

European Cluster Collaboration Platform



FINAL REPORT

**Research paper on cluster manager internationalisation skills
and keys for success in managing and promoting pan-European
Strategic Cluster Partnerships**

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	5
1.1 Methodological approach	5
1.2 A few clarifications to start with... ..	5
1.3 Structure of the Report	8
2. MANAGEMENT SKILLS AND KEYS FOR SUCCESS	9
2.1 Building of the project partnership	9
2.1.1 Composition of the partnership	9
2.1.2 Selection and characteristics of participants	11
2.2 The coordination of the project	13
2.2.1 Definition of the role of project coordinator	13
2.2.2 Key coordinator management skills.....	14
2.3 Management skills and tools amongst project participants	16
2.3.1 Specific skills to interclustering initiatives	16
2.3.2 Decisions and roles inside the consortium	17
2.3.3 Human and financial resources.....	18
2.4 Internal Information and communication.....	20
2.4.1 Information and communication amongst project partners.....	20
2.4.2 Promotion of the initiative towards clusters' SME members.....	20
2.5 Internationalisation	21
2.5.1 The joint international strategy	21
2.5.2 The Effectiveness of the JIS methodological approaches	22
2.6 Strategy deployment and feedback.....	23
3. EXTERNAL PROMOTION SKILLS AND TOOLS NEEDED	27
3.1 Communication and promotion tools/materials	27
3.1.1 Key elements for an efficient international communication strategy.....	27
3.1.2 A common branding and identity	28
3.1.3 Common publications and communication tools	28
3.2 Communication and promotion skills	32
4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	34
4.1 Summary conclusions	34



4.2	Recommendations.....	37
5.	ANNEX 1: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES	39
6.	ANNEX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDELINES	40

“Cluster manager internationalisation skills and keys for success in managing and promoting pan-European Strategic Cluster Partnerships”

DRAFT FINAL REPORT
19 November 2014

inno TSD
Place Joseph Bermond
Ophira 1 – BP 63
06902 Sophia Antipolis
Cedex France

Authors:

Marc Pattinson, inno TSD
Soraya Bernard, inno TSD
Camille Duran, inno TSD
Jean Noel Durvy Expert

1.Introduction

This research paper presents an overview of the activities and results of the Six Pilot projects for Cluster internationalization funded by DG Enterprise and Industry of the European Commission under the CIP programme (WIINTech, REINA, Textile2020, EU4SportsClusters, bioXclusters, Feeding the Planet). It also includes some information regarding the developments of the thirteen European Strategic Cluster Partnerships Partnership (ESCP) launched in 2013. It concludes by setting out some recommendations for the management and promotion of European Strategic Cluster Partnerships and for future cluster internationalisation projects that might be supported under the COSME programme.

inno TSD (and their expert JN. Durvy) was commissioned on 10 July by the ECCP platform animator Clusterland on behalf of DG Enterprise and Industry of the European Commission to undertake a study on the results and experiences of these cluster internationalisation projects (ESCP). The aims of the study were to examine the results of the projects, but in particular to focus on the range management skills and communication tools that are required for their successful implementation and the key lessons for future ESCP type projects.

The first results of this paper were presented during a workshop held during the 4th edition of the European Cluster Conference in Brussels on the 20-21st October 2014.

1.1 Methodological approach

The findings of this report are based on both quantitative and qualitative data based on interviews with project coordinators and data mining techniques. The approach adopted was to conduct an analysis, on the one hand regarding the management skills necessary for implementing such projects and identifying the keys for success of these cooperation initiatives, and on the other hand the skills and methods necessary for the promotion of these initiatives, and the key skills and communication tools/materials required.

Interviews have been carried out with representatives of the 6 pilot projects (with coordinators and selected partners) and a selection of ESCP coordinators. This research fieldwork took place between late July and October 2014.

1.2 A few clarifications to start with...

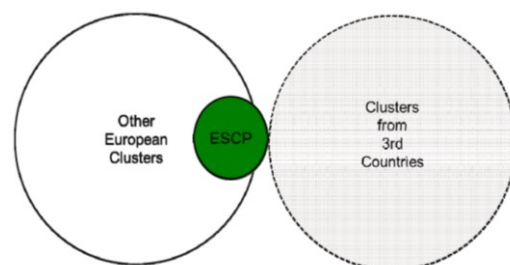
Promotion and development of world-class cluster

The ESCP acronym stands for European Strategic Cluster Partnership and was launched by DG Enterprise in 2012. The ESCP's seek to develop and trial innovative approaches to facilitate cooperation between cluster organisations and cluster firms across Europe and beyond, with a view to intensifying SME internationalisation through clusters and developing more competitive clusters in Europe. In order to successfully compete on a global level, it has become crucial for Europe to actively further its innovative potential and to collaborate between regions and industry clusters.

The principal aim of these partnerships is to work on developing and implementing joint international strategies (JIS) for entering third markets beyond Europe.

In total **six pilot projects** have been funded under the CIP programme in order to support the internationalisation of SMEs outside the European Union, by building upon and further developing successful support schemes already implemented in some Member States.

EUROPEAN STRATEGIC CLUSTER PARTNERSHIPS (ESCPs):
Cooperation at European & Internationalisation level



This general purpose of these projects includes the following detailed objectives:

- to create international cluster cooperation
- to increase the visibility and credibility of the clusters inside and outside Europe
- to improve and upgrade existing programmes regarding cluster international activities
- to jointly develop an internationalisation strategy
- to communicate, disseminate and replicate progress and results achieved

These five objectives were at the forefront of the considerations of the research team when undertaking the interviews with project partners. The report focus is clearly on the “international, management and cooperation” aspects and not on general cluster management/marketing skills issues.

Table 1 List of the pilot projects

Pilot European cluster partnerships	Main activities
WIINTech - Worldwide Intercluster Initiative for New materials and processes focused on clean Technologies	Adoption of International roadmap Visit of WIINTech cluster partners to targeted countries - US, Brazil, India, Japan - to share approaches Matchmaking event in Europe Handbook for SMEs First pilot activities in 2014
REINA - World EU Cluster Initiative in Renewable and sustainable Energy	The activities are structured in three operative phases that fit into the internationalisation model developed by the European Energy Cluster Alliance Internationalisation Handbook: 1) Energy market screening 2) Definition of tailored internationalisation strategies 3) Strategies deployment (promotional and marketing actions, development of a network of key contacts, involvement of target companies, support the definition and launch of specific internationalisation company projects, evaluation, sustainability and dissemination of best practices and project lessons)
BioX4Clusters - BIO crossing borders of 4 European Clusters for a joint internationalisation strategy	Training sessions for jointly developing the international strategy Sharing network of the 4 regions and develop a European Life Sciences taskforce in China Missions in the three countries: exploratory trip in Brazil, business mission in the USA and a common BioXclusters event in China Adoption of joint and sustainable world-class internationalisation strategy
EU4Sports Clusters	Analysis of participant clusters (benchmarking, internationalisation work groups, strategic benchmarking on international strategies) Support capabilities via internal cluster trips Pilot missions to international countries (Brazil and Russia)

TEXTILE2020 The European World-Class Cluster for Advanced Textile Materials	Creation of the European Advanced Textile Materials world class cluster Elaboration of a joint internationalisation strategy Organisation of four international business trips Joint participation in two international fairs Organisation of an Advanced Textile Materials stakeholder conference Identification of needs for new international innovation funding schemes Implementation of a joint internationalisation pilot action
Feeding the Planet	Matchmaking and R&D project development; Supporting EU industry and research institutes to find partners abroad; Facilitating foreign industries and research institutes willing to invest in the EU market; Scouting of funding opportunities for R&D projects; Business intelligence in agri-food clusters at international level.

The aim of these partnerships is to encourage clusters from CIP participating countries to move from networking to developing and implementing joint cluster internationalisation strategies in new areas towards third countries beyond Europe.

During the First Call for the Expression of Interest 13 partnerships (selected in 2013) were selected: A modest amount of finance was available to organise cluster/best practices visits. Each project has between 6-13 partners and project partnerships had the possibility to add more partners:

- ☐ European Lighting Cluster Alliance – ELCA
- ☐ European Aerospace Cluster Partnership – EACP
- ☐ ICT4Future
- ☐ European Sports Clusters Partnership
- ☐ European Semiconductor Cluster Consortium – ESCC
- ☐ Food, Health & Wellbeing
- ☐ Textile 2020
- ☐ Energy in Water
- ☐ Mind the Gap – Health and Wellbeing for the Elderly
- ☐ International Cleantech Network – ICN
- ☐ Photonics & Packaging for Innovation - 3P4I
- ☐ Personalized Healthcare
- ☐ Natural Resource Efficient Europe - Natureef



1.3 Structure of the Report

This document is structured as follows:

- ☐ An overview of project management issues
- ☐ An overview of marketing and promotional issues
- ☐ Conclusions and recommendations

The findings are illustrated by extracts from the interview findings or from the project published results.

2. Management skills and keys for success

This chapter presents the findings regarding the nature of the management skills of the project coordinators and project cluster managers, necessary for cluster internationalisation projects; which need to be considered in order to manage and deliver the desired project results

Cluster organisations and inter cluster partnerships are increasingly becoming a key tool for regional and international development and for supporting the reinforcement of SME competitiveness. The six pilot projects and the ESCP projects have sought to develop a new collaboration approach, a so called “large meta-cluster” with a critical mass of partners, thus addressing three challenges at the same time: to combine individual cluster interests with the overall objectives of the project and to focus on a limited number of geographical markets and technology sectors and to help SMEs access new markets.

The success and added value of these initiatives relies on the empowerment, competences and abilities of the project team. The following sections illustrate the key processes involved in such projects and deal with them in a chronological order i.e. from project development/start up through to project delivery.

2.1 Building of the project partnership

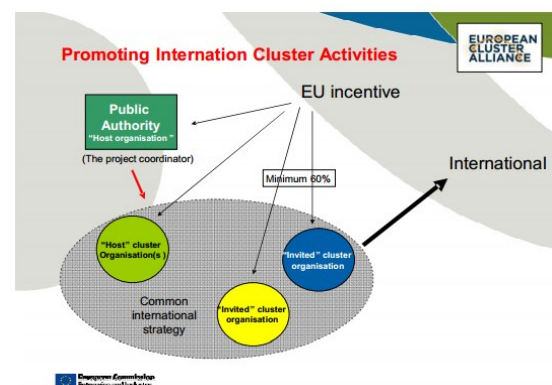
2.1.1 Composition of the partnership

The building of the project partnership is a key moment in the project preparation phase, in which specific challenges can be faced and specific skills and tools are needed. Most project coordinators and partners agreed that it has proved very advantageous to the building of the project for **clusters to already know each other before the project** and even to have engaged in previous cluster internationalisation projects together. This invariably shortened the project lead-in time and allowed results to emerge earlier. This is notably the case of Feeding the Planet, BioXClusters, WIINTech, REINA, etc. In such cases, thanks to the Pilot project and subsequent ESCP initiatives, consortia could rapidly start new activities, based on their existing collaboration often within existing networks such as the Council for European Biotech Regions (CEBR) for bioXCluster. Most agreed that the project would have been less efficient with completely new partners. In some cases, new partners were added to existing collaborations in order to improve geographical and technological coverage inside the consortium (eg. WIINTech). Very few initiatives started from scratch, and when this was the case, this has been a real disadvantage to the initiative compared to others and such projects were considerably delayed in implementing concrete project actions. Project performances clearly benefit from working with clusters and experienced coordinators who are well integrated into international networks.

It was also generally considered that before starting to cooperate, **clusters should have a good knowledge of each**

Zoom on the ESCP Healthcare or EPHCA:

This ESCP project is a direct follow-up of BioXclusters pilot project and of a long-term cooperation between 4 clusters: Lyonbiopole, Biocat, BioM, and BioPmed. Another cluster completed the initiative, Health Science Scotland. The collective thinking was already established, although there was a challenge in integrating a new participant in the existing collaboration. The ESCP was the occasion to continue the work undertaken on the development of their internationalisation tools as a group, e.g. a consortium mission to South Korea, continuation of collaborations with Brazil, incoming mission event "EU-Japan Cluster Matchmaking" etc.



other's characteristics, especially clusters' focus, strengths and weaknesses. For example, the initiative EU4Sports for started with an analysis of each participant cluster consisting of benchmarking, internationalisation working groups, and strategic benchmarking on international strategies. The gathering of such detailed knowledge of each partner region was also an important attribute for the coordinator and also amongst participants to better explore future opportunities for cooperation.

Each of the six pilot projects was composed of one regional or national public authority/agency (the project coordinator identified as "host organisation"), a minimum of one cluster and network organization from the coordinator's country/region ("host cluster organisation") and a minimum of two cluster and network organisations from other CIP participating countries ("invited cluster organisations"). **ESCPs' composition was different from pilot projects**, as there was no precondition regarding the integration of a public authority/agency in the project consortium.

Interviews with the project coordinators cited that it is important to involve members of the cluster, and especially SMEs, in the definition of the project concept from the outset. It is each cluster's role to bring the interests of their own SMEs into the discussions on cooperation. The focus of cooperation should be decided in accordance with the SMEs' needs. When discussions occurred inside each cluster before the start of cooperation and during project building, it turned out to be very useful to the initiative.

Some pilot projects also used external experts to present and brokerage relationships and to develop sector knowledge. The pilot project WIINTech, for example, included BPI France, the French public body for SME innovation and funding as a partner to deal with the management of the project, and UbiFrance, the French Agency for International Business Development as a subcontractor with an important role at the operational level and for bringing its know-how on the preparations of international missions. The Agency Veneto Innovazione also played a key catalyst role to facilitate the definition of a common branding strategy.

Zoom on the Pilot project WIINTech: in this project the expertise of external project experts was very beneficial to help clusters overcome their own individual interests and to converge towards a single and common view. For instance, the coordinator and partners underlined the positive role played by organisations like UbiFrance, Oseo, Veneto Innovazione and the Fondation Sophia Antipolis (FSA) during the launch phase of the project.

Project coordinators stated that it is important to understand when it is appropriate to bring in external expertise and be aware of their and their consortiums limits in terms of competences and expertise. The utilisation of external and "neutral" experts can help create consensus and building blocks for future development. bioXCluster was able to fund the use of international experts (another project funding) from international cluster ecosystems to participate in regional meetings. This expert presence greatly enhanced the quality of the exchanges and provided a valuable business and training element to the clusters involved in this project. Project coordinators should also be experienced in international projects and well

Zoom on the ESCP EACP:

In the ESCP European Aerospace Cluster Partnerships (EACP) the demand to participate was high and the following process was implemented. The applicant first had to fill in a 4 page form about the cluster, and this was then submitted to the feedback of all project members. If feedback was positive, the cluster was invited to join the consortium at an event, and if the participation went well, then its application was submitted to a vote inside the consortium where 35% of positive voters were required.

networked to ensure that project consortium members have a track record of successful cooperation and/or international experiences.

Regarding the number of clusters participants in each consortium, it seems quite evident that **small-scale cooperation between 3 to 5 clusters** works very well. This size of consortium facilitates concrete activities and cooperation and a common identify is readily achieved. Above this number cooperation becomes more difficult, eg. in some cases getting 8 clusters to agree on a single international strategy has proved difficult and the scope for cooperation is often reduced to a limited number of "common denominators". A reasonable consortium size is an

advantage, but some consortia like WIINTech and Textiles 2020 were nevertheless successful with larger consortia.

Indeed one of the main differences between the six pilot project and the ESCP's is often the number of partners, the latter often having double those of the pilot projects. The average number of clusters amongst the pilot projects was indeed nearer 5 clusters, with the majority of initiatives composed of only 3 to 4 clusters (REINA, EU4Sports, Feeding the Planet, BioXClusters) and two initiatives with 8 clusters each (Textile2020, WIINTech). Conversely, the average number of clusters per project was of 8 cluster members for ESCP projects, when a minimum of 5 clusters was observed in a few initiatives (Healthcare, ICT4Future, 3P4I) and a maximum that reached 13-clusters (ICN). This may have slowed down the process of building a common strategy and starting concrete activities and missions amongst the ESCP projects.

2.1.2 Selection and characteristics of participants

The success of partnerships also relies on the quality of its members. Indeed, it has proved important to involve reliable and well-established cluster organisations, with secure and long term funding and with a strong internal support for the initiative, notably from the top-managers. Indeed, in some cases, such as in the ESCP Mind the Gap, a project could suffer from resignations when partners are not sufficiently stable, notably in terms of budget. In the Mind the Gap partnership for example, the successful execution of the project was particularly altered by the resignation of two clusters from the project which had to stop their activities in the course of 2014. The consortium thus concentrated on looking for new partners, as some fields were missing to complete the value chain represented in the consortium. They finally found new partners but were then lacking time to start concrete cooperation.

The cluster organisations benefitting from **ECI labels** are considered a good indicator of the quality and experience of the cluster organization, especially Gold labels where international actions and networks represent key performance indicators. Some projects used a specific new member process to measure the potential inputs of each new addition to the consortium in order to guarantee this quality. The idea of some partnerships was to bring together the forces of some of the best clusters in Europe from one sector, and to achieve a critical mass. Clusters were also chosen with considerations such as complementary activities and value chains in mind. A lot of clusters already had experience in cluster collaboration before, and this proved useful in many cases.

Zoom on EU4Sports:

"Individual sports clusters benchmarking - In order to identify the strengths and synergies between the 3 participant clusters, a benchmarking exercise was undertaken individually by each cluster manager. Based on a self-assessment by each cluster manager in the context of an individual interview using the ESCA benchmarking approach, each cluster received an individual report providing a comparison of different characteristics of the cluster management organisation with peers and recommendations for further improvement. Moreover, through this benchmarking exercise the three European clusters were awarded with the European Cluster Management Excellence Bronze Label." *Extract from EU4Sports, Best practices in internationalization for clusters, December 2013.*

Key skills and success factors summary – Project building phase

- 1) Project coordination skills based on similar international projects and knowledge of cluster networks is a prerequisite for managing and leading such initiatives
- 2) A Consortium composed of clusters that already know each other and in the best cases have already cooperated at an international level is a bonus.
- 3) Some partners who already have an experience of interclustering in the consortium is an advantage
- 4) A particular attention needs to be paid to the quality and sustainability of clusters involved. Project coordinators need to be aware and familiar with cluster excellence tools/methods.
- 5) A strong internal support in each organization for the initiative. Project coordinators must have the necessary communication skills set to convince and present the value added of international cooperation to cluster (internal) management and funding (external) bodies.
- 6) A good shared knowledge amongst the consortium of each cluster/region facilitates cooperation actions
- 7) A reasonable size of the consortium (4 to 6 clusters involved)
- 8) External support can help identify the priorities and focus for the project partners. Clusters labeling and benchmarking tools can also help provide “neutral” assessments of the cluster strengths and competences.

2.2 Coordination of the project

2.2.1 *Definition of the role of project coordinator*

Most project coordinators and partners of both pilot projects and ESCPs agreed that the “coordination function” of such a project could be understood, in a broad sense, as encompassing three functions: an administrative role, an animation and facilitator role and/or as a project leader/driver role in the project.

The “minimum” expected role of the coordinator of such a project, according to those interviewed, is composed at least of a administrative role, and an animation role consisting of reminding project partners of deadlines and expectations related to the project but also gathering “energies and motivating troops”, and dealing with internal communication, internal conflicts, and being a link between the European Commission and the project partners.

Regarding the pilot projects, as previously mentioned, each project had to be led by a regional or national public authority/agency (the project coordinator identified as “host organisation”) that manages the cluster and network programmes dedicated to support international activities or committed to add an international dimension to its existing cluster and network programme.

The role of coordinators in these projects was **mainly an administrative function**. They often focused their activities project management planning, coordination of tasks (verification of deadlines, reminders, etc.), reporting and financial administration of the project. Another project partner, in most cases a cluster organisations and its cluster manager often took the role of the leader or ‘locomotive’ of the project, notably regarding missions and activities. Indeed, project partners generally did not perceive the “administrative” coordinator as an animator of the initiative, even less a “leader”.

Opinions were divided on the pertinence of public entities to coordinate the project. On the one hand, most respondents agreed on the fact that their presence was useful to take charge of the administrative part of the project and provide linkages with other public agencies. The outcome was rather positive when it came to discussing the pertinence of having a partner focusing on administrative tasks, while another project partners, in this case cluster organisations could take the role of a leading partner, to manage the group and coordinate the definition of the Joint Internationalisation Strategy (JIS) for example. Their presence was also perceived as beneficial as they were considered as a **neutral** entity in the project, an important quality when dealing with consensus-building, sharing of tasks and management of conflicts between partners drawn from many different countries. They could also effectively help partners to find counterparts abroad (agency representation in the third country targeted, for example export agencies, development agencies).

Nonetheless, some aspects regarding the coordinators’ involvement in concrete activities of the project were subject to more discussion. Indeed, coordinators often did not involve themselves in the definition of the joint internationalisation strategies and did not participate in the missions and activities. In most cases, this was not perceived as a problem by project partners, but some of them would have preferred greater involvement of project coordinators in concrete activities. In some cases, the coordinator was considered as potentially too distant from the business sphere to be efficiently involved in the definition of the common strategies and in concrete activities. Some also regretted that the coordinators did not play the role of facilitator and animator sufficiently well.

In the end, a certain proportion of respondents remained sceptical on usefulness of the involvement of public entities in such projects and would have preferred that a cluster or a cluster related agency assume all the functions associated with a project coordinator. Some also suggested that the presence of public entities in such initiatives had added an unnecessary administrative burden to the projects.

Innovative project coordination ideas from interviews with coordinators and partners of the 6 pilot projects:

- In several cases, there were **two coordinators from the beginning of the project**, one with an administrative role and one with an animation and leading role. Such a dual organisational structure worked very well.
- A project coordinator argued in particular that the coordinator role and necessary skills are not the same in the initial launching phase of the project, when neutrality as well as administrative and project management skills are essential; as they are in the mature phase of the project, when the coordinator would gain from being a cluster, because knowledge of technological aspects, SME needs as well as of the main potential industrial partners for the consortium, are increasingly crucial. In the initial phase of the pilot project, the coordinator's role would be more one of an administrator and a facilitator role, neutral and able to build trust and confidence as well as consensus, which would suit public entities very well. In the second phase of the project, "locomotives", clusters should be placed at the heart of the coordination role. Flexibility is recommended for the future.
- Task delegation was important and some coordinators preferred to allocate tasks to two partners to create strong bilateral exchanges (and a safety back up).
- One of the benefits of a "public administration or Ministry" led coordination is that they can manage some political and geographical or culturally sensitive questions/issues. A project partner also advanced the idea of setting up **advisory boards** for such initiatives, composed of public bodies and thus not requiring their direct involvement in the project as formal partners.

Regarding ESCPs, coordinators were responsible for the administrative role and a leading/animation role in the consortium. Indeed, they had a good overview of the strategy, clusters' objectives, and project activities and missions, and could thus be pro-active in playing the role of "locomotive" in the project. Indeed the knowledge and activities often associated under the "administrative" heading can often provide a valuable insight into opportunities and project leverage, for example additional funding, partnership and complementarities with other national or regional programmes/initiatives.

2.2.2 Key coordinator management skills

Inter-clustering initiatives logically require coordinators' to master specific management skills. They represent new and innovative initiatives with an important international and intercultural dimension, and tackle the difficult challenge of making potential competitors work together towards a common goal or shared objective. In any case, the management skills considered essential for the coordinator of such projects are logically linked to the general conception of the role of a coordinator in such projects.

In most cases, the administrative role was particularly highlighted and thus having extensive **experience in European project management**, experience in writing proposals and dealing with administrative and financial follow-up and financial reporting were perceived as important to the good coordination of the project. The ability to set up and coordinate project management systems is important as are the skills required to train and coach other partners through the administrative processes. The ability to manage the project planning and ensuring partners respect planning and deadlines, as well as to help build consensus amongst participants about the division of tasks in the consortium, and to supervise the successful progress of the project, are also essential qualities for coordinators. Finally the ability to gather the collective resources and focus the partner resources in order to plan consortium meetings and videoconferences, and the ability to lead those meetings is essential to the role of coordinator.

A very **good knowledge of clusters**, their needs, policies, and strategies, and experience of projects with cluster managers would also be a great added value to the coordination of such projects, as cluster policies are at the heart of such initiatives, especially cluster policies regarding internationalisation and SMEs. As previously noted the lack of knowledge of the coordinators regarding the business sphere and clusters was a common reproach made by project partners regarding the coordinator of their initiative.

Communication skills were also often mentioned, notably internal communication and dissemination skills, and the knowledge of helpful tools for management and communication (internal and external), for example in the TEXTILE2020 project a series of shared IT tools were used, Dropbox for less sensitive information and the NFID Intranet for exchange of information inside the consortium. Sometimes expectations were also specific to partnerships and inter-clustering initiatives, when pertaining to the methods and tools of management and internal communication (such as platform or innovative resources for such initiatives). Indeed, in some cases, such as in the ESCP Mind the Gap, the project coordinator was appointed amongst its peers for their inter-clustering experience and skills. A dynamic and professional coordinator able to use state of the art/best practices and tools was clearly an advantage on managing such projects. Given the complexity of the projects it was important to provide simple and transparent management tools to enable partners to focus on the core issues of cluster and SME internationalisation support and strategy definition.

Coordinators are also required to coordinate the cooperation of clusters from different European countries, and might also be in contact with the international targets of the project. For these reasons, they are also required to have sufficient **intercultural and international skills**, and it was stated by all interviewees that one could not be the coordinator of such projects without very good **communication and written English skills**. Knowledge of other languages was also a bonus, for example those spoken by partners or third party target countries.

The project coordinator is also expected to adopt a **neutral approach** that would notably enable them to play the role of facilitator in the project building phase, facilitate the building of consensus between project partners in the first steps of cooperation, and deploy consensus building, negotiation and conflict management abilities. The attitude of the coordinator towards both project partners and the European Commission was also frequently mentioned, with high hopes regarding the coordinator's ability to balance both sides' expectations and link the two aspects.

Coordinators were also expected to have qualities such as rigour and consistency and the ability to anticipate problems and needs. These skills are not very different from general project management skills but they take on an additional importance when set within an international context. Indeed, project planning and anticipating problems and challenges were particularly important skill sets for coordinators in the six pilot projects given their relatively short duration (24 months) and the number of complex international events/missions to deliver.

Leadership skills were also frequently mentioned by respondents who suggested that leadership skills should be at the heart of the coordinator's role. Ideally project coordinators should also provide sectoral, technological and ecosystem knowledge and skills.

Key project management skills and success factors summary for project coordination

1. Experience in European project management
2. Internal communication/dissemination skills and advanced project management tools
3. Good international and intercultural skills
4. Essential language skills: oral and written English at least, particular attention should be paid to drafting clear meeting minutes and action notes.
5. Good knowledge of clusters and clusters' needs and strategies and understanding of SME needs
6. Ability to act as a neutral entity in project management and be a project facilitator
7. A combined knowledge of the administrative and project activities can provide an insight into valuable leverage opportunities (funding, networks, other missions...)
8. The creation of an Advisory Board involving government/public administrations can help ensure sensitive internationalisation issues can be managed and/or considered. For example the changing political environment in certain countries.
9. Regular project management monitoring/meetings (monthly)

2.3 Management skills and tools amongst project participants

2.3.1 *Specific skills to interclustering initiatives*

According to project coordinators and participants, managing international inter-clustering initiatives requires some specific skills. They are new and innovative initiatives with an important international and intercultural dimension, and require from clusters a radically new attitude towards their potential European and international partners and competitors.

These requirements relate principally to participant's attitude, notably the **ability to think collectively**, to combine their own interests with those of other clusters and their members and work on common goals, to adopt a consensual or at least a neutral approach in certain cases, and finally to build trust and confidence with and amongst its partners but also with clusters of third countries visited. On this basis synergies and complementarities can be exploited to the benefit of all participants. The necessary skills for these activities therefore lie at the heart of the success of the projects.

Knowledge about differing clustering ecosystems is also considered important. An understanding of the administrative and financial set up of other clusters will enable project coordinators to comprehend the choices and decisions made by other clusters. For example understanding how and where the project's international activities fit within the broader national/regional cluster and SME internationalisation strategy. For example in the Rhone Alpes region (FR) each cluster has signed an "international contract" with the regional council and all new projects need to fit into this funding and administrative framework.

Experience in international collaboration is valuable when participating in projects that require intercultural and language skills. There is a need to be able to express oneself clearly in English (oral and

written) but also to show tolerance when experiencing cultural differences, as good internal communication and relationships are key to such projects.

The interviews suggest that the key skills for developing managing meta-clusters include:

- The ability to develop and share a cluster strategy and vision
- Forward thinking and awareness of key and relevant trends
- Understanding of cross-sectoral needs
- Information flow and quality of internal communication within the cluster partnership
- Maintain a focus on the needs of the SMEs in each cluster ecosystem and understanding (and selling) how they can benefit from international partnerships/mission/cluster visits etc...

In addition, time allocation is a key aspect for ESCP projects: clusters will only be active and participate in the activities where they see a real added value for their companies and their clusters.

2.3.2 Decisions and roles inside the consortium

Project coordinators and partners of both the pilot projects and ESCPs insisted that project leaders are not the decision-makers, and that decisions should always be taken as a group and on a collective basis. Project leaders should only coordinate decision taking or manage consensus building. Thus **particular efforts in such specific initiatives have to be made on the governance and consensus building** tasks inside the consortium. Building a common dynamic and desire to work together that will enable the consortium to start joint activities is particularly linked to clusters' perception of the strategy and activities and their own interest in those activities. This is why it is important that all clusters need to be involved in decision-making, otherwise later support and agreement in the consortium is not guaranteed. Amongst the pilot projects, all partners were generally involved in the definition of the Joint international strategy of the consortium, as explained later in this document, and were generally satisfied with their involvement in the project decision-making processes.

In some cases, **workshops amongst project participants** to jointly discuss common strategy and activities were used and were key to the success of the project, such as the pilot project WIINTech. Such meetings were also held in some ESCP's (the European Aerospace Cluster Partnership EACP) but have not yet been fully implemented due to a lack of funding). Such processes are nevertheless important to create a common vision.

Working groups were also implemented in some

Zoom on BioXClusters: "Flexibility for sustainability:

The partners are committed to exchanging information, working together and sharing costs and responsibility for a long-term collaborative framework. They will decide together, with a high degree of flexibility, which target countries to work on and which partner will take the lead in which area. This approach will provide added value to our cluster actors, allowing the flexible implementation of joint activities in line with the requirements of the regional SMEs that may differ within Europe." *Extract from the bioXclusters Joint Action Strategy (JAS), December 2013*

Zoom on WIINTech workshops: in the pilot project WIINTech, workshops between clusters were used to commonly decide upon the cooperation focus.

The Fondation Sophia Antipolis, as an external facilitator, first organised a survey among members to prepare the two workshops. Following the results of this survey, targeted markets and sectors of activity were presented and decided upon during the workshops, on the basis of the survey and of clusters contributions and discussions.

The workshops were commonly appreciated for their ability to build the cluster partnership and to create mutual trust. They contributed to reach a common vision of the project, a common focus, to establish good practices of cooperation between partners and to better know each of them. There was a clear and rigorous strategy as well as a common branding defined after the workshops and it avoided revisiting the same topics, to discuss them again and again and avoided conflicts.

initiatives, with a specific focus on one international market (for example again in the ESCP EACP). Their goal was to jointly discuss the local market and join knowledge thereof, as well as discuss future activities in the zone. Working groups generally need an animator/facilitator, and the assistance of a sector expert, to bring background knowledge in each working group is also a good practice to be noted. This was particularly appreciated by SMEs/business representatives.

It was also a commonly held view that every project partner should be responsible for **specific and clearly defined tasks**, which is a way of increasing the feeling of ownership and responsibility and commitment to all activities. The distribution of tasks and responsibility should intervene prior to the start of the project activities. In most cases, clusters were responsible for organising specific missions and events, and each cluster was leader for a particular mission or international target. It was also especially important to **distribute roles in accordance with each partner's specific skills**, knowledge and network. One cluster could be in charge of coordinating external communication, and another for organising missions in a specific country of which it has the best knowledge or a strong presence through cluster members. For example, in the ESCP Healthcare, tasks were equally divided amongst project partners, with each cluster taking the lead in their particular technology field/market of interest or competence in order to value the competences of each.

It was nonetheless considered as important that **each partner would be involved in each task**, even though they are not the task leader, to guarantee full commitment of each cluster in all activities. Delegation and task division is important and project coordinators need to be skilled in managing this process. This requires motivation skills, monitoring skills, quality control and dissemination skills. It was considered particularly important to supervise the timely delivery of outputs that affected other activities. It is therefore essential that project coordinators ensure that they have and maintain a project overview at all times.

2.3.3 Human and financial resources

Given the size, duration and budgets associated with these projects it is not surprising that projects did not have a full time dedicated team for their delivery, but rather people working part-time on the initiative in each cluster organisation. In this regard, some clusters particularly insisted on the importance to **keep a stable contact person** for the duration of the project, for the benefit of the consortium but also for the visibility and image of trust of the project towards foreign clusters and actors. In certain cases it was reported that clusters took the opportunity to hire a short-contract full-time employee to work on specific missions abroad (eg. The case of the pilot project FEEDING THE PLANET with an important mission led in New York in October 2014 and the cluster Agropolis which was task leader on the mission hired a short-term contract employee). It was also highlighted as important that the person in charge of the project in each cluster would already have experience in cluster internationalisation.

The budget management was especially a source of concern amongst project coordinators and participants. Indeed, the extent of internationalisation actions in the initiatives was highly budget-dependent. The public financing of the initiatives was generally expected to cover the human resources dedicated to the project, travel costs, and the communication and promotion costs of the project. Problems with delayed payments impacted on cash flow for partners, and uncertainty related to project financing apparently slowed down project activities. Participants also generally considered the overall funding amounts for such projects as insufficient, this was especially true for the 13 ESCP's but was known from the outset by partners.

One frequently made recommendation made by project partners in view of future similar European calls concerned the view that the project budget should include an allocation/budget to finance the travel of some SMEs in the international missions to directly promote their technologies and discuss cooperation in third countries. This was apparently not permitted in the current initiatives. The project partners argued that the quantitative impact of such missions in terms of SMEs cooperation would have been much higher

if such financing could have been provided. On the other hand some project partners were able to utilise other funding sources to support SME travels and their participation in missions.

The funding situation of the six pilot projects compared to the ESCPs was very different. Indeed in most cases the ESCP's have not accessed any direct EC funding. Most ESCP's have only had access to modest funding for the organisation of missions (5000€). Indeed some ESCP coordinators stated that often they lacked the necessary resources to encourage the very first steps of cooperation. Most of them, when they could effectively start the project, had to use their own funding to conduct the project and have been awaiting the launch of new EC funding calls. The ESCP Mind the Gap for example did not proceed very far into cooperation, as no funds were available for developing cooperation, thus clusters finally had to look for external funding, and put their own money into cooperation, and this slowed down cooperation. For example in the ESCP 3P4I, an analysis of the value chain was done, but no further actions have been implemented because of budget restrictions. The EACP was fortunate in the sense that the lead partner, Hamburg Aviation, has dedicated a full time team member to internationalisation activities and this person has played an important role in coordinating activities of this ESCP.

Regarding the duration of the pilot projects (24 months), most interviewees stated that the initiatives did not have sufficient time to proceed with detailed cooperation and international missions, and thus short-term results, "easy wins" were particularly pursued and encouraged in the projects. Participants generally agreed that two years were not enough to develop activities and to achieve important results, especially in the case of new cooperation. ESCPs in particular very often did not proceed very far in terms of cooperation. Cooperation was also often slow during the launch phase (first six months) because it was first necessary to build trust and understanding between partners; but not much time remained for concrete activities after this. It also made it difficult to monitor and gather follow up information on the results of missions and the progress made by SMEs in developing contracts and business opportunities.

However, as previously observed many projects were based on existing collaboration and could implement strategies and activities and achieve results notwithstanding the budget and project duration constraints. For example the ESCP Aerospace made the most of existing cluster "travel plans" based on conference/technical air show events to organise regular ESCP partner meetings, thus ensuring a constant contact between partners.

Key skills and success factors summary

1. The ability to think collectively and develop trust amongst partners is key
2. Pre-existing experience in international collaboration amongst partners is valuable
3. All partners should be involved in important project decisions and in the building of common strategies
4. Tasks should be divided between partners at the outset of the project, with some identified task leaders. The empowerment of others is a key success skill for project coordinators.
5. Project delegation and management skills to ensure the timely delivery and coordination of activities are important.
6. Each cluster organisation should determine one contact person to work on the initiative and where possible keep it stable for the project duration
7. Budget is always a very important issue for cluster organizations starting such project and clusters can rarely allocation significant budgets for cooperation or experimentation not put a lot of money on collective projects – public funding is thus key
8. Short-term results were pursued but projects often perceived the duration as too short to achieve adequate project results
9. Additional funding incentives for SMEs should be provided (by EU or national/regional funding) to enhance participation levels.

2.4 Internal Information and communication

2.4.1 *Information and communication amongst project partners*

Most participants agreed that efficient internal information and communication was essential to the success of the project and project coordinators must have these skills. Indeed, ideally an internal communication and dissemination method and strategy should be defined at the outset and prior to the main project launch, to decide which tools would be used, and how. The coordinator of the project should also take on the responsibility of coordinating internal dissemination.

Regular consortium meetings, through face-to-face meetings (rare, at least one at the beginning is deemed necessary to establish and build the relationships) and regular web based or skype conferences are recommended to reaffirm each cluster commitment, common strategy, share the results of common activities, and discuss future activities. Such meetings are more or less difficult to organise according to the number of clusters in the initiative, and obviously depend on the availability for these types of meetings. Given the lack of face to face meetings and the multiplication of bilateral and “electronic meetings” the project coordinator role takes on a particular importance in reminding every partner of the importance of attending, leading the meeting and providing everyone with a short report after the meeting. The use of innovative communication tools and the timely dissemination and follow up of discussion was essential to maintain the project dynamics. Good quality and well written meeting action notes and minutes, disseminated in a timely fashion are important project success factors.

Regular internal progress reports related to activities and results are also recommended, especially from each Work Package leader to all partners after a milestone has been reached.

Internal dissemination tools are also important to gather information, reports and deliverables of the project, such as a project portal, a file hosting service (such as Dropbox) or one partner’s Intranet (eg. Textile 2020 used NFID –the project coordinator’s Intranet - for sensitive project information).

Participants also said that once the project finished, it became difficult to continue relationships with other clusters, and maintaining such relations is important. Some form of transition or sustainability process should therefore be identified by partners to ensure project activities and follow actions do not suddenly stop. For this to work clearly requires the efforts of the coordinator but it also requires that the cluster partners are fully committed to securing the internationalisation of their SMEs and not simply pursuing ad hoc financing opportunities.

Managing and communicating the decision timeline process is an important skill required to ensure the project progresses as planned. Given the duration and the nature of the main tasks (missions, study visits etc) project coordinators need to be aware of the impacts of delays on other outputs/activities and communicate them.

2.4.2 *Promotion of the initiative towards clusters’ SME members*

An important task was also to promote the initiatives and project results to the SMEs and other members of cluster ecosystem and related value chain actors. In some cases, there was a real demand from businesses to participate further into the initiatives and launch concrete activities (example: ESCP Mind the Gap). In other cases clusters found it challenging to explain to their members the underlying concept behind the Pilot projects and ESCP’s, although it became easier once international visits to third countries were organised. Consortia also had to adapt their communication to this audience. Some have highlighted that they should in the future insist on the short-term and concrete advantages of such initiatives towards SMEs, but also make them participate in workshops or propose services to them, to better involve them from the beginning. For example in the EU4Sport pilot project the SMEs that participated in the overseas missions were asked to present the results of their participation to the cluster ecosystem once they had returned back in their regions. This implication succeeded in attracting more

SMEs to subsequent missions organised by the project. Other pilot projects sought to ensure that the SMEs participated in project workshops to determine the content and focus of the JIS. For example SMEs were asked to complete a survey of which countries they felt the project should focus upon. This long list was then discussed with the workshop participants and the resultant country priorities could be said to have emerged from a “bottom up” and market process.

It was also important to distinguish the tools and actions that are required to create linkages with SMEs as opposed to policy makers. Successful projects were based on the development of tailored and targeted materials, “one size fits all” are clearly not a valid approach when supporting SME internationalisation challenges. The role of public organisations as coordinators can and did lead to some tensions and the need to adapt messages.

Large companies, members of the clusters, should also be involved once country and technology targets have been established. Large companies can participate by working alongside SMEs and opening up their international networks and offices to project partners. Interesting experiences can be found in the ESCP Aerospace regarding the implication of large companies in such processes. Project sustainability can be developed using the international presence of large companies, for example by hosting SMEs or offering soft landing facilities for SMEs/cluster organisations in the target countries.

Key skills and success factors summary

1. Internal communication is key in such projects, regular consortium meetings and internal dissemination tools are in particular important to reaffirm common strategy in the first case and share news and results.
2. SMEs should especially be informed and involved by clusters in the projects, through specific communication, and missions abroad.
3. Large companies, members of clusters, with a strong international presence and a network of offices and partners should also be mobilised to support missions and post project sustainability.

2.5 Internationalisation

The six pilot projects have developed and tested internationalisation activities and tools for building and supporting the internationalisation of SMEs. The interviews with the 6 projects coordinators and partners confirmed the relevance of this action, internationalisation is indeed an important goal for all of them and recognised as a key priority in their individual strategies.

2.5.1 The joint international strategy

The definition of a joint international strategy was a central part of the pilot projects and was crucial in order to maximize the outcome of the pilot projects. A good definition involves a certain number of key characteristics, from the identification of the key country targets, understanding market conditions and barriers within target third countries, technology priorities and the most suitable participants to the follow up of the actions. When developing the joint internationalisation strategy with different clusters, it was essential to reach a clear consensus on the objectives, the targeted countries and individual responsibilities. The cluster coordinator must be particularly skilled in managing this process and being able to extract the information and relevant experiences from each cluster. For this to work a clear and transparent process needs to be developed that ensures all available information is shared and reviewed in a timely manner. A solid JIS lies at the heart of creating the key success factors for such projects. For clusters interviewed, the main objectives of the Joint Internationalisation Strategy were:

- To articulate a common vision of internationalisation and mutual priorities
- To progressively align project and partners' strategies with agreed mutual priorities and markets
- Agree on priority third market targets and sectors
- Agree on key actions that would form the content of the JIS

2.5.2 The Effectiveness of the JIS methodological approaches

In order to identify the potential markets and third countries to target, each pilot project seems to have developed their own JIS approach according to their needs and specificities:

- ☐ Matrix approach (markets and sectors VS activity)
- ☐ Common technology directory
- ☐ Internationalisation working groups
- ☐ SME surveys to identify country priorities
- ☐ Interviews with key cluster actors (export agencies, large companies, selected SMEs...)

These varied approaches were quite efficient and enabled the cluster managers to reach an agreement on choosing countries that they preferred to focus on. The selection of sectors and geographical markets was based on the profile and centre of interests of each cluster involved in the projects and their members.

When defining the JIS, a set of variables should be defined to analyse and compare different market attractiveness and competitors, such as the size and growth of target markets, but also cultural and political issues as well as barriers to market entry. Most of the cluster managers agreed that the availability within the territory of actors providing support for cluster/SME

"The most successful missions are those which were organised through a bottom up process: Political pressure to go in a specific country is seen as rather counterproductive (example: Tunisia). Conversely, the mission in Japan was a success, because the cluster responsible for its organisation was very well connected in this country."

Extract from an interview with TEXTILE2020 project coordinators

internationali

sation (chamber of commerce, institutional delegations...) as well as MoU signed by the ECCP platform were crucial indicators and that it should be taken into account when designing the strategy.

The selection of targeted markets must be done together with the companies, but cluster managers should have the final say. In some cases an external expert was brought in to build a consensus between participants. It is also important to select ambitious international markets, not

the easiest, but the ones with greater interest and potential for companies in which the cluster can play a role in supporting companies enter the market. However countries with too many competitors or barriers should be avoided for such short duration projects, for example following a visit to the US by the BioXCluster team it was decided not to pursue actions in this market as it was difficult to agree upon a common approach to the US market.

Zoom on the EU4Sports pilot project:

In the EU4Sports project, Internationalisation Work Groups (IWG) were organized in each region by the partners (Catalonia, the Netherlands and Rhône Alpes). Each work group gathered more than 30 companies. Preferences in terms of target countries were discussed as well as individual experiences when going international. In order to find a consensus and help SMEs to make choices, an external facilitator was brought in. This methodology was efficient and helped to get SMEs actively involved in the project activities.

The focus should be on few markets per year in order to develop high performance actions. This means that a certain degree of flexibility has to be maintained in the implementation phase. It also means that internal flexibility regarding the level of commitment of every partner towards the different markets has to be maintained.

Zoom on the REINA pilot project:

"The activities are structured in three operative phases that fit into the internationalisation model developed by the European Energy Cluster Alliance Internationalisation Handbook: 1) Energy market screening 2) Definition of tailored internationalisation strategies 3) Strategies deployment (promotional and marketing actions, development of a network of key contacts, involvement of target companies, support the definition and launch of specific internationalisation company projects, evaluation, sustainability and dissemination of best practices and project lessons)."

Extract from the Evaluation of Cluster initiatives managed by DG Enterprise and Industry – Final report, Annex C, September 2014.

Many of the projects used the [internationalisation methodology](#) guide published by ECA-TACTICS, based on three steps: get ready, take action and use networks. Some also involved experts from the TACTICS project to broker partner discussions. Both the EU4Sports and BioXclusters pilot projects elaborated a "Handbook of internationalisation" presenting their recommendations and experiences. Indeed following this methodology resulted in bioXClusters inviting two external experts to challenge and comment upon the JIS before it was finalised.

The majority of the cluster managers interviewed recognized that the definition of the joint internationalisation strategy for the "metacluster" was a very useful exercise. For example, BioXclusters started to design a 10 page strategy and ended the project with a 50

page report; this constituted a real output for the project and provided interesting insights into both technology trends and business opportunities for the cluster members. On the other hand not all partners had such a positive experience. Indeed, for some the JIS was a long process and some cluster managers mentioned that it took more time than anticipated in the project plan and the difficulties on securing a consensus between partners meant that the resultant document was not as comprehensive as it could have been.

Towards an excellent joint international strategy:

1. The Joint Internationalisation Strategy has to be clear and simple
2. The Joint Internationalisation Strategy process should be flexible enough to respond quickly to a changing economic, technological and political environment
3. The Joint Internationalisation Strategy has to be supported by the knowledge-and inputs of the cluster SMEs and specialized partners if necessary such as external consultants in order to assist the cluster with their specific
4. From the very beginning the JIS should articulate clear targets that can be delivered and measured through the project actions

2.6 Strategy deployment and feedback

Following the phase of strategy development and consensus building between partners, various actions such as joint missions to the specific target third country markets were carried out. The goals of the missions were to create contacts with clusters and companies outside Europe, to find cooperation opportunities, to benchmark with these clusters, and to create the conditions for long lasting external relationships. The implementation of the internationalisation strategies in the pilot projects began mostly in the second phase of the projects.

Judging the right moment to visit target countries can be a key success factor for the missions and can help attract potential SMEs and greatly facilitate the organisational aspects, for example during the presence of a critical mass of other internationalisation/export actors such as during large conferences or trade shows. It is important therefore to monitor trends, events and opportunities in target markets as part of the preparation phase. Project coordinators or the event task leaders must have the skills and knowledge to undertake such “screening” exercises. Many project partners suggested this knowledge and screening process was a key success factor for missions and helped create the conditions for successful missions.

The EU4Sport project highlighted the following recommendations when organising an action abroad:

- Duration: the action can last 4-5 days
- The action can take place at the same time as a fair or any sector big event:
- A joint booth with one only European brand can be of interest depending on the local business culture.
- Mission Structure. It is divided into two different phases:

Common Agenda (2 days): visits and meetings with the whole group, or separated into 2 groups. These are broad meetings with local decision makers and local agencies who can present the local ecosystem. In normal circumstances individual companies cannot arrange these types of meetings on their own. This is one of the advantages of EU collaborative projects and working with strategic partners who can “open doors” to enable participants to better understand how to do business in certain countries. This phase also includes meetings with people that have good knowledge of the market and can help progress and implement actions post mission visit. Preparing meetings in advance ensures the relevance of discussions to be held and information to be obtained. All companies should have an opportunity to briefly introduce themselves during such meetings.

Business to business meetings (2-3 days): individual visits between companies and possible distributors, partners, customers, providers, etc. In some cases, meetings may be developed in small groups. Participating companies should also arrange their own meetings, taking part in the appointments of the agenda they feel more comfortable with.

Key skills and keys for success recommendations:

1. Organise a workshop during the action abroad so that participants could exchange impressions and share experiences
2. Combine joint meetings with high profile local organisations (that companies could not arrange on their own) with individual meetings
3. Use local events such as trade fairs to maximize local participation and create a critical mass of local companies and experts.
4. Ensure a follow up 6 months after the event providing support to the companies

Interviews with cluster project coordinators showed that designing a mission to the needs of both cluster managers and SMEs was rather complicated as expectations differed between the two target groups.

- The projects had varying success in engaging SMEs in the international missions. The projects have been more successful in involving companies in study visits and events. The networking events were highly appreciated by the SMEs as they were able to make

“In both missions satisfaction surveys were carried out amongst participants. Globally, participants were very satisfied with the overall mission, and specifically 82% of the contacts made were considered as good, very good or excellent and 94% of the respondents would participate in another pilot mission.”

Abstract from EU4Sport booklet

new business contacts. A combination of international missions and participation in fairs and exhibitions is positively evaluated (the exhibition atmosphere facilitating contacts).

- Among the SMEs, a clear distinction has to be made between those which are used to working internationally and in English and those which are exposed to international contacts for the first time, most of whom will invariably suffer from linguistic weaknesses
- Almost all the clusters interviewed have highlighted the importance of having support from regional/national agencies in charge of the promotion and support for internationalisation (regional agencies, chambers of commerce, embassies, foreign investment agencies) to be indirectly involved in a project such as REINA (e.g. the Basque Delegation in Mexico organised the logistics of the mission and provided contacts). UBifrance in the WINNTech project also played a significant role, in this context, indeed it was quite surprising (rare) that a national agency worked to the benefit of a European project.

On balance, it seems that internationalisation missions were successful. In some countries such as Japan and Brazil, it took more time to build trust and it was also difficult to have concrete results in the short term and in the context of the present projects, but there are seeds for the medium and long term. It would have been much more difficult for the clusters/companies to go alone and a European meta-cluster approach was a very positive and appreciated step towards internationalisation.

In all the projects, the methodological approach was efficient, but participants also reported that there was a need to re-assess the joint international strategy during the project and after the missions abroad. Indeed, there is clearly a need to improve know-how to succeed in the international context.

The most significant impacts that have been underlined by the interviewees are:

- ☐ an increased awareness of internationalisation opportunities in specific target markets
- ☐ a better understanding of the internationalisation process
- ☐ the launching of specific internationalisation initiatives involving target companies
- ☐ Access to new markets/ changes in global value-chains
- ☐ Post event evaluation and identifying lessons and the adaptation of the JIS is an important methodological step and should not be overlooked if the JIS is to remain relevant to SME needs.
- ☐ Resources need to be dedicated to gathering post event/mission follow up and results of commercial/B2B activities. This takes time and money.

Globally, SMEs who participated in the missions reported that the mission has enabled them to develop good contacts with potential clients and business counterparts. In the EU4SPORTS project for example, the support provided and the B2B appointments were a real help for the SMEs that did not have the time or resources to implement such a mission.

As a summary, some outcomes and European added value activities derived from the pilot projects can be highlighted and illustrate the great variety of project outcomes:

- 5 SMEs from **REINA** have started the process to create a joint-venture with a local company in Brazil. Some of them are negotiating conditions and incentives with partners and/or state governments.
- One SME that took part in **REINA** activities is negotiating the licensing of small scale wind turbine technology for up to €5m

- The **WIINTech** project established cooperation agreements with 6 international clusters in the field of material technologies and cleantech markets and an MOU was signed with partners in India
- Horizon 2020 proposals are in preparation in a number of projects
- **Feeding the Planet** signed a cooperation agreement with the Eurochile Foundation (Chile), a concrete tool that will allow EU players to enter the market and access a wide range of opportunities and potential synergies.
- One of the companies from **Feeding the planet** that was present during the mission in Chile signed a commercial contract with a Chilean organisation, during the mission (May 2014).
- In the first **EU4Sports** trade mission in Brazil, 246 qualified contacts and prospects were identified and two commercial agreements reached.
- In the second **EU4Sports** trade mission in Russia, 170 qualified contacts and prospects were identified and three commercial agreements reached..
- High level of SME participation in **EU4Sport** missions (9 in Brazil and 18 in Russia).
- A MoU signed between **TEXTILE 2020** and the Pôle de Compétitive Monastir - El Fejja (mfcpole) in Tunisia, to establish formal and sustainable cooperation in the area of Advanced Textile Materials.
- The Mission **TEXTILE 2020** to Japan organized over 20 business to business (B2B) meetings. A cluster to cluster (C2C) meeting with the Toray textile was organised. The necessity to develop this cooperation was confirmed by both sides. TEXTILE2020 invited Japanese partners to participate in European events, such as “A winning edge: the difference is design”, April 29 2014, UK.

Nevertheless, the commercial contacts and linkages still need to be consolidated, which requires substantial resources and time.

Participating in the ESCP projects has also benefited the clusters in several ways. First of all, clusters have improved and fostered relationships with other EU clusters as well as third country clusters, giving the cluster the opportunity to establish communication and cooperation conditions for future projects. Secondly, project managers have improved their skills, capacities and knowledge, and also shared their experiences.

3. External promotion skills and tools needed

3.1 Communication and promotion tools/materials

3.1.1 *Key elements for an efficient international communication strategy*

One of the key challenges for the six pilot projects and the ESCPs was to provide a common image or message for their cluster partnerships or European meta clusters to ensure the common identity of the project was clear both within the consortium but also externally. Indeed the ability to display a common identity especially when attending overseas missions was considered a success factor for the projects. This aspect also presented a challenge in terms of ensuring the project's visibility in each of the regional ecosystems without creating too much confusion.

The six pilot projects developed and used a variety of communication tools to implement their projects. Some of the pilot projects and ESCPs drafted a written communication strategy at the outset in which they set out the framework for the range of communication, branding and dissemination actions. Some ESCPs nonetheless did not find sufficient time to do so, and are planning to develop one in the future, and perhaps as part of upcoming EU calls. Communication strategies generally deployed common branding, and common tools for communication, with the objective to promote the initiative to their international targets. In one case, already presented above, a survey and workshops were used to build consensus inside the consortium about the communication strategy, facilitated by an external actor. A number of the project partners also used the cluster marketing and branding handbook prepared by the ECA Tactics consortium and available at www.ecatactics.eu to help them refine their communication messages.

Regarding the strategy, the importance of presenting the consortium as a whole through a common branding was considered especially crucial. Each partner was responsible for undertaking marketing activities in his home region in his native languages and illustrating the advantages of a common European meta cluster approach. For example, the project partners should take advantage from their critical mass, and communicating about their global strength as for example in the Feeding the planet project: "8000+ of food companies 200+ research & innovation projects 17000+ people working on research". Clusters should also be able to demonstrate to their companies how participation can result in concrete impacts on their business. It was also especially mentioned that it should be "client-oriented", and thus adapted to the different targets, for example SMEs, other clusters or RDI actors.

One frequently expressed concern related to the languages used to communicate and disseminate project news/activities. Most consortiums chose to communicate in English only, others adapted their materials to the country they visited. Some have highlighted that using English only was sometimes a barrier in countries such as Russia or Brazil, especially toward the local SME audience, and thus multilinguism should be encouraged in future cooperation and a translation budget might be useful in the future. Partners also suggested that they needed to provide materials in their own languages for use within their own cluster ecosystems and web sites (i.e. French, Spanish, Italian ...)

One consortium (EU4Sports) also highlighted its efforts to remain an "eco-friendly project" by keeping the number of printed materials to a minimum and putting the efforts into electronic materials.

3.1.2 A common branding and identity

The good practices identified in the pilot projects and ESCPs regarding common branding were notably:

- ❑ The use of an easily identifiable common name: this is especially the case amongst the 6 pilot projects, with attractive names such as EU4Sports, bioXClusters, or WIINTech.
- ❑ Logos and visuals were also designed to give a common identity to the consortium and used on all communication materials :



Some of them also used a slogan/stapline such as bioXClusters: “European Innovation Worldwide”, or Feeding the Planet “EU Agro-Food and Biotech Clusters on the World stage”.

Another good practice, seen in the project bioXClusters was to add the logo of the initiative on each cluster business card, to place each cluster in the larger context of the initiative. The project Feeding the Planet also thought about designing a common business card to be used in international missions and events, which is a sign of a strong common approach.

Many projects produced a common template (in different formats, for example word and power point) at the beginning of the project, in order to promote a single visual identity for each type of publication.

Another visual tool used during international events, fairs and missions was to share a stand or project booth (notably mentioned by the ESCP Healthcare). In one case also (Textile 2020), the metacluster made efforts in order to adapt its branding and communication tools to its geographical target, for example producing a kakemono, i.e. a Japanese scroll painting or calligraphy, to adapt to the needs of the Japanese target.

It was considered as particularly important that all clusters would use this common identity when communicating about the project.

3.1.3 Common publications and communication tools

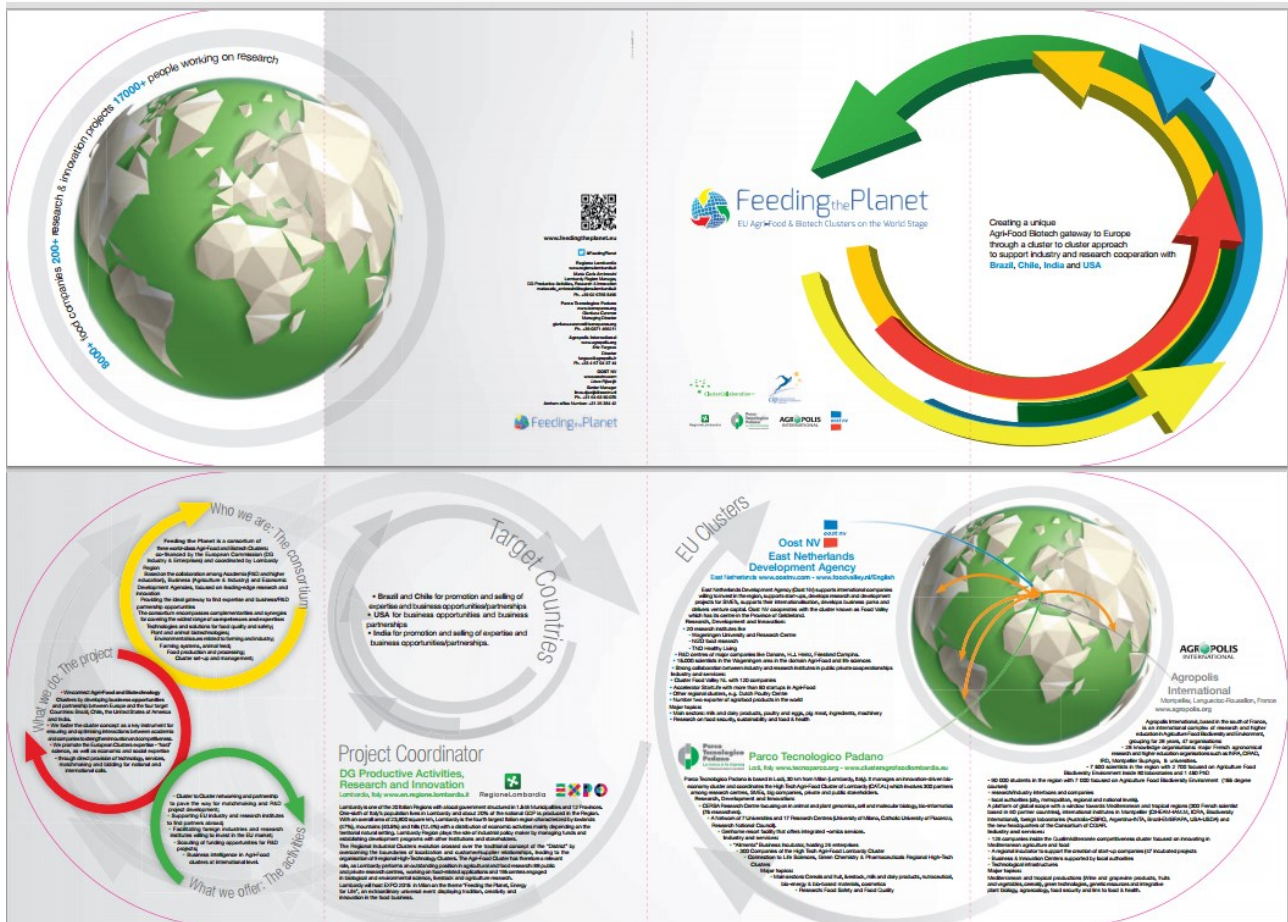
The use and development of web sites varied considerably between projects. Some took the decision not to create a web site for such a short duration (responding to concerns in terms of sustainability) and preferred to disseminate the project results through their pre-existing cluster web sites. Others

considered it important to create a distinct project web site to create a strong project identity and common ownership between the partners.

- ❑ **A website**, with good content and regular updates was developed by Textile 2020 and WIINTech for example. Others would have liked to of had sufficient funding to develop a website, in order to keep a record in the future of the initiative, but finally chose not to do so (EU4Sports). However, other project coordinators considered there was no added value in having a common website, as this is expensive and projects remain temporary initiatives. A common blog could be a good compromise between the costs and the importance of being present on the Internet with at least a description, and a contact for the consortium. In the best cases, project websites have a 'news' and 'agenda' section regularly updated, and publishing materials such as press releases, newsletter, and international missions reports
- ❑ Amongst consortia, individual clusters were also encouraged to use their own website to promote the project initiative.
- ❑ **Twitter, LinkedIn and other social networks**: most projects did not see any particular interest in using social networks. The ESCP "EACP" nonetheless found it too expensive to maintain and update a website and preferred to open a LinkedIn profile for the initiative. Some individual clusters also used their own twitter profile to publish news regarding the common projects. In rare cases, such as in the project EU4Sports, a facebook open community was created (see below), but this was done instead of creating a website or a blog :



- ❑ **A single common presentation on power point** was also a good tool. These were often produced at the outset of the project and subsequently updated, in order to facilitate and uniformise the presentation of the initiative, its objectives and results, from all clusters of the consortiums (example : WIINTech). Some projects also produced one power point presentation per event, adapted to the context and target on the event.
- ❑ **Flyers in English** were produced in order to be disseminated during events. The Pilot project Feeding the Planet for example designed a leaflet as did WIINTech and Textile 2020.



Feeding the Planet project's flyer, printed in a small size and recto verso, with a QR code and an attractive design.

- Project brochures were produced, with key information on the projects and some good practices. Some tried to adapt them to different audiences (public institutions, SMEs). (Textile 2020, bioXClusters);



proplast
PLASTIC INNOVATION POLE

PLASTIVAL

Chemie Cluster Bayern

repic
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION POLYMER CLUSTER

poolnet
PORTUGAL INNOVATION NETWORK

Plastipolis

oseo

dgcis
Direction Générale de la Compétitivité et de l'Innovation

veneto nanotech
veneto nanotechnology

réseaux d'innovation
network of innovation

CLUSTERLAND
COORDINATION GROUP

Worldwide Intercluster Initiative for New materials and processes focused on clean TECHNOLOGIES

WHO WE ARE

The WIINTECH network links eight European leading world-class clusters belonging to the chemical and materials sector as listed - Totally, we represent more than 2500 companies and research centres working in the materials and clean technologies sectors. The different partner clusters bring to the project their own expertise and specialisms to address the complete range of technological and business topics in the clean technology space.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The project aims to identify or initiate opportunities for business development between the European sector and the overseas partner clusters. These include setting up research and development partnerships as well as encouraging trade arrangements. By focus on the growing area of activity around clean sustainable products and services the European members seek to establish technology transfer activities and explore trade development.

The group of clusters from the EU are intending to foster intercluster and transnational partnerships, extend international cooperation by sharing know how from European experience develop a joint intercluster cooperation with internationally leading clusters (technology and industrial partnerships, training, tech transfer, mobility, mentoring) focusing on material and production technologies for fast growing lead markets such as clean tech markets.

The partners will establish linkages, business partnerships and trade opportunities between technology linked members of the clusters and put in place practical actions and support to assist companies grow commercial relationships.



CLUSTER	REGION / AREA	BUSINESS TECHNOLOGICAL AREA
PLASTIPOLIS	Lyon-France	Plastics
PROPLAST	Italy	Plastics
CHEMIE CLUSTER BAYERN	Munich Germany	Chemicals
NEPIC	Wilton UK	Process Industry
CLUSTERLAND	Austria	Multi sector
PLASTIVAL	Spain	Plastics
VENETO NANOTECH	Italy	Nanotech
POOLNET	Portugal	Engineering and Tooling Industry

PRACTICAL STEPS

The European Clusters will visit selected clusters in three main geographical areas:
NORTH AMERICA
SOUTH AMERICA
ASIA



WIINTECH project brochure, Page 1

- Good practices brochure were produced by partners in several projects towards the end of the project (Textile 2020, EU4Sports, WIINTECH). These were generally of high quality and presented a summary of the lessons learnt. **They are particularly useful documents for other clusters interested in embarking on similar cooperation projects.**

- ❑ **Communication tools and methods for engaging with SMEs** varied between the projects. They generally took two forms: those intended to engage SMEs in the project processes such as the JIS and those aimed at recruiting SMEs to participate in missions or study tours. In both cases the processes and methods were adapted to regional ecosystems (local promotion, local languages etc) and were more in line with the tools used for general cluster animation processes. Following the organisation of the first activities cluster partners were able to promote success stories and these could then take on board a more international feel. Indeed it was necessary to plan a series of difference communication methods as the project progressed.
- ❑ A good practice was also to produce a video of the project. The project bioXClusters for example produced an animated video to communicate on the combined critical mass and strengths of the associated clusters in Europe and worldwide, and the project EU4Sports produced two videos, in shorter and longer format: <http://vimeo.com/80878653>.
- ❑ Project newsletters were also released on project's website in the "news" section (e.g. Textile 2020)
- ❑ A mailing was organised in some projects, which required to produce and maintain an updated list of contacts potentially interested in the news from the project. This was notably the case of the ESCP "EACP". This is also a good way to keep the clusters' members, and notably SMEs informed of the activities of the metacluster.
- ❑ Press releases were produced in some projects, notably in some pilot projects, such as Textile 2020 (a few press releases) or bioXClusters (a dozen press releases). The targets of these press releases were notably local newspapers where the international visits took place, to make the visits attractive and communicate on their activities.
- ❑ **Organisation and presence in international events:** some projects participated jointly in international events to affirm their common identity and share costs. For example, the project Textile 2020 participated in 4 exhibitions and trade fairs, and the project Feeding the Planet will jointly participate in the Universal Exposition of Milan from May 2015 with a common stand, and will display the results of the project at this occasion. However, most ESCP regretted they did not have enough budget to participate in international events of interest.

The ECCP platform: most consortiums published information about their projects on the European Cluster Cooperation Platform <http://www.clustercollaboration.eu/>. This is an important dissemination tool to reach out to other European clusters and networks. In the early stages a number of partners stated that they experienced some problems notably regarding the process of requesting and obtaining validation for publication from the moderators of the platform. Some of them asked if another process could be used in the future, where project coordinators could directly upload project documents on their profile on the platform.

3.2 Communication and promotion skills

The communication and promotion skills cited as being the most important amongst project participants were notably the ability to maintain an important network and relations with media, to think strategically and adopt a businesslike approach in all communication activities, as well as good intercultural skills

In most cases, languages were also a very important concern for communicating, and the ability to produce communication materials in English but also to adapt the languages of all communication to the geographical target (such as Brazil and Russia where English is not always commonly used, especially amongst SMEs) was considered as one the most important factor/skills for good communication activities.

A good experience of with communication and branding tools is also essential, for example, skills in the field of social media, and other innovative communication tools, or website and promotional material design. Such skills might be found particularly amongst communication/design experts.

Indeed, some projects coordinators and participants highlighted that it would be of great added value to have a communication expert amongst the consortium team and in a few cases, some communicating and branding activities were subcontracted to an expert. Indeed, communicating and promoting is not an easy task, especially in the cases of European meta-clusters which demand innovating strategies and tools of communication. Coordinators of projects confessed that in certain cases, the project would gain from accepting to have recourse to external expertise when necessary to enhance the communication and dissemination impacts.

Although each partner should be the contact centre in its country/region the marketing and awareness about the “meta-cluster” and its activities have to be promoted in appropriate way with the highest possible efficiency and visibility for external and non European partners. The partners need to agree what the key messages are in terms of market targets, value chain positioning, desired technology partners and what they can offer to their potential partners. A market or target segmentation is often necessary as the focus of a cluster study trip is very different from a B2B/trade mission type of visit. Tracking and recording the press coverage and communication results post visits is an important activity and is often overlooked by project coordinators.

Success: in the end most project coordinators and partners believed their communication strategy and activities to have been a success, but most of them have already thought of future improvements, guided by the experience they have gained thus far. Indeed future cluster and SME internationalisation missions need to enhance the range and scope of their communication and branding actions to facilitate the creation of a common European Meta Cluster.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

4.1 Summary conclusions

The purpose of this document was to identify the skills and highlight the key success factors for implementing ESCP type projects. The conclusions and recommendations presented in this chapter seek to bring together some of the main messages highlighted through interviews with project practitioners and extracted from the main project documents and project outputs. The purpose of this work was not to undertake an evaluation of the individual projects but nevertheless it has been possible **to identify and determine success factors and the challenges that the project and the project coordinators have faced.**

The overall message from interviewees is that **these projects provide a valuable contribution to the development of internationalisation capacities for their clusters and their cluster members, especially SMEs.** There is no doubt that these initiatives are a key instrument for cluster organisations to improve their visibility on the international scene and to promote a common European cluster strategy or meta cluster. Indeed the focus on external markets has helped to create a common purpose and reduces the inter-cluster competition that might have existed if the project had remained focused on Europe.

Furthermore the analysis has put forward evidence that the projects have contributed in positive ways to enhancing cluster management skills and increased cross-sector collaborations.

In particular, we would like to highlight the following skill requirements and key success factors:

Lessons regarding the meta cluster organisation/ consortia building:

- ☐ The project coordinator needs a **range of skills** to manage the different aspects of international cooperation projects. These include: managerial profile, with a significant experience of decision making processes, problem/conflict solving, consensus building, group dynamics... and intercultural and language skills. Active and regular project management is a necessary criteria for the performance of the project and particular attention should be paid to drafting clear meeting minutes and action notes.
- ☐ The coordinator should bring strategic direction and ensure that the actions remain **aligned with the companies' interests.**
- ☐ The coordinator must be able to **build trust and consensus** among the members of the project, but also with the clusters of third countries visited. But they are not the sole decision maker and decision making must be facilitated and organised in a collegial fashion.
- ☐ The project manager should have an expertise in the "sector field": but it is not only about mastering technologies, industry trends and markets but also about being adequately connected and networked with main actors at a European and international level in the area considered.
- ☐ A **previous collaboration between** a core group of the partners in another European project is an advantage. Personal knowledge can help select the right coordinator.
- ☐ **Cluster labeling and excellence experience** is a valuable indicator for selecting project partners.
- ☐ Regarding the number of clusters participants in each consortium, it seemed quite evident that small-scale cooperation networks with 4 to 6 clusters worked very well and is an efficient working model.

- ☐ The project requires a minimum critical scale of cluster partners (and budget) as a key enabling factor as it provides the basis for allocating sufficient time and resources for cluster organisations to take part in the project and disseminate the results to their members.
- ☐ The creation of a meta cluster and the support of the EU and the participation of other institutional entities facilitated the access to foreign countries and helped “open doors” and the scheduling of visits that individual companies could not have arranged on their own.
- ☐ Project coordinators should ensure that the project partners are aware of the need to build links with complementary initiatives at a regional and national level. This can provide scope for project sustainability and disseminate the concept of European meta clusters more widely.

Lessons regarding the approach to internationalisation activities:

Joint International strategy

- ☐ It is crucial to have a clear, precise, rigorous and well structured and detailed **strategy** in order to avoid conflicts between the partners and to give the project a clear focus. In an ideal situation the efforts and knowledge created during the JIS process should lead to **greater policy alignment between the individual cluster strategies and the European meta cluster objectives**.
- ☐ Focus on areas where cooperation and **shared interests** are the strongest and market penetration can be facilitated.
- ☐ SMEs must be involved in the JIS development process to ensure greater ownership and project transparency.
- ☐ The selection of target markets must be done jointly with the cluster companies. External expertise and facilitators can help and give credibility to the process and provide valuable insights into the target markets.
- ☐ Use external experts to test and challenge the JIS prior to its finalization.
- ☐ **Flexibility** is required when defining the country targets (eg. political and legislative changes) and the necessary evolution of third country targets.
- ☐ The EC and the participation of other institutional entities (eg. national delegations) have facilitated the access to foreign countries and helped open doors and create the image of common and coordinated strategy.
- ☐ The collaboration among different clusters provides a critical mass for action (also fewer costs per cluster). Clear economies of scale (e.g. organising missions...).
- ☐ A stepping stone to the creation of European “meta clusters”. Indeed many clusters felt the two years gave them the opportunity to put in place the methodology to create the JIS but it takes longer to have a truly common and shared JIS.
- ☐ Projects must have strategic content, and should use internationalisation as a tool for competitiveness. The elaboration of project agendas has to be in line with the strategy. Trips, participation in fairs, or any other actions cannot be meaningful if they are not conceived as part of a broader purpose.
- ☐ Projects need a shared strategy and clear focus from the outset to lay foundations for cooperation, especially in emerging markets where industry sector boundaries are « fuzzy » indeed the JIS needs to be considered as an evolving document that takes on board the lessons learnt during overseas missions/trade fairs.

- ❑ Cluster internationalisation and cooperation's do not have to be based on complementing services or final products. There are success stories of cluster cooperation bringing together technical capabilities-business expertise-and better user understanding.
- ❑ Follow up support, especially after international trade missions, is required if SME growth opportunities are to be seized or accelerated. This can take the form of MOUs or involving export agencies/institutions or seeking support from large companies present in the cluster ecosystem with an international presence.

Lessons regarding the approach to communication tools and promotion strategy:

- ❑ Efficient internal information and communication was essential to the success of the project and an internal communication and dissemination strategy should be defined at the outset and prior to the launch of project activities.
- ❑ Success will be based upon an in depth exchange in order to define a common branding, a common terminology, a common leaflet, a common presentation well accepted by all partners: these factors are key elements for partner integration and passage from an individual to a joint perspective.
- ❑ External support or focus group activities should be used to test the messages and resources invested in good quality translations.
- ❑ Project partners did not believe a dedicated website for the project is necessary but in this case the project and European meta cluster concept needs to be given a high visibility on partner web sites and should be better disseminated through the existing cluster web sites and among the clusters members and ecosystems. Otherwise a dedicated web presence would seem an important and key success factor to establish and communicate about the European meta cluster presence and actions.
- ❑ More use of social media (eg. LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter...) should be encouraged especially in association with events and overseas missions.
- ❑ Use what has worked elsewhere... ECA/Tactics methodology/handbooks... <http://www.eca-tactics.eu/eca>; should be used with some adaptations (see Textiles 2020), with a survey and workshops to define a common identity, common objectives and clear planning of activities and sharing of responsibilities among partners.
- ❑ A set of communication tools was also important in order to create a common identity and to promote efficiently the projects towards targeted third targeted countries. The following communication tools have proved to be very valuable:
 - Creation of a website, logo/brand and common presentation (PPT) to create a shared identity. Indeed a project logo is essential to overcome the different and individual cluster identities.
 - Bespoke project flyers for each trade mission (English) and in local languages
 - Use of the ECCP European platform as a tool to spread the knowledge
 - Client/SME (end user) focus and less of an institutional or project presentation.
 - Global dissemination tools (such as ECCP) and the production of Project Handbooks are valuable methods to capitalise on project results.
 - Involving SMEs in post mission briefings helps create synergies with the regional cluster ecosystems and creates the dynamic conditions to encourage other SMEs to participate.

- The notion of project ambassadors with the use of dual identity business cards (cluster and meta cluster) is an interesting method for developing the project identity.

The main challenges and barriers identified are summarised below:

- ❑ One clear barrier mentioned was the information asymmetry among cluster organisations. This poses difficulties in finding common grounds for cooperation and in identifying the most suitable themes and hence partners for the JIS. Clusters need to make more effort and need to be supported to raise awareness of their capabilities and specificities, which should facilitate project implementation and partner searches.
- ❑ The direct participation of SMEs was considerably limited in some projects, for example in WIINTech, SME involvement was strongly limited as the original mission of the project was to create cluster-to-cluster meetings and partnerships, rather than business-to-business activity. Therefore companies did not participate in missions abroad, but received some information from cluster managers.
- ❑ Likewise, the original pilot internationalisation projects' budgets did not plan to cover the travel costs for SMEs. Only those pilot projects starting at a later stage succeeded in adjusting the initial budget breakdown.
- ❑ A lack of flexibility: some changes in schedule and activities, considered necessary by the partners, were cumbersome to negotiate with the Commission.
- ❑ The impact on SMEs could have been increased with a more careful preparation of the onsite meetings. Prior to the mission, clusters should make sure they understand the activities and interest of their SMEs. Impacts and subsequent outcomes could have also been enhanced if sufficient resources were available to pursue initial contacts.
- ❑ Some partners suggested that it was difficult to produce documents and activities that responded to both policy makers and SME needs as they both have very different expectations.

Sustainability: Most of the project coordinators and partners expressed their interest to continue their cooperation in the future. Some have already migrated from the pilot projects towards new ESCPs. Many of the participants interviewed felt that the project was too short and very demanding and covering varied tasks such as: screen the markets, develop a joint internationalisation strategy and implement actions abroad. Now that the projects are over, new funds would be needed to guarantee the financial sustainability of the meta-clusters. Some project networks have managed to keep the dynamism moving forward and have organized other missions (bioXClusters to South Korea for example). Others used final conferences and held them in non partner regions to draw attention to their actions, this was the case of EU4Sport which held its final conference in Brussels.

Opportunities for non EU funding sources should also be examined with scope for public-private co-financing for certain activities. Cluster organisations and their members have to bring the results to the next stage. Given the high costs of building a long-standing internationalisation strategy, most of the cluster organizations would like to go further and apply for the next COSME call (some of the cluster organisations mentioned that they would probably go with a smaller consortium).

4.2 Recommendations

Cluster internationalisation is a key policy objective of cluster programme authorities and clusters organisations throughout Europe and would seem to justify the further investment and European

Commission funding of ESCP type actions since national and regional level funding is not readily available. Cluster to cluster cooperation experiences are positive and inter-sectoral cluster cooperation at a European level is growing and is rapidly becoming a priority with national and regional cluster programmes. This final report section presents a set of recommendations for future ESCP type projects which, in turn, can contribute to further promoting the international competitiveness of European industry and SMEs and helping to structure European cluster meta projects.

R1. ESCPs and internationalisation type initiatives should be pursued as they have the capacity to have a real impact on the competitiveness of European clusters and cluster members both in terms of inter-sectoral clustering and accelerating SME growth and export performance.

R2. The JIS and overall project strategic analysis should be developed to create a more robust project setting. This should take into account the current efforts in developing smart specialisation strategies and industrial value chain analysis at both the Member State and the Regional level. New projects should be selected on the basis of their ability to contribute to EU competitiveness, emerging industries and societal challenges...

R3. SMEs participation should be facilitated and financing provided to encourage their participation in project missions and events. SMEs should also be encouraged to participate in project dissemination and success stories at a cluster level.

R4. Sufficient project resources need to be dedicated to the European meta project concept promotion and the dissemination of results.

R5. Projects must devote sufficient time and resources (tools, methodologies) to adequately assess project impacts and outcomes, notably regarding the follow up of SMEs. It may therefore be necessary to extend project durations to 30 months as opposed to the current 24 months.

R6. The European Commission should introduce some specifications in the call such as common terminology, common branding and should provide flexibility with regards to the coordinator organisation.

R7. Projects that can mobilise other sources of finance, public-private partnerships should be encouraged. This is particularly valuable for engaging external and international experts to provide additional inputs into the development of the JIS for example.

R8. Greater support needs to be provided in the “third country targets” to convert the initial contacts into business opportunities. Cluster based MOUs, export and development agencies and the presences of other cluster members (large companies) and other tools should be strengthened and better exploited.

R9. EC Project administration (reporting, cash flow, SME involvement etc) needs to be simplified for these types of projects to ensure flexibility, attractiveness for SMEs and an ability to respond to market opportunities.

R10 Most project partners agree that the methodological tools for developing and implementing ESCP type initiatives are now in place and can be deployed to a wider community for use in support of cluster and SME internationalisation actions.

5. Annex 1: List of interviewees

Name of the Project	Contact Person	Organisation
Wiintech	Mr. Sofiene Lourimi	DGCIS – France
REINA	Inmaculada Freije Obregón	DEDC Basque Government - Spain
REINA	Mr Horameche	Cluster Energia
REINA	Christiane Egger	Oekoenergie-Cluster
Feeding the Planet	Maria Carla Ambrosini	Regione Lombardia DG Industry, Handicraft, Building and Cooperation
Feeding the Planet	Cristina Pellegrino	Regione Lombardia DG Industry, Handicraft, Building and Cooperation
Feeding the Planet	Eric Fargeas	Agropolis International
Feeding the Planet	Gianluca Carengo	Parco Tecnologico Padano
EU4Sports	Emma Vendrell	Accio
EU4Sports	Xavi Esteve	Indescat
EU4Sports	Timothée Silvestre	Sporaltec
Textile2020	Anna Ershova	NFID
BioXClusters	Emilie Romeo	Lyonbiopôle
EACP	Nadine Sablotny	Hamburg Aviation
Energy	Gareth Jones	Water Innovation Network
3P4I	Vaclovas Radvilas	Secpho
Healthcare	Stephanie Wehnelt	Bio-M
Healthcare	Fabrizio Conicella	BioPmed
Mind the Gap	Svend Erik Nissen	Innonet Lifestyle

6. Annex 2: Interview guidelines



Marc Pattinson
Directeur

Tel +33 4 92 38 84 16
Fax +33 4 93 65 41 35
m.pattinson@inno-group.com

European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Interview Guideline

Research paper on cluster manager internationalisation skills and keys for success in managing and promoting pan-European Strategic Cluster Partnerships

1. Introduction and elements of methodology

inno TSD is a consulting firm specialized in science, technology and innovation policies and cluster policies. inno TSD (and their expert JN. Durvy) was mandated by DG Enterprise and Industry of the European Commission and acts as an external expert in this mission.

The interviews should provide elements for the drawing up of a research paper. The goal of the research paper will be to analyse skills and identify keys for success in managing and promoting ESCPs, and draw upon the lessons learned from both the 6 pilot projects for cluster internationalisation and the current ESCPs initiatives. The results of these analyses should provide competitive knowledge to help the preparation of current and forthcoming ESCPs based on previous concrete experiences.

The interview will have 2 focuses and be organised in 2 phases accordingly: 1) A first part will deal with management skills and keys for success of these cooperation initiatives; 2) the second part will focus on the promotion of these initiatives, and the key skills and communication tools/materials it requires.

This document will be used as a guideline for telephone interviews. They constitute an indication and support for the interviewer before and during the interview but could be adapted as the interview progresses.

A particular focus will be put by the interviewer on the questions written in bold type during the interview.

2. Interview guidelines

These questions are intended for project coordinators only.

2.1. Background information on the project's international strategy and activities

- o What are the overall ambitions and expected results of the project regarding internationalisation?
- o What type of activities promoting internationalisation does the project involve?
- o What are the results of the project achieved so far?
- o Has all relevant information been uploaded on the ECCP platform?

2.2. Management skills and keys for success

2.2.1. Building of the cluster partnership

- What are the critical management skills and keys to build such a partnership with success, according to you?
- How was the market or sector focus on this collaboration decided (through a common meeting, a consultation, a scoping study, etc)? And does your project share a strategic agenda? If yes, how was it designed and decided?
- On what criteria were the participant clusters chosen/selected?
- What role did the clusters in the countries you visited play in defining the market focus?

2.2.2. Management skills and key elements to coordinate the project

- Would you say that your coordinator role was mainly an administrative role or a leading role? If you had an administrative role, which of partners were the “locomotives” of the project?
- What is the overall role of a coordinator in such a project, according to you?
- What tasks are you specifically in charge of in the project, due to your role as coordinator?
- What coordinator management skills would you consider essential to the success of such a project?
- Are there any management skills that you would say are specific to this kind of project (collaboration between clusters)? Or specific to the field of activity concerned (health, sport, etc)?
- Did timing or coordination factors have an impact on project delivery/promotion? What skills are required to manage timing or planning conflicts between partners and/or task delivery?
- Did the project have a dedicated team?
- How many partners were involved in the project, and how did you involve them in daily decision-making?

- How were the tasks of the project shared between the partners? (Example: event organisation, dissemination activities, etc.)
- Did you use any dissemination tool to provide information on the project to all partners? Which ones?
- Were there any conflicts between the partners of the project, and how did you deal with or resolve them?

2.2.3. Joint international strategy: building and content

- Does the project involve a Joint International Strategy (JIS)?
- What was the methodology used to build this JIS? What were the different steps to elaborate this JIS?
 - How was the geographical focus of the project decided?
- To what extent did the needs of SMEs guide you in your management and facilitation approach?
- What does an excellent JIS have to incorporate according to you? What are the positive elements of the JIS of your project, according to you?
- Where does the JIS of your project fail, according to you?
- Have your international activities/overseas missions been a success? What were the main factors of success or failure?

2.2.4. Success of the project

- Did cluster partners succeed in thinking collectively for the need of the project, and taking into account the interest of the group, as opposed to the individual cluster level? How was it reflected in practice?
- Did “facilitators” play an important role in the development or the success of the project, and especially on consensus building in the project? What kind of facilitator action was involved (mediator, coach, etc.) and what tools or processes did they use? What lessons do you retain from these exchanges in terms of translating them into a “hard” strategy?

2.3. Promotion skills and tools needed

This part of the interview deals with the implementation of common promotion tools and the promotion skills needed for the visibility of the project.

2.3.1. Communication and promotion tools/materials

Communication strategy:

- Does the project have a written dissemination strategy, with clear international targets?
- Could you depict this dissemination strategy in a few words? (targets, main actions, etc.)
- Would you say the project has an efficient communication strategy abroad so far? (in terms of creating, reinforcing and sustaining the knowledge about the project and activities)
- How were the needs or considerations of cluster SMEs taken into account?
- What are the key elements of an efficient international communication strategy according to you?

Branding/common identity:

- Does the project have the following elements: (if not, why?)
 - An easily identifiable name?
 - A logo?
 - A brand/image?
 - A slogan?
 - Other branding tools? (to be detailed)

Promotion: common publications/events

- Does the project have/carry out the following elements: (if not, why?)
 - A common website/blog?
 - Does the website provide all the information about the project?
 - Are news regularly posted on the website?
 - Is the website available in several languages?

- A twitter strategy?
 - What is the goal/ambition of this strategy?
 - Does the project have an account?
 - Is there a specific person in charge of this account?
 - How dynamic is this account? (news posted, etc)
 - If no account, how do you manage a presence on twitter?
 - A linkedIN (or other professional network) strategy?
 - What is the goal/ambition of this strategy?
 - Does the project have a group?
 - Is there a specific person in charge of this group?
 - How dynamic is this group? (Discussions, news posted, etc.)
 - If no group, how do you manage a presence on this network?
 - A common flyer?
 - Available in several languages?
 - How is it disseminated to international entities?
 - An official project handbook?
 - Available in several languages?
 - How is it disseminated to international entities?
 - Press releases with international targets?
 - Do you and the partners have international contacts to spread the project's press releases abroad?
 - Organisation of and presence in international events?
 - Did the project launch any international event?
 - Did the project get representation in any international event?
 - Did you publish and disseminate any report about these conferences?
Using what channels?
 - A project newsletter? (in English)
- o What other communication/promotion tools did the project deploy to make itself visible internationally?

2.3.2. Communication and promotion skills

- o What are the key skills necessary for international promotion of the project, according to you?