of the Furniture Excellence Center, a partnership between 6 private companies was established, with direct investments allocated in the centre: ANTARES ROMÂNIA SRL, E-LABORATOR FEERIA SRL, TESAGON SRL, SERBAN & ASOCIATII SRL, BASIC POINT SRL and HYGIA SRL.

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
CMT implemented a comprehensive set of actions that combined infrastructure development, digital transformation, cluster strengthening and international collaboration. The project involved the construction and equipping of the Furniture Excellence Centre - CEM building as a modern research and development hub. Within this infrastructure, CMT established 9 specialized laboratories, including eight dedicated R&D labs and a “Future Factory” hall designed to support digital manufacturing, automation and pre-production activities.
A presentation centre was also created to showcase new technologies and the products developed within the cluster. In parallel, the cluster developed three proprietary digital tools: an industry marketplace, a virtual showroom, and a virtual participation solution for fairs and events based on VR, AR and MR technologies. These applications enhance the capacity of member companies to present, promote and test products using modern digital channels.

Results and benefits
The CEM infrastructure substantially improves the ability of manufacturers to innovate by giving them access to testing, prototyping and pre-production capabilities that were previously unavailable in Romania. Companies can now develop unique and technologically enhanced products, including intelligent furniture. The adoption of circular economy principles is facilitated through more efficient use of materials and reduced environmental impact. Internationalization activities have expanded market access and created new business opportunities, while the involvement of new enterprises and research entities has strengthened the overall ecosystem of the cluster. CEM has become a regional hub that connects industry, research institutions and international partners, enabling companies to progress from concept to market-ready products in a structured and efficient manner.

More information about the best practice

3.2.16 Regional Trademark IO SONO FRIULI VENEZIA GIULIA

Name of the cluster/association:
Fondazione Agrifood & Bioeconomy FVG

Country: IT - Italy

Industrial ecosystem: Agri-Food

Contact
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Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
During the COVID-19 crisis, the agrifood cluster identified the need to support regional companies affected by disruptions in food supply chains. The pandemic also inspired a renewed focus on local products and producers, leading to the creation of the "Io Sono Friuli Venezia Giulia" brand. Originating from the #iocomproFVG ("I buy FVG") campaign, it evolved into a collective regional brand reflecting community identity and shared values.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
Fondazione Agrifood & Bioeconomy FVG Friuli Venezia Giulia Autonomous Region PromoTurismo FVG Legalnext (SDGs aspects) GLP (IP protection)

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.

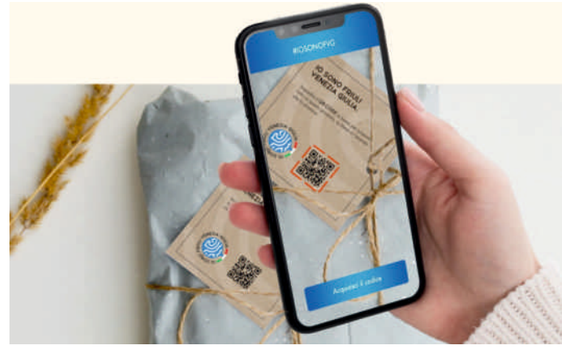
- Definition of the core values of the trademark for agrifood companies
- Definition of the methodology to measure the environmental, social and economic sustainability of companies, that has been translated into a first self-assessment questionnaire

This evolved with the adoption of the national SUSTAINability tool by the Chambers of Commerce, providing sustainability reports aligned with SDGs, GRI, and UNI standards.

- Establishment of criteria for granting the trademark to agrifood products based on local origin and short supply chains.
- Creation of a digital platform (www.iosonofvg.it) supported by QR codes.
- Implementation of a control system linked to the platform, involving key regional stakeholders and certified auditors.
- Development of a regional promotion system in close cooperation with the regional agency for tourist and enogastronomy promotion (*PromoTurismo FVG*)

Results and benefits.
IO SONO FRIULI VENEZIA GIULIA is the regional collective brand certifying the sustainability of agrifood companies and the origin of their products, available in two trademark versions:
·**Gold trademark:** awarded to companies committed to environmental, economic, and social sustainability, evaluated through a self-assessment tool aligned with SDGs and GRI standards.
Blue trademark: assigned to products mainly made with ingredients from regional value chains.
The trademark, subject to a structured control system, brings together over 400 companies and 1,200 products, supporting the transition to sustainable food systems, driving innovation with new local products, demonstrating companies' commitment to sustainability, fostering cooperation in the agrifood sector, and ensuring transparency through QR codes that inform consumers about product origin and traceability, with retailers and restaurants also eligible for certification.

Fondazione Agrifood & Bioeconomy fvg



3.3 Clusters serve as crucial conduits between Industry and Research & Development (R&D), facilitating a swift transition of research to the market.

Research and Commercialisation in Clusters

Within clusters, research and development activities among universities, other research institutions, and private sector firms are often coordinated to create more impact. This coordination, facilitated by cluster intermediaries, may encompass the translation of business needs into research activities. The alignment of mandates, cultures, and business models among different actors within clusters is crucial for effective coordination and translation of market needs into research endeavours.

Clusters translate business needs into research activities

Clusters significantly facilitate collaboration and interaction between businesses and re-search organizations, as demonstrated by the European report “Clusters as platforms for business - research (B2R)/research-business (R2B) relations”.

Investment in R&D in Clusters

Firms located in clusters tend to invest more intensively in Research and Development (R&D) compared to their non-clustered counterparts.

EUROPEAN CLUSTERS ALLIANCE

Clusters improve Return on Public Investments

Clusters enhance the return on public investments in R&D and foster global leadership in key technologies. The impact of successful clusters is well-recognized, leading both advanced and emerging economies to make investments and formulate policies to encourage cluster development. This scenario illustrates how clusters can be pivotal in attracting public sector investments aimed at promoting innovation and technological leadership.

Robust Ecosystems in Clusters

Successful cluster initiatives are noted for their focus on establishing robust ecosystems rather than merely quick job gains.

Regional Competitiveness and Innovation

Industry clusters leverage their mutual proximity and connections for a productive advantage. This proximity and interconnection can significantly contribute to the quick transition of research to market, enhancing regional competitiveness and innovation.

Regional Innovation in Industrial Clusters

An investigation of 46 industrial clusters in 286 Chinese cities revealed that regional innovation is predominantly found in traded industrial clusters. The level of industrial cluster specialization was positively related to regional innovation, with R&D playing a consistent role in fostering regional innovation. This suggests that clusters can effectively bridge the gap between R&D and market applications through regional innovation strategies.

3.3.1 Green Hydrogen Valley

Name of the cluster/association:
Green Tech Valley

Country: AT - Austria

Industrial ecosystem: Energy-Renewables

Contact
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https://www.greentech.at/en/

Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
In 2019, green hydrogen came into focus as a key element of the energy transition, opening up significant new market opportunities in industry, the energy system and, to some extent, the mobility sector. So far, research in this area has been rather sporadic and uncoordinated, with only two companies gaining experience in the application of hydrogen in the mobility sector, an area that was not at the centre of previous strategies. The ambitious goal now is to seize global market opportunities to achieve high technological added value through the production and utilisation of hydrogen.
The plan for this includes strengthening research, dovetailing with industry, and initiating lighthouse projects in order to maximise synergies between science and industry and fully exploit the technological potential of hydrogen as the energy source of the future.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
Green Tech Valley, TU Graz, HyCentA, University and non-university research institutions, Viva P&G, Andritz AG, AVL, regional governments and more.

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
Since 2020, Green Tech Valley has focussed on the strategic field of green hydrogen technologies and aims to strengthen research, infrastructure and local jobs.
Starting from a small number of companies and research institutions with a focus on mobile applications in particular, the cluster was able to initiate three regional R&D calls with a budget of €10 million, highlight the opportunities with radars, win over entrepreneurs for the field with workshops and develop cooperative projects with the H2 Round Table.

Results and benefits
The actions above enabled the new COMET centre HyCentA to be co-initiated with a focus on green hydrogen and partners such as Andritz to be won over.
The cluster also contributed in various ways to results such as the 50% increase in H2 researchers at the site, the expansion of AVL in the non-mobile H2 sector, and the successful market entry of ANDRITZ with the 100 MW electrolyser product. At ANDRITZ alone, the new team of 40 people will grow to several hundred employees within two years. And finally the "Hydrogen Industrial Inland Valley" was jointly won as Europe's first Hydrogen Valley with a focus on industries and an investment of €578 Mio. until 2030.

More information about the best practice
H2 Research Map Austria (publication)

GREEN TECH VALLEY

3.3.2 Boosting Excellent Research in the Czech Nanotechnology Sector

Name of the cluster/association:
NANOPROGRESS, z.s.

Country: CZ - Czechia

Industrial ecosystem: Cross-sectoral

Contact
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www.nanoprogress.eu

Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
Organizations face several challenges when trying to innovate. Technological change is disrupting traditional markets, so it is important to identify emerging trends early in order to innovate and remain competitive.
At the same time, limited resources can restrict innovation efforts, which makes it necessary to optimize resource allocation and build strategic partnerships. Fear of failure often discourages experimentation, so fostering a culture that accepts risk as part of learning is essential.
Collaboration is also hindered when teams work in silos, which underlines the need to promote cross-functional cooperation and collective problem-solving. Innovation can also be slowed by strict regulations, meaning that companies must innovate responsibly while navigating compliance requirements. Internal resistance to change can further delay progress, so involving stakeholders and clearly communicating the benefits of innovation is crucial. Short-term priorities often overshadow long-term strategy, making it important to balance immediate needs with sustained innovation goals. Rapid technological advances can exceed organizational understanding, requiring continuous learning and investment in digital and green transformation. Finally, innovation raises ethical questions, and global competition continues to intensify, making it essential to act responsibly, anticipate market needs, differentiate products, and maintain competitiveness.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
Academia: Universities, R&D centres. KET centres. Civil society: National television. Industry: Cluster organisations, Startups, Spin-offs, Companies. Government and policy makers: Ministry of Industry and Trade, National business agency, Czech Invest, National cluster association, Water Smart Territories S3 platform, Municipalities, Regional and national innovation councils.

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
Since its inception, Nanoprogress has supported collaborative R&D among its members, focusing on innovative nanofiber technologies with clear market relevance. In 2014, a breakthrough application of alternating current for nanofiber production emerged, followed in 2015 by the first prototype manufacturing equipment, developed through ERDF-funded joint projects under the “Cooperation – Clusters” call. R&D then expanded to material development and exploration of applications across various industries.
In 2017, Nanoprogress installed new equipment in shared laboratories and formed an internal R&D team working full shifts to improve processes, resulting in the development of proprietary equipment and components together with members.
In 2020, Nanoprogress built its first fully operational industrial production line and established the spin-off Nanotech Dynamics to commercialize the technology and products. Between 2021 and 2023, dedicated production facilities were constructed, now hosting four operational production lines manufacturing a broad range of nanomaterials for industrial use. Collaboration with members continues to refine and adapt products to market and industry needs.

Results and benefits
Over 40 research organizations and companies have benefited from support, with more than than €55 million invested in pioneering research and technology development. This has led to over 80 protected intellectual properties and the development or improvement of more than 50 products.
The collaboration has involved over 400 researchers and produced more than 400 research studies. The joint work also resulted in 12 globally unique pieces of equipment. A major milestone was achieving TRL 8 for the breakthrough technology using alternating current for producing nanofibrous structures and composites.
Another key achievement is the establishment of shared facilities with open access, equipped for research, production, and analysis, including a dedicated production plant used collaboratively by cluster members. Effective cluster management plays a central role in coordinating stakeholders and providing insight into technology and market trends. By taking on administrative project responsibilities, clusters allow companies and research institutions to focus on innovation and technology development. This approach increases efficiency, accelerates market introduction of unique solutions, and contributes to industrial growth and economic development.
As a result, the Czech nanotechnology sector now holds a globally recognised leadership position, driving innovation and setting new standards for the future of the industry.

More information about the best practice

NANOPROGRESS
THE NANOTECHNOLOGY CLUSTER

3.3.3 Digits and Technics Push Recycling

Name of the cluster/association:
Green Tech Valley

Country: AT - Austria

Industrial ecosystem: Energy-Renewables

Contact
Bernhard Puttinger
bernhard@greentech.at
www.greentech.at/en/

Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
In 2019, green hydrogen came into focus as a key element of the energy transition, opening up significant new market opportunities in industry, the energy system and, to some extent, the mobility sector. So far, research in this area has been rather sporadic and uncoordinated, with only two companies gaining experience in the application of hydrogen in the mobility sector – an area that was not at the centre of previous strategies.
The ambitious goal now is to seize global market opportunities to achieve high technological added value through the production and utilisation of hydrogen. The plan for this includes strengthening research, dovetailing with industry and initiating lighthouse projects in order to maximise synergies between science and industry and fully exploit the technological potential of hydrogen as the energy source of the future.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
Green Tech Valley, K1 centres, HyCentA, University and non-university research institutions, Viva P&G, Andritz AG, AVL, regional governments and more

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
Since 2020, Green Tech Valley has focussed on the strategic field of green hydrogen technologies and aims to strengthen research, infrastructure and local jobs. Starting from a small number of companies and research institutions with a focus on mobile applications in particular, the cluster was able to initiate three regional R&D calls with a budget of €10 million, highlight the opportunities with radars, win over entrepreneurs for the field with workshops and develop cooperative projects with the H2 Round Table.
Work is currently underway on an EU Hydrogen Valley submission for 2024 with several hundred million euros of investment.

Results and benefits
The actions above enabled the new K1 centre HyCentA to be co-initiated with a focus on green hydrogen and partners such as Andritz to be won over.
The cluster also contributed in various ways to results such as the 50% increase in H2 researchers at the site, the expansion of AVL in the non-mobile H2 sector and the successful market entry of ANDRITZ with the 100 MW electrolyser product.
At ANDRITZ alone, the new team of 40 people will grow to several hundred employees within two years.

More information about the best practice
News:

GREEN TECH VALLEY

3.3.4 EU Projects: A Solution to Local Actors' Needs

Name of the cluster/association:
VEGEPOLYS VALLEY

Country: FR - France

Industrial ecosystem: Agri-Food

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Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
VEGEPOLYS VALLEY is a leading French competitiveness cluster bringing together +650 plant-sector stakeholders to boost their competitiveness.
Headquartered in Angers and with offices in six sites across four regions, the cluster employs 40 FTE to support its diverse members: companies, research and training centres, professional organizations, development bodies, and consular chambers.
Covering the whole plant value chain from genetics to end-use, VEGEPOLYS VALLEY mobilizes its ecosystem around seven key innovation axes and provides services in innovation support, business development, internationalization, networking, and communication.
Members increasingly seek to expand innovation capacity through shared expertise, reduce financial and technical risks via co-funded projects, share results, differentiate in the market, enhance European visibility, expand networks, and strengthen strategic or international positioning. EU-funded projects provide an effective response to these needs.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
VEGEPOLYS VALLEY and its +650 members.

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
The cluster offers a support path to obtain information, define a European strategy, join a European project, identify partnerships, and set up a European project.
This offer is aimed at companies (start-ups, SMEs and ETIs, large groups), research players, training centres and other organizations supporting the plant sector.
The service offered includes generic services for all members:

- Information webinars for new European programming
- Monthly current newsletters

These are supplemented by personalized services:

- Sending targeted European partnership opportunities
- Diagnostic Europe (member meeting dedicated to European strategy)
- Search for partners via the European network
- Editing support (writing advice, proofreading)
- Labelling and support for submitted projects

Recently, the team has developed further new à la carte services such as a Club Europe (restricted think tank to maximize inter-member collaborations in project submission), a support course to complete a proposal including the filing phases (e.g., support process at the EIC).
The next services envisaged are to organize writing workshops and/or awareness-raising for teams of members of European programs, as well as the organization of European bilateral meetings.

Results and benefits
Since 2019, the cluster has strengthened its European dimension by supporting members in preparing EU project proposals and by participating as a partner in European collaborative projects.
Priority has been given to Horizon Europe, while additional projects have been submitted under INTERREG, LIFE, EIC Accelerator, EIT, ERASMUS+, EUROCLUSTER, PRIMA and COSME, with support ranging from networking to full project setup. To build member capacity, the cluster carried out awareness and diagnostic activities to assess European potential and strategic positioning:

- +180 member diagnostics (2019–2024)
- monthly Europe newsletters
- ~40 information webinars on EU programming
- ≥3 interventions per year at internal and external events
- 115 facilitated connections between members and consortia
- Support provided for 163 project assemblies, leading to 146 final submissions

With a 20% success rate (members + cluster), results are in the high range for EU-funded projects. Among the 200 supported members, 76 companies applied for European calls, including 17 coordinating proposals, mainly under EIC Accelerator, EIT and LIFE programs. Notably, many were first-time applicants at European projects.

VEGEPOLYS VALLEY
INTERNATIONAL PLANT CLUSTER

3.3.5 Innovation Vouchers

Name of the cluster/association:
AUTOKLASTR

Country: CZ - Czechia

Industrial ecosystem: Mobility-Transport-Automotive

Contact
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Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
AUTOKLASTR celebrates success! Two of its members have secured financial support of 60,000 EUR from the Euroclusters RESIST project to develop advanced software that, with the help of artificial intelligence, will revolutionize production planning within the concept of the "*Biomorphic Factory*."
AUTOKLASTR is a long-standing member of the National Cluster Association and actively participates in projects that strengthen the development of human potential, business relationships, as well as research and development activities.
With 95 members and the successful completion of 33 projects, it ranks among the most significant cluster organizations in the Czech Republic and abroad.
The AUTOKLASTR supported Cerebrica and LARS Chemie as part of the open Eurocluster RESIST call, where the AUTOKLASTR serves as a partner. The call supports innovative projects and focuses on selecting suitable candidates from the AUTOKLASTR.
The ideal choice was the startup Cerebrica, a new member thanks to its collaboration with the Mobility Innovation Hub (MIH) and their Technology Incubation program.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
AUTOKLASTR, Cerebrica, LARS Chemie, Eurocluster RESIST

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
Cerebrica, in collaboration with LARS Chemie, is working on the development of a tool for advanced production planning using AI within the concept of the "Biomorphic Factory."
Their project was consulted with the aim of preparing a successful application for the call, focusing on optimizing production, ensuring smooth material flow, improving delivery accuracy, and reducing costs.
The assistance provided resulted in a significant achievement for AUTOKLASTR, as Cerebrica became the first member since 2017 to participate in and secure support through open EU project calls where AUTOKLASTR was a partner.
The total support for the Cerebrica and LARS Chemie project amounts to €60,000, with each company receiving €30,000.

Results and benefits
Thanks to this contribution, the companies were able to initiate the development of production planning software. In November 2024, during the industrial fair BE 5.0 in Mulhouse, France, the companies presented this solution at a European level, offering opportunities

to expand the software's reach beyond the Czech Republic. For its support in fostering innovation and development in businesses, the AUTOKLASTR received an honorary award during the Cluster Day in the South Moravian Region.
The award was accepted by the Executive Director, Libor Dobes, and recognized the AUTOKLASTR´s best practice example: Supporting the development of advanced production planning software using AI within the concept of the "Biomorphic Factory" for Cerebrica and LARS Chemie, utilizing the €60,000 voucher from the Eurocluster RESIST project.

More information about the best practice

3.3.6 Partnerships drive challenging ‘living drugs' development

Name of the cluster/association:
SaxoCell

Country: DE - Germany

Industrial ecosystem: Health

Contact
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Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
SaxoCell, the Saxonian precision therapy cluster, aims to make effective, safe, and affordable cell and gene therapies (CGT) available for patients with severe and previously untreatable diseases. The cluster connects leading basic and applied research in Saxony with industrial capabilities and national and international expertise to form a strong CGT network.
Core partners include TUD Dresden University of Technology and Leipzig University with their university hospitals, the Fraunhofer Institute for Cell Therapy and Immunology IZI, and the Chemnitz Clinical Centre.
SaxoCell is a winner of the BMBF Clusters4Future initiative and has entered its second funding phase with €15 million for 2024–2027. The cluster brings together around 180 participants from 29 partners (including 23 companies) working on eight CGT projects focused on clinical translation and research transfer.
Research topics include improved CAR-T, CAR-NK and macrophage therapies for oncology and autoimmune diseases, new non-viral gene editing methods, and MSC therapies for lung diseases in premature infants. These approaches represent a shift from treatment toward cure.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
The TUD Dresden University of Technology, the Leipzig University and the Fraunhofer Institute for Cell Therapy and Immunology IZI were in charge of the conceptual design.The concept was initiated by scientists, physicians and transfer people.The project was also supported by Saxon politics from the beginning. Altogether, this ultimately led to success in the competition phase and ‘SaxoCell’ being selected as one of 137 applicant clusters by an expert jury and being able to start implementation.

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
SaxoCell provides a unique R&D environment that connects academic, clinical, translational and industrial partners in cell and gene therapies (CGT).
A diverse, multinational team works on shared topics, enabling strong knowledge exchange and team cohesion.
The cluster regularly organizes consortium meetings, and young scientists especially benefit from career opportunities across the Saxony-wide network. Continuous feedback is collected to improve services and working conditions.
A key example of collaboration is the NK Alliance project, involving all core academic partners together with eight industry partners. In addition to R&D activities, SaxoCell offers extensive training programs, including research transfer, intellectual property and commercialization, GMP, design thinking, creativity, pitch training and the “Investors Club,” which connects projects with investors.
The cluster also focuses on clinical translation, with two working papers published and a two-day “SaxoCell Clinics” workshop, alongside regular lunch meetings presenting emerging technologies. SaxoCell maintains dialogue with policymakers through the “SaxoCell meets politics” format and engages the public and patients through co-organized outreach events, from patient days to student laboratory programs.
Marketing through social media, print, digital publications and a regular newsletter support network growth.

Results and benefits
Thanks to SaxoCell’s support, two new companies have been settled in Saxony in the past three years, and three university spin-offs have been intensively supported during their formation and further development.
All three are now industrial partners in SaxoCell’s R&D projects in the second funding phase, which is considered a major success and will accelerate the transfer of research results to industry.
The industrial partnership network has expanded from 8 initial partners to 23 today, demonstrating that SaxoCell’s strategy is working effectively. Two key R&D results include:

- Production of a GMP-compliant antibody in 2024 as a prerequisite for developing a new therapeutic agent to prevent GvHD (with Tcell Tolerance GmbH).
- Major progress in developing novel designer recombinases for treating haemoglobinopathies (with DKMS Life Science Lab GmbH). More than twenty new life sciences patents have been generated over the last three years, and over €20 million in additional funding has been secured for clinical studies and validation projects.

The consolidation of the cluster through SaxoCell e.V. has begun to ensure continuity and agility beyond the funding period. Planned next steps include specialist recruitment, expansion of training programs, support in acquiring funding, and strengthened networking with external stakeholders in the healthcare sector.

More information about the best practice

3.3.7 Cross-pollinating RDI & Business

Name of the cluster/association:
SuperEcosystem

Country: FI - Finland

Industrial ecosystem: Cross-sectoral

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Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
The original reason for building up thematic clusters in the North-Savo region was to enhance regional innovation and economic development. These clusters aimed to bring together interconnected companies, business service providers, and associated research and education institutions within specific fields.
The thematic clusters have been designed around the region's existing strengths and competitive advantages, aligning with the Smart Specialization Strategy (S3)'s goal of building on local capabilities.
As a response to the need of integration of the clusters into a broader network, the SuperEcosystem meta-cluster has been created. In its current form, the SuperEcosystem facilitates cross-sectoral innovation and internationalization.
It brings together 6 industrial clusters (Bio & Circular Economy, Energy, Water, Agri Food, Machine Technology and Health) and development service providers of the North-Savo region with national and international visibility and appeal. The operational model of the SuperEcosystem supports clusters in their development and international collaboration.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
Stakeholders were representing vary range of different type of actors: companies (SME and larger ones), ecosystems, municipalities, regional governance, research and educational organizations and entrepreneur associations.

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
The mission of the project was strategic and operational structural change, in which the ecosystems of the county form a service entity, a service package called "SuperEcosystem". It is a significant centre of excellence in line with existing and new regional strengths. The aim was to ensure the development, renewal, and continuity of operations of the North Savo SuperEcosystem and individual ecosystems.
Key actions taken to ensure the desired outcome:

- Strategies for ecosystems were defined, vision and mission clarified.
- Ecosystem services were productized by determining what is produced, who produces it, and how it is produced.

A foundation was laid for utilizing international networks by entering into partnerships. Marketing capabilities were developed by creating a communication plan and brand for ecosystems.
An operating model was created through which ecosystems productized their services and further developed their own operations. Key cooperation and mutual awareness of ecosystems were orchestrated.
In the fall of 2021, the project organized SuperWeek, a hybrid event with more than 100 performances.
There were 27 business decision-makers talking about their company's operations and discussing the future of ecosystems regionally and nationally.
More than 90 presentations were videotaped at the event. SuperEcosystem also gained international visibility during the event.

Results and benefits
The most significant results of the project were ecosystem-specific corporate customer-oriented roadmaps and strategies. These will guide the activities of the operators for several years.International network memberships guarantee access to European networks in the field and open new sources of funding.
The productized services of ecosystems enable systematic marketing, which plays a key role in the performance of ecosystems and in the development of their customer-oriented innovation capability.
The branding of ecosystems and the production of marketing materials ensure and support the visibility and communication of the entire region and all ecosystems.Improving the innovation capacity of ecosystems has led to an increase in the number and level of innovations, as well as the number of commercialized innovations and their progress in the commercialization process — a key result for the long-term vitality of the region.
Increasing awareness of the region's ecosystems, expertise, and services plays a significant role in the competitiveness of the entire region.

Super Ecosystem

3.4 Clusters can avoid policy priorities being stuck, blocked by outdated ways of thinking or acting.

Clusters can play a significant role in modernising policy priorities and combating outdated ways of thinking.
Cluster policies can integrate policy fields that are usually addressed separately and are relevant to entrepreneurship and society, harnessing the capacity of clusters to respond to social challenges alongside economic ones.

EUROPEAN
CLUSTERS ALLIANCE

Evolution of policy frameworks
Clusters can help in the evolution of industrial and innovation policies by adapting to new challenges, scenarios, and demands from the social and economic community. This adaptation suggests a move away from outdated policy frameworks towards more contemporary and responsive policies.

Smart Specialisation Strategies
Clusters are integral to smart specialisation strategies, which are employed to address societal challenges. Through smart specialisation, clusters can help avoid policy stagnation by aligning policies with contemporary societal needs and challenges.

Economic Recovery and Renewal
Clusters and cluster approaches are seen as attractive solutions for economic recovery and renewal, suggesting a move away from traditional or outdated economic and policy frameworks towards more innovative and collaborative frameworks.

3.4.1 Mountain Trends Book - A Collaborative Forecasting Tool

Name of the cluster/association:
Cluster Montagne

Country: FR - France

Industrial ecosystem: Tourism

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Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
Mountain territories and their industrial ecosystems face numerous challenges (Sustainability, Interactivity, Security, Accessibility, Playfulness and Performance) which are correlated with national and international context such as the pandemic crisis, the energy crisis, changing of clients needs... In this context, members of the Cluster Montagne wanted to have a tool allowing them to forge their forecasting culture in order to guide them in the development of their mid and long-term strategy.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
The Mountain[s] Trend Book is one of the collaborative projects that Cluster Montagne is likeky to bring out. It has been co-designed by a group of Cluster Montagne members : institutions, territories, and companies, with the conviction that the subject of transition and sustainability was a matter for collective reflection. Since 2019, Cluster Montagne has been publishing one edition each year in partnership with our partner, the bank “Crédit Agricole des Savoie”.

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
The Mountain[s] Trend Book is based on collaboration, innovation and long-term vision. It aims to bring together diverse stakeholders, such as experts, entrepreneurs and policymakers, to share perspectives and ideas on the future of mountain territories.
It also values sustainability and seeks to address current challenges while preparing these regions for a prosperous and resilient future.

In short, the emphasis is on collectively building a positive future for the mountains, with an emphasis on cooperation and anticipation of future changes. Every year, we gather and synthesise strong and weak signals in order to imagine different possible scenarios.

Results and benefits
A project like the “Cahier de Tendances Montagne[s]” offers a multitude of benefits. It makes it possible to anticipate future trends, share knowledge and strengthen collaboration between mountain tourism stakeholders.
By promoting innovation and emphasizing sustainability, it helps improve the attractiveness of mountain destinations while promoting tourism that is more respectful of the environment and local communities.

Cluster Montagne
Le collectif de l'excellence française

3.4.2 Piedmont Regional Innovation Cluster System

Name of the cluster/association:
Sistema Poli di Innovazione Piemonte

Country: IT - Italy

Industrial ecosystem: Cross-sectoral

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Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
The Regional Government of Piedmont initially established the Innovation Clusters in 2009 to support technological domains. While successful, the complex challenges of the 2021–2027 ERDF programming period required a shift from a vertical, sector-based approach to a transversal, systemic model.
The primary challenge was to reorganize the 7 Innovation Clusters into a single, integrated ecosystem—"Sistema Poli Piemonte"—capable of addressing the "Twin Transition" (Digital and Ecological) and Community Wellbeing. Launched operationally with the CLIPS Project (Clusters Innovation Poli piemontesi a Sistema), this new model aligns with the updated Regional Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3).
It aims to move beyond individual silos to foster cross-sectoral innovation, maximizing the impact of R&D funding by connecting different value chains (e.g., linking textile with green chemistry, or ICT with agrifood) to tackle complex industrial problems.
The 7 Innovation Clusters are:

- Polo Agrifood – Agrifood sector
- bioPmed – Life Sciences and Health
- CGreen – Green Chemistry and New Materials
- CLEVER – Energy and Clean Technologies
- MESAP – Smart Products and Manufacturing
- Pointex – Textile sector
- Polo ICT – ICT sector

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
Regione Piemonte (funder and strategist) and the seven managing entities of the Innovation Clusters, working as a unified consortium under the Sistema Poli brand. Key stakeholders also include the 1,200+ member companies (mostly SMEs) and research organizations that participate in the Entrepreneurial Discovery Process, directly influencing regional innovation policies.

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
The Sistema Poli clusters operate through a coordinated action plan focused on five key pillars:

1. **Governance of S3 & Entrepreneurial Discovery:** They actively manage the "Entrepreneurial Discovery Process" for the Region, collecting over 330 project ideas annually from companies to update the Strategic Research Agendas and shape future funding calls (such as the "SWIch" measure).
2. **Ecosystem Valorisation:** They developed and manage the "Digital Showcase", an online platform promoting over 1,000 funded R&D projects and success stories to attract investors and partners.
3. **Strategic Networking:** They preside over 57 extra-regional and international networks, creating structured opportunities for members to join EU consortiums and global value chains.
4. **Innovation-Training:** They bridge the skills gap by mapping corporate training needs and co-designing curricula with Higher Technical Institutes (ITS) and universities.
5. **Support for R&D Financing:** They provide specialized guidance for accessing the €80M+ annual regional R&D funds (PR FESR 21-27), facilitating the creation of multi-disciplinary consortia that receive funding bonuses for their systemic impact.

Results and benefits
Members:
The Sistema Poli Hubs currently aggregate over 1,200 active members, comprising a vast majority of SMEs (approx. 70%), large enterprises, and research organizations. Since its inception, the System has engaged more than 3,000 entities in its network, fostering a continuous exchange of innovation.
Investments and R&D Funding:
Under the new PR FESR 2021–2027 framework, the Sistema Poli plays a crucial role in the "SWIch" (Support of the Whole Innovation Chain) funding measure.
The 2024 edition alone allocated €80 million to support industrial research, experimental development, and innovation valorisation.
Since the System's establishment, it has generated total investments estimated at over €430 million.
PR FESR 2021-2027 & SWIch Summary:
The Sistema Poli actively supports companies in accessing R&D funds. For the "SWIch" calls, the Clusters supported 139 companies in submitting 85 project proposals, facilitating access to grants for both collaborative and individual innovation challenges.
The funding scheme includes specific bonuses for projects disseminating results through the Cluster network, directly linking funding intensity to ecosystem engagement.
Skills Development and Training:
The System has launched the "Innovative Skills Questionnaire" to map skills gaps and training needs directly from companies. Collaborations continue with Higher Technical Institutes (ITS) and universities, utilizing instruments like the Advanced Apprenticeship (AAF) contracts to align training supply with industrial demand. A specific focus is placed on reskilling and upskilling for the digital and ecological transitions.
Role in Regional Innovation:
The Clusters drive the regional Entrepreneurial Discovery Process, having collected over 336 project ideas (2022-2024) to shape the Regional Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3). To valorize results, the System launched the "Digital Showcase" (Vetrina Digitale), an online platform promoting over 1,200 projects and success stories to national and international investors.
National and International Collaborations:
Sistema Poli presides over 57 strategic networks (national and international), generating over 160 distinct opportunities for members in 2023-2024.

3.5 Clusters are the best market sensors, enabling quick knowledge about real market variations, and fast and coordinated reactions to those changes.

Clusters significantly contribute to market responsiveness in various ways:

Enhancers of market responsiveness

Clusters, due to the dense knowledge flows and spillovers facilitated by the close proximity and interactions among their members, are able to identify and address opportunities and unmet needs for economic growth, making them significant players in fostering market responsiveness.

Engines for better Productivity and Efficiency

Being part of a cluster increases the productivity and efficiency of firms, contributing to the commercialisation of innovations and the formation of new businesses within the target sector.

Weathering Economic Crises

Clusters have proven resilient during past economic crises thanks to the collective strength and flexibility of their member businesses. The EU recognizes the importance of addressing value-chain disruptions, and the COVID-19 crisis highlighted clusters' role in detecting disruptive trends and facilitating collaboration between companies and universities.

By monitoring industry developments and fostering cooperation, clusters can anticipate changes and strengthen European supply chains.

They are expected to proactively identify disruptions and propose solutions to improve value-chain resilience.

In March 2022, a survey conducted through the European Cluster Collaboration Platform assessed disruptions in European supply chains, including the impact of Russia's war on Ukraine. The results revealed major operational challenges, estimated losses, and potential solutions proposed by clusters to address these disruptions.

EUROPEAN CLUSTERS ALLIANCE

Clusters help overcome bottlenecks in supply chains

The European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP) published in 2020 a Discussion Paper examining the role that clusters have in building resilient supply chains in response to the disruption created by COVID-19. By facilitating new partnerships, providing support, exper-tise, and collaboration opportunities to companies facing disruptions, clusters can help overcome bottlenecks in supply chains.

Through Collaborative Problem-Solving approaches, in instances of supply chain disruptions, collaborative and agile supply chain leaders can work together inside clusters to overcome bottlenecks.

Clusters build business relevant skills in education and vocational system

Most European clusters are developing specific collaborative approaches to develop Talent and Capacities needed by their members. It's an industrial reaction to the urgency for adaptive skill frameworks in the age of rapid digital transformation. Clusters are close to the ground, fully understanding industry intricacies, and rapidly addressing their changing needs. An example of this approach is the "Programa Encuentra" developed by the Cluster IDiA, highlighted by the World Economic Forum with an article titled "This is how we build a future-ready workforce for the post-COVID world".

Framework for Economic Policy

Clusters provide a framework for rethinking and refocusing economic policy, drawing attention to the real-world dynamics of regional economies, and coordinating fragmented policy offerings to improve efficiency. This aspect of clusters plays a vital role in enhancing market responsiveness as it aligns economic policies with the actual needs and dynamics of the market.

3.5.1 IPARLA: Industrial Plastic Recycling

Name of the cluster/association:
Pays Basque Industries - Euskal Industriak

Country: FR - France

Industrial ecosystem: Cross-sectoral

Contact
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Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
Pays Basque Industries is a community of about seventy manufacturers in the Basque Country. Many of these companies are users of plastics, including production scrap, supplier purchase packaging, and plastic packaging film.
Finding a recycling channel for these plastics is challenging due to:

- Diversity of plastics used
- Difficulties in sorting at source
- Insufficient volume per type of plastic to interest a recycler

In response, Pays Basque Industries launched the IPARLA project, a collaborative initiative aimed at creating a recycling chain for industrial plastics in the Basque Country. The project includes a diagnosis, study, and testing phase for all industrial companies in the region. The common problem is that, without sorting plastics by type and having several tons of the same material, there is no viable recycling solution.
Companies usually have two options:

- Dispose of plastics as CIW
- Engage a logistics company (e.g., SUEZ) to collect the waste

In both cases, plastics typically end up in incineration or landfill, which has ecological impacts and represents rising costs for manufacturers. At the same time, companies are increasingly assessing the carbon impact of their products. The relocation of the supply chain and the use of post-industrial recycled material (PRM) are key improvement areas.
The IPARLA project addresses these challenges by:

- Producing more locally (near the factory and raw material source)
- Using PRM as raw material
- Recycling overlooked plastics to reduce carbon footprint by producing industrial parts directly where waste is generated successfully, IPARLA could offer low-carbon plastic products and expand its model to other regions.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
Four firms within the IPARLA project developed eco-friendly practices: EBL Polyester created in-house shredding for plastics like ABS and PP, reducing workshop waste. AGEC developed landfill solutions, including a new composter, ensuring compliance with environmental laws. SOMOCAP reintegrates plastic waste into production, lowering the environmental impact. SOKOA, certified with ISO 9001 and 14001, ensures sustainable manufacturing of professional seating. Their collaboration highlights cross-sectoral cooperation for sustainability in industrial plastics management.

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
The IPARLA project consists of one diagnostic phase and two study/testing phases. Its objectives are to characterize industrial plastic deposits in the Basque Country, identify companies interested in developing PRM-based products, conduct R&D to convert plastic waste into PRM, industrialize PRM-derived technical parts, and perform technical and economic studies for more complex components. The project will also identify national plastic recyclers and develop PRM expertise among local manufacturers. Note: highly technical sectors (aeronautics, space, medical) are excluded.

1. Diagnosis:

- Map industrial plastic waste in the Basque Country, including type, quantities, recurrence, technical data sheets, colour, and pollutants
- Identify recyclers specialized in plastic recycling nationally, detailing plastics processed, service offerings, logistics, and costs
- Identify project leaders for new or relocated products based on PRM
- Create a database for future investments and for use by the Territoire d'Industries program

2. Studies/Tests:

- Conduct R&D tests to transform local plastic waste into PRM
- Develop local manufacturers' skills in PRM transformation and integration into products
- Industrialize parts derived from PRM
- Perform technical and economic studies up to prototype stage for more technical parts

Results and benefits
Key metrics from the techno-economic studies include cost comparisons among local PRM, imported PRM and virgin plastic (covering production and transport, broken down into NREC and REC), as well as carbon impact comparisons. The studies also assess development time for producing a new local PRM (from waste identification to qualification) and ROI associated with investments in larger production lines.

More information about the best practice

PAYS BASQUE INDUSTRIES
euskal industriak

3.5.2 Powering Green Transformation

Name of the cluster/association:
Green Tech Valley

Country: AT - Austria

Industrial ecosystem: Cross-sectoral

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Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
The EU Green Deal marks a new era where sustainability and green technologies lead the transformation of the economy. At the Green Tech Valley, specialists collaborate to develop innovative solutions for a greener future.
The cluster faces the challenge of enabling transformation not only for its direct customers but also for the entire value chain, reaching the customers of its customers. Maintaining visibility in this dynamic environment is essential, including building a distinct brand that symbolizes quality, innovation, and sustainability.
This brand must capture attention, foster trust, and form the foundation for strong partnerships. By creating value beyond the ordinary, the cluster helps its customers differentiate themselves in the market and deliver advantages to their own clients. In a competitive landscape also pursuing green transformation, it is crucial not to be passively swept along.
Success requires strategic planning, continuous innovation, rapid response to change. A proactive approach allows the cluster to anticipate trends, position itself at the forefront of development, and explore new ways to advance technological and economic sustainability, ultimately increasing value for all stakeholders.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
Green Tech Valley, NEFI, Green Tech Academy Austria, iv Steiermark, iv Kärnten and more.

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
Green Tech Valley aims to occupy a central role, supporting its customers (companies from all sectors) on their journey of green transformation.
The cluster has implemented numerous innovative initiatives and achieved significant milestones:

- Green Tech Radar: A resource accessible to all companies, tracking the latest trends and technologies in green transformation.
- Technology Days: Organized at large industry corporates to promote sustainable technologies and their practical applications.
- Green Transformation Cards & Map: Developed with consultants as a strategic tool to visualize and plan sustainability initiatives.
- GRETA Green Tech Academy: Disseminates knowledge about green technologies and supports a new MBA program focused on green innovation.
- Climate Pioneers Collaboration: Partnership with the Industrial Association of Styria and Carinthia, gaining recognition as "Climate Pioneers" and accelerating sustainable industrial practices.
- Workshops & EU Engagement: Events including a Brussels workshop with the EEN Enterprise Europe Network, leveraging the Green Transformation Cards.
- EU Green Capital Recognition: Three of six Austrian Climate Pioneer Cities recognized as finalists.
- Innovation Labs & Funding: Real Lab for Net-Zero-Industry, NEFI innovation laboratory, and Green Startupmark program securing €6 million for green, knowledge-based startups.
- Green Utopia – Zero Waste Project: Eight green utopias developed by students and disseminated widely across Graz, public transport screens, international tech websites, SFG Future Day (1,200+ participants), and social media, with further initiatives planned for 2024.

This comprehensive approach strengthens the cluster's leadership in green innovation while fostering sustainability and knowledge-sharing across industries.

Results and benefits
The GRETA Green Tech Academy Austria and the new MBA programs are expanding training opportunities in green transformation, equipping professionals with the skills needed for sustainable innovation.
Technology Days connect 180 major industrial sites (e.g., MAGNA, VOEST) with green tech providers, driving practical implementation of sustainable technologies and boosting sales.
Other initiatives include:

- Real-world Laboratory for Net-Zero Industry: Developed to demonstrate and test green technologies.
- NEFI+ Innovation Laboratory: Strengthened to support advanced green innovation projects.
- Regional Impact: Investments in green steel and decarbonization contribute to regional sustainability.
- Recognition: Graz recognized as an EU Green Capital Finalist 2023.EU Just Transition Platform: Green Tech Valley will be showcased as one of six good practices in 2024. These initiatives position the cluster as a central driver of sustainable transformation across industries, linking innovation, training, and market impact.

More information about the best practice

3.5.3 Natural Wool Sourcing Platform lanatheque.fr

Name of the cluster/association:
Lainamac - RésoLAINE Nouvelle-Aquitaine

Country: FR - France

Industrial ecosystem: Textile

Contact
CAUCHY Géraldine
g.cauchy@lainamac.fr
www.lanatheque.fr
www.ohmylaine.fr www. lainamac.fr

Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
Selection of 100% French materials according to 5 key localisable steps. It has become so difficult to source these supplies, and indeed in the "Made in France materials".

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
Companies directly through an expert committee set up within the cluster.

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.

- Development of the library platform to present 100% French sheep breeds, services and materials;
- Identification of companies;
- Referencing;
- Mapping in progress.

Results and benefits

- Obligation of transparency of undertakings;
- Incentive to produce better-defined French references;
- 8,000 visitors last year on the platform.

LAINAMAC

3.5.4 New Opportunities for Cluster Members in Third Markets

Name of the cluster/association:
Bioeconomy Cluster

Country: SK - Slovakia

Industrial ecosystem: Agri-Food

Contact
Katarina Blicklingova
info@bioeconomy.sk
https://bioeconomy.sk/en/?noredirect=en_GB

Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
Many Slovak food companies, mostly SMEs, seek export opportunities to better use production capacities and reach new markets. As Slovakia's small, export-oriented economy depends on internationalization, the Bioeconomy Cluster supports its members through international trade missions.
Between 2022 and 2024, three missions to Canada, Japan, and the United Arab Emirates connected Slovak and European companies with distributors, importers, and experts, opening new distribution channels.
These initiatives aim to expand market access and strengthen Slovak export potential through direct international collaboration.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
The action was carried out under the F2F Health Matters (COSME) project, in which five leading European agri-food clusters from Slovakia, Belgium, Portugal, France, and Spain joined forces to support their members in internationalization. The initiative provided hands-on support to innovative SMEs in the healthy food sector, strengthening cross-border cooperation, promoting knowledge exchange, and improving global market access for European agri-food innovators.

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
The Bioeconomy Cluster and its partners organized three collective trade missions to Canada, Japan, and the United Arab Emirates, with participating companies selected through calls in 2022–2023.

A total of six Slovak companies took part and received travel cost reimbursement, while three others benefited from individual consulting services, including commercial lead support for market prospecting in target countries.
Participants also joined an online training and coaching program providing in-depth insights into target markets — covering regulations, product labeling, business etiquette, and marketing strategies.

Results and benefits
The main result was the creation of new business contacts for SMEs in target markets and improved knowledge of these markets. Participating companies met potential partners—both in person and online—to explore business opportunities and build distribution channels. At the same time, clusters engaged with partners, experts, and networks in the target countries. Several Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) were signed, confirming the commitment to long-term cooperation and future internationalisation initiatives for SMEs.

More information about the best practice

Bioeconomy Cluster

3.5.5 Development of a Value Chain on Urban Agriculture

Name of the cluster/association:
VEGEPOLYS VALLEY

Country: FR - France

Industrial ecosystem: Agri-Food

Contact
Léa MINIER
lea.minier@vegepolys-valley.eu
https://www.vegepolys-valley.eu/

Challenges

What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?

The European project SUAVE (Euro Cluster) is a pioneering 30-month initiative dedicated to developing urban agriculture for sustainable and resilient urban food systems. Funded by the European Union, SUAVE is coordinated by VEGEPOLYS VALLEY, in collaboration with four experienced clusters in the agrifood and digital technology sectors: FEMAC (Spain), INNOSKART (Hungary), UNIMOS (Poland), and Agrifood Lithuania (Lithuania).

The project's goal is to support European companies and competitiveness clusters in driving the green and digital transition within urban agriculture. As part of this mission, €1 million is allocated to European SMEs through calls for projects that promote innovation and international market access, with a focus on North America.

With its multidisciplinary approach, SUAVE encompasses the development of urban green spaces, alternative food production and distribution models, digital technologies for cities, environmental and urban planning challenges, and social inclusion and community building. Urban agriculture, a perfect intersection between green and digital transformation, serves as a response to multiple global challenges.

It fosters sustainability while generating economic, ecological, social, educational, and health benefits.

By offering strong support and continuous guidance to European SMEs, SUAVE empowers them to prepare for a greener and more digital future in urban food systems, enhancing resilience across all dimensions of sustainability.

Stakeholders

Who was involved in the development of the good practice?

The SUAVE consortium VEGEPOLYS VALLEY (France), in partnership with four clusters experienced in the field of agrifood and digital technology, FEMAC (Spain), INNOSKART (Hungary), UNIMOS (Poland) and Agrifood Lithuania (Lithuania).

Actions

What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.

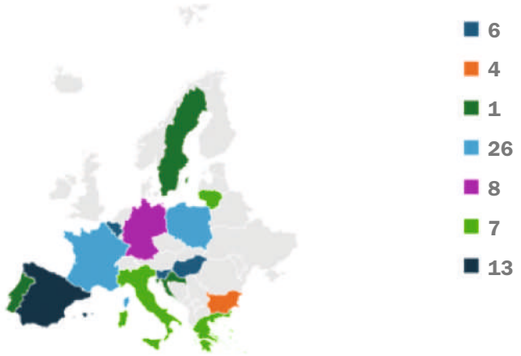
The SUAVE project aims to enhance business potential and address the growing needs for innovation, technology transfer, and industrialization across EU countries. In the short and medium term, SUAVE focuses on the urban sector, promoting sustainable food cities, ICT and digital innovation, and advancing the agricultural sector through the transfer of innovative tools developed for urban agriculture, ensuring local engagement and activity across Europe. In the longer term, the project will extend its impact to the water and energy sectors, as urban agriculture becomes increasingly integrated into the urban ecosystem and city metabolism, playing a key role in sustainability transitions. SUAVE aims to reach 500 SMEs, clusters, and business network organizations across Europe.

SUAVE consortium managed to reach important stakeholders of Urban Agriculture both in Europe and in other countries.

Results and benefits

- Through 2 waves of calls, the project funded 118 projects of 76 SMEs from 14 different countries representing a total of 1 045 500€.

GEOGRAPHICAL OUTREACH OF SUAVE FUNDING (CALL 1 & 2)



3.5.6 Programme eNCUENTRA: Skills for the Region

Name of the cluster/association:
Cluster IDiA

Country: ES - Spain

Industrial ecosystem: Digital Ecosystem

Contact
Nina Hoppmann
nina.hoppmann@idia.es
www.idia.es

Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
The green and digital transitions have sharply increased the demand for talent with advanced digital competences in Aragón. IDiA member companies were facing growing ***skills shortages and mismatches***, particularly for ICT profiles, and in 2017 they set up an internal working group to analyse the problem and co-design solutions.
The cluster's diagnosis triggered a structured regional skills dialogue with key stakeholders, including the Public Employment Service of Aragón (INAEM). This dialogue led INAEM to launch a publicly funded talent programme aimed at improving digital skills and employability in the region. Under the brand ***eNCUENTRA***, IDiA designed a series of programmes to pilot and scale ***innovative active-labour-market measures***: personalised guidance, upskilling and reskilling pathways, and direct links with companies. The programmes promote ***equal opportunities and inclusive access to quality jobs***, with a focus on groups at risk of being left behind in the twin transition: young people seeking digital skills, employed workers looking to reorient their careers, unemployed people and women in rural areas. Professional guidance was identified as a key instrument to tackle the talent gap, facilitate labour-market integration and equip people with the skills needed to access high-quality jobs in leading companies.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
IDiA implements *eNCUENTRA* in close partnership with ***INAEM***, which finances the actions through competitive public calls.
This public–private partnership ensures that the programme is fully aligned with ***regional employment and skills policies.***
To anchor the initiative in real labour-market needs, IDiA created an ***Advisory Council*** composed of representatives from member companies.
The Council regularly validates the digital skills in demand, emerging job profiles and the design of training content. In addition, IDiA cooperates with ***companies, VET centres and public and private education providers*** to ensure that the learning offer is coherent, practical and connected to concrete job opportunities.

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
eNCUENTRA consists of a portfolio of ***tailored support programmes*** that combine guidance, training and direct interaction with employers. Each edition is adapted to the specific target group, with a strong focus on ***individual learning pathways*** and ***work-based learning elements.***
IDiA's team is responsible for the full implementation cycle: outreach and recruitment of participants; structured interviews to identify profiles, prior learning and career goals; definition of individual professional pathways; one-to-one counselling; design and coordination of group workshops; company visits and job-matching activities.
Training modules cover both ***transversal employability skills*** (labour-market information, job-search strategies, personal branding, communication, professional development) and ***technical digital competences***, such as specific software tools and ICT applications relevant to member companies.
For each new *eNCUENTRA* edition, the skilling workshops are updated based on feedback from the Advisory Council and participating firms, ensuring a close fit with evolving skills needs in the regional digital ecosystem. To date, IDiA has implemented ***seven programmes*** under the *eNCUENTRA* brand.

Results and benefits
eNCUENTRA has delivered ***tangible labour-market outcomes*** and contributed to the EU's objectives on ***upskilling, reskilling and inclusive participation in the twin transition.*** So far, ***630 people*** have taken part in the programmes, with ***49% women***, reflecting IDiA's commitment to gender balance and to widening participation in digital careers. More than ***350 participants have moved into new jobs*** with the support of IDiA's team, either in member companies or in other firms in the region.
Across the seven editions, the cluster has carried out ***over 5,000 individual and group actions*** (guidance sessions, workshops, company contacts).
The programmes have supported both ***upskilling of people with ICT backgrounds towards*** more specialised positions and ***reskilling of participants from non-STEM fields*** into digital roles.
Experience shows that, with the right combination of targeted training, continuous mentoring and direct contact with companies, participants can successfully transition into quality digital jobs. For IDiA's members, *eNCUENTRA* is a strategic instrument to ***secure a skilled talent pipeline*** that is aligned with their real needs, while for the region it strengthens ***the innovation ecosystem and industrial fabric.***
High participant-satisfaction rates and sustained demand from companies confirm the programme's effective-ness in enhancing employability, addressing critical skills gaps and supporting the EU policy agenda on skills, employment and the green and digital transitions.

More information about the best practice

IDiA
Growing Through
Collaborative Innovation

3.5.7 Kickstart Trainings

Name of the cluster/association:
Latvian IT Cluster / Latvian Digital Innovation Hub

Country: LV - Latvia

Industrial ecosystem: Cross-sectoral

Contact
Aiga Irmeja
aiga.irmeja@itbaltic.com
www.dih.lv

Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
The Kickstart training programme began with its first digitalisation training in 2021, inspired by a Swedish good practice introduced through the EU-funded project InnoCape and then adapted to the Latvian business environment. At that time, Latvia's low DESI index and our early experience revealed that many companies struggled to clearly identify their business challenges and understand the impact of digital transformation. Although most enterprises expressed a strong wish to become more digital and innovative, they lacked both the knowledge and the practical tools to begin this journey.
Kickstart trainings were created to change that. Instead of traditional one-directional webinars, the programme was designed as an intensive, hands-on learning experience built around practical workshops, expert insights, peer learning, and the development of real business solutions. Over the years, the programme has expanded significantly.
What started as digitalisation training has now grown into three interconnected training tracks aimed at raising the digital maturity of Latvian companies:

- ***Kickstart Digitalisation***
- ***Kickstart Cybersecurity***
- ***Kickstart Artificial Intelligence (AI) (launching in 2026)***

Today, these trainings are offered to micro, small and medium enterprises, as well as large companies across a range of sectors.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
The Kickstart programme is organized and developed by the Latvian IT Cluster. Key partners, such as the Digital Centre of Cēsis and the innovation society ZINIS, participate in certain activities, along with various industry partners, sectoral clusters, associations, IT companies, and traditional industries acting as experts, as well as public bodies including the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia.
The cybersecurity training was developed in close collaboration with Norwegian partners, where this training format has already proven highly successful and widely used across Scandinavia.

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
Kickstart Digitalisation (2022–2025)
By 2025, the digitalisation trainings have been organised 26 times, engaging approximately 350+ companies. The format:

- Each company joins with a clearly defined business challenge it wants to solve.
- Over the course of one month , and with the support of mentors and experts, the company develops a roadmap for finding technological solutions.
- Weekly in-person or online sessions include workshops on business process evaluation, innovation culture, digital tools, technology adoption, and more.
- Weekly homework assignments help push the challenge toward a concrete solution.
- At the end of the training, participants present their progress report, showcasing their roadmap and proposed digital solutions.
- Companies are introduced to relevant funding and support instruments to continue their digitalisation journey.

Kickstart Cybersecurity (launched in 2025)
Since October 2025, 5 training groups have been delivered with participation from 160 companies. This is an interactive 3-hour practical training co-created with Norwegian cybersecurity experts. After its strong track record in Scandinavia, it has now been brought to Latvia. The training offers:

- Hands-on participation in real-life cyberattack scenarios
- Live cybersecurity simulations
- Immediate expert guidance on how to protect digital assets and improve organisational cyber resilience

Kickstart Artificial Intelligence (launching in 2026)
The newest addition to the Kickstart programme will focus on the use of AI in business, helping companies understand how AI technologies can:

- optimise and automate business processes
- strengthen innovation capabilities
- enhance digital transformation efforts

These trainings will give companies practical tools and examples to integrate AI responsibly and effectively into daily operations.

Results and benefits
Over the past four years, the Kickstart programme has grown in scale, expertise, and impact.
Digitalisation results (2022–2025):

- 350+ companies trained
- 26 training groups delivered
- Participants represent sectors such as tourism, agri-food, manufacturing, construction, creative industries and more
- A large share of companies continued their digital transformation journey:
  · 150+ companies expressed interest in applying for digital transformation grants supported by Latvian IT Cluster EDIH

Cybersecurity results (2025):

- 160 companies trained in 5 interactive simulation groups
- Strengthened cybersecurity awareness and readiness across micro, small, medium and large organisations

Programme expansion: with the 2026 AI trainings, Kickstart becomes a digital platform helping Latvian companies innovate, compete, and stay secure.

Latvian Digital Innovation Hub
POWERED BY LATVIAN IT CLUSTER

3.5.8 Courses for RES Installers

Name of the cluster/association:
SAPI - Slovak Association of Sustainable Energy

Country: SK - Slovakia

Industrial ecosystem: Energy-Renewables

Contact
Ján Karaba
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www.sapi.sk

Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
The lack of workforce skilled in renewables is becoming increasingly apparent in Slovakia, as in the rest of the EU. Without installers trained not only in installing relevant RES technologies but also in designing systems and managing the final approval of installations, the development of RES in Slovakia would be slow and would hinder progress toward EU decarbonisation targets for the energy sector.
SAPI therefore set out to support the reskilling of professionals already working in the electro-technical sector and the upskilling of those who have some experience with electrical installations but need specialised knowledge in PV and solar thermal systems.
The intention was to expand the pool of qualified workers able to contribute to the development and implementation of RES projects, thereby accelerating the deployment of renewables across the country.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
In addition to SAPI's own experts and member organisations, several of whom were directly involved in delivering the training, the initiative targeted independent installers and energy specialists seeking to improve their competencies. These practitioners actively participated in SAPI's courses to broaden their skills in the installation of photovoltaic and solar thermal devices.

SAPI Slovak association of sustainable energy

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
We have organised specialised 1–2 days training courses for installers, depending on participants' needs and whether they wished to be trained in photovoltaic systems, solar thermal systems, or both. The courses were typically held on a monthly basis, with breaks during holiday periods.
SAPI is certified by the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic to provide these courses as an accredited training service. As a result, specific participation requirements applied, particularly regarding candidates' technical background and education.
To complement the training, SAPI also developed and published a Codex for PV Installers, which sets out standards and norms that every photovoltaic installer — especially SAPI members — is encouraged to follow to ensure high-quality and safe installations.

Results and benefits
Until now SAPI has successfully reskilled or upskilled over 2000 installers through its requalification programme Courses for RES Installers, consisting of two modules: one focused on photovoltaic systems and one on solar thermal systems.
Building on this success, SAPI is now modernizing this programme based on latest industry knowledge utilizing online tools and adding practical training part. This way we are continuing in our contribution to strengthening the renewable energy workforce in Slovakia.

3.5.9 Live IT Projects

Name of the cluster/association:
Košice IT Valley

Country: SK - Slovakia

Industrial ecosystem: Cross-sectoral

Contact
Adam Urban
adam.urban@itvalley.sk
https://www.kosiceitvalley.sk

Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
The benefit of Live IT projects lies in providing students with direct contact with real business practice and the professional environment. As part of these projects, students work in teams of 4–5 members on real IT projects over a four-month period (October–January), under the guidance of industry experts and university mentors. The project outcomes typically include a software prototype such as an information system, website, mobile application, cloud solution, IoT application, intelligent interface, or electronic service. The project contractors are professionals from the field, acting as product owners within the SCRUM framework, ensuring the projects reflect real-world development processes.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
Košice IT Valley The Technical University of Kosice - Department of Computers and Informatics FEI

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
Live IT Projects represent a unique educational initiative that fosters cooperation between universities and industrial practice, organized under the auspices of the FEI TUKE Department of Computers and Informatics and the Košice IT Valley Cluster. The project stands out in both scope and format, being uncommon in Slovakia. As part of Live IT Projects, students work in teams of 4–5 members on real IT projects over a four-month period (October–January), under the guidance of experts from industry and academia. The project outcomes are typically software prototypes, such as information systems, websites, mobile applications, cloud or IoT solutions, intelligent interfaces, or electronic services. The project contractors are professionals from practice who act as product owners according to the SCRUM framework. The culmination of Live IT Projects is a public final event, where students present their solutions to an audience and a jury in a 2.5-minute pitch, competing for material prizes.
A key goal of the project is the creation of a functional prototype, verified through direct customer use. While innovation is valued, the focus remains on implementing ideas whose real potential is confirmed by end users. Therefore, teams are encouraged to develop prototypes early and engage in continuous customer validation throughout the project.

Results and benefits
Project Outputs:
The output of Live IT Projects is primarily software prototypes, including:
- Information systems
- Websites
- Mobile applications
- Cloud solutions
- Intelligent interfaces

Key Achievements:
- Over 30 companies contribute new project topics annually.
- Students collaborate with companies to address projects for the third sector and local government, demonstrating social impact.

IT VALLEY KOŠICE

- Many students from the early years of Live IT
- Projects now serve as mentors to corporate partners, showcasing the program's success in building talent and leadership.
- The initiative opens doors for students to engage in real IT projects, guided by experts from both industry and academia, providing practical experience.
- Live IT Projects highlight the endless opportunities within the region for students and professionals alike.

Live IT Projects in Numbers:
- 11 years of operation
- 432 projects completed
- 2335 students participated

This program exemplifies how collaboration between academia and industry can cultivate skills, innovation, and regional development.

More information about the best practice

3.5.10 Programme for HR Development

Name of the cluster/association:
ASTRICO NORD-EST TEXTILE CLUSTER

Country: RO - Romania

Industrial ecosystem: Textile

Contact
Carmen Boiciuc
cluster@astricone.eu
www.astricone.eu

Challenges

What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?

One of the cluster's goals is the training and continuous development of human resources through different programs. The need for skilled personnel has determined the implementation of significant initiatives for the development of human resources.

Stakeholders

Who was involved in the development of the good practice?

The group companies were involved in the actions of training the personnel and supporting their integration on the labour market. The companies organized internships and training programs in cooperation with the education and academia.

Actions

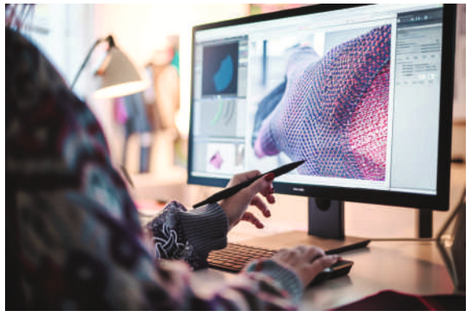
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.

We have developed the following initiatives:

- Qualification of unemployed persons through training programmes, tailored to the needs of the textile industry.
- Support for unemployed persons integration on the labour market through specific activities: professional counselling, job clubs.
- Supporting the integration in the labour market of the students from the Faculty of Industrial Design and Business Management - Iasi by organising internships in the cluster's factories.
- Active involvement in the development of the education-industry partnership by being part in the Regional and Local Consortium for the Development of the Social Partnership in the Vocational Education.
- Qualification of students through dual education system in partnership with the Technical College "Gheorghe Cartianu", Piatra Neamt.
- Organising dual education programmes in different specializations from the textile industry with students from different levels and classes.
- Supporting the students to finish their diploma theses at the centre of sampling, collection creation and professional training.

Results and benefits

- 70 unemployed persons received a qualification certificate on occupations necessary for the textile industry
- More than 400 persons from the rural areas receive support for the integration on the labour market
- More than 100 students were trained in different specializations from textile industry, being provided with increased opportunities for education and training, scholarships and job possibilities in textile companies of the cluster according to their skills.



3.5.11 Collaborative System in the Textile Value Chain

Name of the cluster/association:
ASTRICO NORD-EST TEXTILE CLUSTER

Country: RO - Romania

Industrial ecosystem: Textile

Contact
Carmen Boiciuc
cluster@astricone.eu
www.astricone.eu

Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
In 2011, the members of the cluster, important companies from the textile sector, identified the need to cooperate and to coordinate their efforts and potential to increase their competitiveness, to develop own, high added value products and to eliminate the „lohn" production system.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
The cluster companies were involved in this collaborative marketing-sales system.

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
Astrico Nord-Est has developed a collaborative marketing-sales system by setting up a trading company, owned by the members of the cluster.
The goals of this system:
- Developing own, high-added value products
- Reducing costs for members by offering complementary services
- Optimising the raw material costs and consumption
- Making more efficient the manufacturing capacities
- Reducing the commercial risks for members
- Obtaining better prices for delivered products

Results and benefits
Through this system the group companies benefit from services such as:
- Designing prototypes according to the technical specifications
- Developing collections by collaborating with specialized designers
- Know-how transfer among members
- Technical assistance
- Logistic and financial services

Annually, through the group trade companies are delivered 200,000 pieces of knitted garments for men, women and children.

Also, within the group, ASTRICO NORD-EST has founded its own creative production capacity equipped with the newest technologies on knitting industry:
- Computer graphic design systems
- Flat knitting machines
- Complete sewing line equipment
- Complete system for professional washing, drying and ironing
- Design and creative department

3.5.12 Catalonia Health Innovation Communities

Name of the cluster/association: Biocat

Country: ES - Spain

Industrial ecosystem: Health

Contact
Montse Daban
mdaban@biocat.cat
https://www.biocat.cat/en

Challenges

What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?

The challenge was boosting the growth of the healthcare innovation ecosystem, enhancing the connection and collaboration among stakeholders in all the value chain, supporting the acceleration of innovation toward patients and the market, filling the gaps in the value chains. What was intended with this program was to combine strengths of different institutions to accelerate the arrival of innovation in the healthcare system, boost the Advanced Therapies Network in Catalonia (ATMP Catalonia) and facilitate business development and access to investment and funding for the BioRegion's entrepreneurial community.

The 3 platforms connected are:

- Program for Innovation Access to the Catalan Health System (PASS)
- Catalonia Advanced Therapies Network (ATMP Catalonia)
- Health Investment Portal

Actions

What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.

With the Invest in the BioRegion Portal we've connected startups, innovative projects in Biotech, Medtech and Digital Health in the BioRegion of Catalonia with investors and corporates globally.

This tool facilitates the visibility and connectivity of the Catalan innovation ecosystem by promoting and amplifying the identification of investment and business opportunities internationally.

The portal allows the innovation ecosystem to publish information about their assets, allowing personalized search for investors and corporates through different fields to identify and contact potential candidates without intermediaries.

With the ATMP Catalonia and the community of practice, we've connected almost 200 players to promote the development of these therapies and make them accessible to citizens in a more agile, efficient, and sustainable manner.

It strives to improve connections between various stakeholders in the ecosystem, foster consensus and collaborations throughout the entire value chain, and contribute to addressing the challenges and needs of this community.

With the PASS program, we've increased visibility and interaction with health centres interested in incorporating innovation. Biocat has provided Initial guidance from on the next steps to access the Catalan Health System, direct access to the Self-Assessment Tool validated by AQuAS for a preliminary self-assessment of products or services, serving as a guide for innovators, access to the priority pathway for innovations that meet the necessary requirements, including a personalized institutional support program from Biocat in coordination with AQuAS.

All this is possible thanks to 2 main services that Biocat offers to the ecosystem:

- The BioRegion Report - the benchmark study of the life sciences and healthcare sector in Catalonia.
- The Catalonia Health and Life Sciences Data Platfom, access a comprehensive database with 1920 companies and institutions in Catalonia.

Results and benefits

With the Invest BioRegion Portal we've connected about 200 opportunities (research projects, startups, spinoffs), < to about 200 scouters (investors and corporates) generating almost 2000 interactions (visits, messages and actual meetings).

With the PASS program Navigator, we've identified almost 100 innovations to be supported and have established a permanent navigator in house to support their access to the market and the patients by entering the Healthcare System.

With the ATMP network we've set different task forces on the main issues, and implemented an ATMP acceleration program with training, mentoring, access to lab spaces and connections at local and international level.

More information about the best practice

3.5.13 QualiBioPharma

Name of the cluster/association:
leap:up GmbH

Country: DE - Germany

Industrial ecosystem: Health

Contact
Claudia Fischer
claudia.fischer@leap-up.com
www.leap-up.com

Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
Several SME active in the biotechnology and medical technology sector asked us in 2021 to train persons as lab workers. As there are too few large biotech companies to train beyond their needs, and the SME do not have sufficient capacity to adequately qualify staff themselves, they asked us to initiate and establish a project. With the project, leap:up GmbH intended to prove that it is possible to train inexperienced persons from non-academic backgrounds in becoming GMP-Operators capable of working in an aseptic environment according to GMP Standards, within a relatively short period of 3 months.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
City of Leipzig, Metropolregion Mitteldeutschland (Central German Metropolitan Region), Fraunhofer Institute for Cell Therapy and Immunology, Arbeitsagentur / Jobcenter Leipzig

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
Firstly, leap:up GmbH organised a kick-off workshop with Small and Medium Enterprises and several biotech companies that need lab staff, to define their main needs and the core learning content that should be part of the curriculum.
Based on this input, we created a curriculum in close cooperation with our project partner, Fraunhofer Institute for Cell Therapy and Immunology Leipzig. Fraunhofer Institute offered their lab staff to act as trainers and offered their high-end lab infrastructure (including the clean rooms) for us to use as well, so the training took place in the laboratories of the Fraunhofer Institute for Cell Therapy and Immunology located at BIO CITY Leipzig.
leap:up GmbH became an AZAV-accredited educational provider for adult vocational training and thus could work with unemployed persons who want to enter the Life Science industry laterally. Due to the AZAV accreditation, the Arbeitsagentur / Jobcenter pays for the education of the unemployed persons.
Since 2022, leap:up GmbH has been a certified training provider and supports the region in meeting its need for skilled workers. Once a year, we train up to 12 persons in our educational program "QualiBioPharma" and enable them to start right away to work in biological or chemistry labs as GMP-operators after having finished the training. With their degree, the graduates have a solid basis for direct employment and further training in the employing companies.

Results and benefits
Since 2023 we conducted "QualiBioPharma" three times, once a year each. In the first round, we trained 12 unemployed persons, 11 of whom finished the program and 10 passed the final exams in theory and practice. Six months later, 8 of these successfully started their career in the Life Sciences industry. The placement rate is above average.
“QualiBioPharma" also offers people with a migration background an opportunity to enter the German labour market. In this way, "QualiBioPharma" makes a decisive contribution to strengthening the innovation and competitiveness of the entire region.

More information about the best practice

3.5.14 Future of Footwear and Plastics Manufacturing

Name of the cluster/association:
Czech Footwear and Leather Association Paves the Way for the Future of Footwear and Plastics Manufacturing
Country: CZ - Czechia
Industrial ecosystem: Textile

Contact
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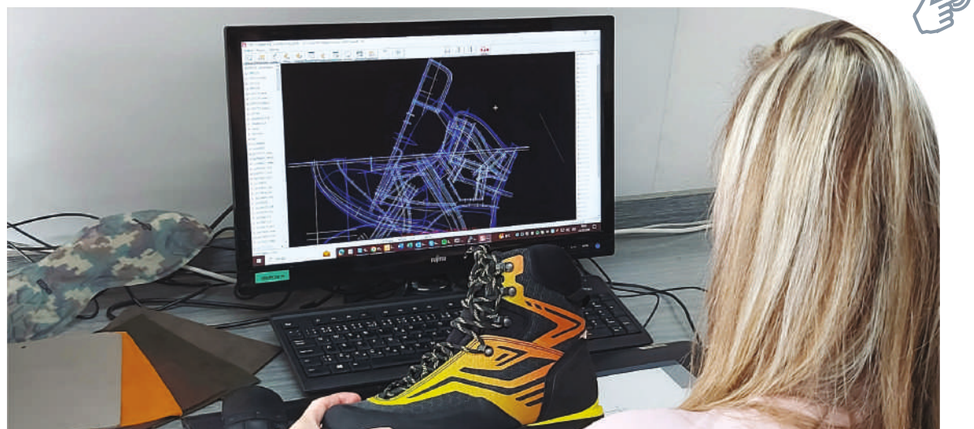
Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
The Czech Footwear and Leather Association (ČOKA), in collaboration with the Zlín Region, the Secondary Polytechnic School – Centre for Vocational Training Zlín (SPŠP – COP Zlín), and the Plastics Cluster, has initiated the creation of a new high school program, "Technical Lyceum – Footwear and Plastics Manufacturing Specialization."
The goal is to ensure a qualified workforce and attract the younger generation to study this promising field. Based on a petition initiated by ČOKA and signed by footwear and plastics companies, a working group was formed, comprising representatives from the Zlín Region, SPŠP – COP Zlín, and the Plastics Cluster.
This group worked intensively to transform the framework educational program into a modern school curriculum that reflects the current needs of the industry.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
Cluster organisations, Secondary Polytechnic School

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
The new high school program, "Technical Lyceum – Footwear and Plastics Manufacturing Specialization," has been designed to meet companies' demands for a qualified workforce.
The curriculum not only includes modern theoretical education but also significantly increases the number of practical training hours directly in companies, enabling students to gain valuable experience and better prepare for their future careers.
The goal is to launch the new program in the 2025/2026 school year, ensuring full capacity with at least 20 students in the first year. To achieve this, an intensive promotional campaign has been prepared. ČOKA, in collaboration with companies, raised CZK 200,000 to support marketing activities.
The campaign includes advertisements in magazines, trolleybuses, and on social media, ensuring effective communication with the younger generation.

Results and benefits
This new program will not only secure a qualified workforce for the footwear and plastics industries in the Zlín Region but also provide attractive educational opportunities for young people. Thanks to the initiative of ČOKA and its partners, a unique foundation is being created for the future development of these traditional yet constantly innovative industries.

More information about the best practice



3.5.15 Joining Forces to Support Technical Education

Name of the cluster/association:
HR Development Cluster

Country: CZ - Czechia

Industrial ecosystem: Proximity, Social Economy, and Civil Security

Contact
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Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
The declining interest in specific fields and challenges in education sparked discussions within the HR Development Cluster about whether companies could play a role in addressing this issue. Today's schools often lack the resources and capacity to prepare students for the demands of real-world technical professions adequately.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
Cluster organisation, two companies, high schools

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
Motivated by this challenge, RONIX TECH s.r.o., a member of the HR Development Cluster, partnered with SIConsult Zlín s.r.o. to create an educational project aimed at increasing interest in technical fields such as robotics, automation, and machining.
This initiative seeks to bridge the gap between education and practice, ensuring students are better equipped for their future careers.Since September 2024, training has been conducted directly on the premises of RONIX TECH s.r.o., utilizing the company's own training facilities and industry experts.
This program is open not only to meet the needs of RONIX TECH but also to support other member companies of the cluster. The first five students (one from SOŠ and SOU Otrokovice and four from GJP & SOŠ Slavičín) have already begun their training under the guidance of the company's employees as part of a dual education system.

Results and benefits
The project aims to prepare qualified and motivated individuals who will gain real-world experience during their studies. The HR Development Cluster expects the project to enhance the prestige of technical fields and generate greater interest in these career paths among students.
If the educational program proves successful, plans are in place to expand it to smaller companies, providing them access to similar training opportunities for future professionals. This initiative could significantly benefit students and the entire technical sector.

More information about the best practice

ROZVOJOVÝ HR KLASTR

3.5.16 GO Furniture META-CLUSTER

Name of the cluster/association:
GO Furniture META-CLUSTER

Country: RO - Romania

Industrial ecosystem: Cross-sectoral

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https://gofurniture.eu/

Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
The European furniture and wood industry is characterised by a large number of SMEs operating in fragmented markets, often with limited capacities for internationalization, innovation, and green/digital transformation. Prior to the creation of the GO Furniture META-CLUSTER, cooperation between European clusters existed but lacked long-term structure, shared governance, and sustainability beyond individual project funding.
The metacluster was funded as a long-term commitment of the initial funded INTERNATIONAL project Furniture GO International. At the end of the project, the following challenges have been identified: Difficulty for SMEs to access third-country markets, lack of information, insufficient support in navigating regulatory changes at EU level. To address these challenges, the META-CLUSTER was created to:

- Provide a unified European platform for collaboration and knowledge exchange,
- Support SMEs in accessing international markets, Strengthen sustainability and innovation capacity,
- Build a long-term governance model ensuring continuity and strategic development.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
GO Furniture META-CLUSTER has 8 founding members: Transylvanian Furniture Cluster – RO; HABIC – ES; Wood Industry Cluster – SI; Klastr Ceských Nábytkářů – CZ; Interior Cluster Sweden – SE; Pro Wood Regional Wood Cluster – RO; Bulgarian Furniture Cluster – BG; AMBIT – Centre for Wood & Furniture Technology – ES.
It expanded with: Rivne Furniture Cluster – UA; Distretto Interni Design – IT; Cluster Legno Arredo Casa FVG – IT; CLUSTER FURNITURE & MORE - MD; Lviv Furniture Cluster - UA; SHPDK - Kosovo

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
Establishing a long-term governance and operational model: composed of General Assembly (GA): main decision-making body Chairman (MCC): elected every 2 years; Operational Team (OT): responsible for implementation and Working Groups (WG): addressing sustainability, innovation, and market expansion. Governance principles were codified, approved and shared with all members. We have formalised the network, through the Partnership Agreement.
The GO Furniture website (https://gofurniture.eu/) was launched, providing visibility, communication, events, networking. Together with the network, we have successfully submitted 4 new European initatives, organised 4 online events and 4 on-site exchanges among the consortium, and supported dissemination of relevant regulatory and opportunities material for cluster members and the management team.

Results and benefits
A unified European meta-cluster connecting 14 clusters from 9 countries, with over 1.000 SMEs represented within the network, benefiting from shared opportunities.

- 300+ active users on the networking platform.
- Ambassador networks established in three strategic global markets.
- Long-term governance model ensuring sustainability beyond project funding.
- Launch of new GO Furniture Hubs, expanding European coverage (e.g., Italy Hub, 2025).
- Continuous dissemination of news, market insights, and events. Together with the network, we are creating lasting value through shared actions, hubs, ambassadors, and cross-cluster collaboration, that supports SMEs to become more competitive, innovative, and internationally oriented.

More information about the best practice

3.5.17 Innovation Platform Project

Name of the cluster/association:
Cluster Legno Arredo e Sistema Casa FVG Srl Consortile

Country: IT - Italy

Industrial ecosystem: Cross-sectoral

Contact
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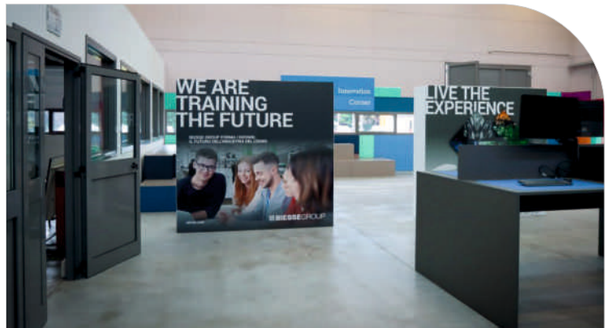
Challenges
What was the starting point? What did you intend to achieve and why?
The main challenge was to develop a platform that could bridge the gap between the skills required in the furniture sector and the shortage of specialized workers, while also integrating the latest innovations and best practices. We aimed to promote continuous training and the adoption of innovative, sustainable technologies and materials. This required understanding national and international trends to attract the right talent and investment to the region. We also sought to create a collaborative space for schools, designers, and businesses to share knowledge.
The goal was to help the sector evolve in line with industry demands by offering specialized training, disseminating best practices, and connecting to wider networks to support innovation and growth.

Stakeholders
Who was involved in the development of the good practice?
Cluster Legno, national and regional institutions, training institutions, furniture system companies, unemployed residents, students, professionals.

Actions
What have you done? Please make your description as concrete as possible.
There are four active laboratories in Brugnera, Udine, and Manzano: three dedicated to training and updating professional profiles demanded by companies, and one focused on disseminating best practices to create value for businesses, schools, the workforce, and professionals. The project involves companies through project-based activities and training to address key topics for technological and sustainable development, supported by structured surveys, such as energy efficiency, environmental sustainability, innovative materials, and production technologies and identify training and specialization needs.
Additional actions strengthen career guidance and the education offer: enhancing the regionally recognized training offer for the furniture and panel sector in Friuli-Venezia Giulia and the neighboring provinces of Veneto through state-of-the-art laboratories, with the goal of positioning FVG as a leading training hub and providing mentoring, career guidance, and educational visits to exhibitions, companies, and Innovation Platforms to connect education with industry.
To facilitate workforce integration, targeted courses address shortages in CNC programming, 3CAD and technical drawing software, and upholstery techniques.

Results and benefits.
In less than three years, the Innovation Platform organized over 70 events, provided technical training to more than 300 participants, re-skilled over 50 unemployed people, and involved more than 500 students in visits and activities.
The project strengthened sector-wide knowledge, innovation, and visibility, while continuously updating companies and supporting both workforce re-skilling and employee upskilling.



CLUSTER FVG
LEGNO ARREDO CASA

INNOVATION
PLATFORM