

SIE Project Internationalisation Case Study – Torun 'Clustering for International Markets'

Background:

Torun Regional Development Agency is a partner in the SIE (SME Internationalisation Exchange) Project and runs a range of support initiatives to help local SMEs with international trade. During the SIE study visit to the Kujawsko-Pomorskie region in April 2017, the Agency highlighted a successful programme which supported the internationalisation of SME clusters.

Project Objectives:

- To assist SMEs with accessing international markets by establishing sector-focused clusters
- To help clusters to access joint business opportunities in foreign markets

Project Overview:

- Torun Regional Development Agency ran a programme from 2013-15 which aimed to create sector focused SME clusters of SMEs in the Kuyavia and Pomerania Region
- Financial support was provided for the establishment of the clusters consisting of local SMEs as well as formal links to local universities and regional technical university
- Additional support services were provided to the member companies and cluster leads including assessing export-readiness, promoting the clusters through the Enterprise Europe Network and cluster matchmaking
- The clusters were encouraged to access opportunities in foreign markets and support was provided to help them to do this

An Example of a Successful Cluster:

- The [Grupa HORECA Cluster](#) (Hotel, Restaurants & Catering) in Torun brings together 13 SMEs and a university from the Torun area with a complementary ranges of products and services
- The cluster is led by one of the member companies; [Chairconcept.com](#)
- Due to its small size, the cluster is able to be agile and flexible in order to respond to opportunities in other countries to bid for potential contracts in the hotel and restaurant sector
- Through offering a 'one-stop-shop' approach, the cluster has won business in many different countries thanks to its comprehensive and innovative offer to potential customers
- The member companies are in very regular contact with each other and have good personal connections in order to be able to respond quickly to new international business opportunities



Resources:

- Seed funding was provided by Torun Regional Development Agency through the 'Co-operation Links Fund' which provided financing for the development and establishment of sector-focused clusters.
- Advice and guidance including from the local Enterprise Europe Network service was provided to the clusters which in particular, enabled clusters to make connections in other European countries

Links to Policies:

- The clustering programme links to Kujawsko-Pomorskie's Regional Innovation Strategy

Results & Impacts:

- Out of 29 clusters which received financial support from the TRDA through the 'Co-operative Links Fund' to develop a cluster strategy, 14 received additional funding to implement its recommendations. 10 of the clusters (including Grupa HoReCa) have done business internationally which means that around 80 SMEs have now actively traded in foreign markets.
- Through supporting strategic clusters, the Regional Development Agency has enabled many regional companies to enter international markets. Without this clustering approach, it is unlikely that many of the SMEs would have had the time, resources, capacity or knowledge to bid for contracts in foreign markets. However, working with other companies means that many barriers to internationalisation were overcome.

Transferability:

This cluster / consortium approach to internationalisation could work in other European regions subject to:

- Identifying seed funding to initiate clusters
- Finding a suitable lead company or companies
- Working out which sectors would offer the best potential for exporting
- Ensuring regular communication between the companies and the cluster lead
- Providing ongoing advice and support for the clusters

Sustainability:

Following the initial financial investments from the Regional Development Agency, the clusters are able to bid for contracts that would not be possible for the individual SMEs acting alone. This means that additional revenues are generated for the member companies. This, in turn, proves the value of the cluster. When companies are convinced that being a cluster member can help their business grow and win foreign contracts, they are happy to contribute to the ongoing management and operational costs.

