

Policy Learning Platform

Research and innovation

SME competitiveness

Event report

Thematic workshop on clusters as drivers of regional innovation, SME competitiveness and interregional cooperation

20 June 2018

VAC Dirk Bouts, Leuven



Summary

The thematic workshop organised in Leuven on 20 June 2018, was a joint event between the Policy Learning Platform on Research and innovation (TO1), and SME competitiveness (TO3). Project partnership representatives from the two topics participated along with representatives from Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship, the European Commission's DG GROW and DG REGIO, Enterprise Europe Network, the Interreg Europe Joint Secretariat and experts from the Policy Learning Platform. In total, 32 individuals participated, including 16 representatives from 12 Interreg Europe projects.

The workshop was divided into three main sessions:

1. Presentations on cluster policy updates: learning from the experts

Speakers from Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship presented the Flemish research and innovation landscape and the region's cluster policy. This was followed by presentations from DG GROW and DG REGIO on relevant EU level cluster policies. Finally, a panel discussion bringing together the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) and the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP) highlighted the different dedicated services available to clusters and SMEs.

2. Practitioner Panel discussion regarding the role of clusters in driving interregional cooperation: learning from the projects

This session was focussed on hearing from four representatives from organisations representing both TO1 and TO3 Interreg Europe projects working with clusters in different respects with illustrations of methodologies and good practices that could be transferred to other projects.

3. Project partner breakout sessions: learning from each other

During the afternoon, two parallel breakout sessions were organised, one focussing on clusters as drivers of innovation and technology transfer, and one focussing on clusters supporting interregional cooperation and clusters supporting and engaging SMEs.

The points below represent some of the key messages and outcomes of relevance to Interreg Europe project partners that emerged from the day long discussions. They are linked to a range of possible policy options that can be adapted and implemented by regions or on national level.

- Clusters bring together actors from industry, academia and public organisations – making clusters a key resource in smart specialisation, cross sectoral collaboration, bottom up regional policy making and implementation, and knowledge and technology transfer.
- Clusters help SMEs identify common challenges, and give them additional credibility and leverage towards other research and industry actors, as well as facilitate the internationalisation processes of SMEs.
- Skilled people, most notably cluster managers, are important success factors for clusters contributing to the regional innovation ecosystem, fuelling entrepreneurship and cooperation, and mediating in cultural differences.
- On EU level there are a number of initiatives targeting investment in cluster excellence, the promotion of cluster collaboration and the development of cross-sectoral value chains. These include programmes and pilot actions, as well as support communities like the European Cluster Collaboration Platform and Enterprise Europe Network.

Support provided by the Policy Learning Platform

Projects can access a range of dedicated Policy Learning Platform services that can help enhance and deepen interactions with project partners and cluster stakeholders, for example sharing project methodologies, policy tools and the design of key performance indicators (KPIs). This could involve helping organise joint events, facilitating thematic exchanges and peer learning activities. The exchanges between TO1 and TO3 also illustrated how SMEs can be better integrated into the policy design and testing phase, for example linked to technology diffusion or internationalisation actions.

Finally, those recently approved Call Three projects can benefit from the experiences of the Call One and Two Projects, especially in relation to the way partners can seek the engagement of cluster organisations and their members in project activities. They can also learn from the different dissemination and communication methodologies that have been deployed to maximise impact, for example those offered by the Interreg Europe platform but also those available at ECCP or national level cluster networks.

Table of contents

Summary	1
Introduction	4
Participation.....	4
Three workshop sessions	7
<i>Session one: Presentations on cluster policy updates – learning from the experts</i>	7
<i>Session two: Practitioner panel discussion – learning from the projects</i>	12
<i>Session three: Project partner breakout sessions – learning from each other</i>	16
Workshop Conclusions	19
What’s next?	21
Other relevant information	22
Contacts	22
Appendix A – Workshop agenda	23
Appendix B - List of Participants	25

Introduction

The thematic workshop organised in Leuven on 20 June 2018, was an event bringing together Interreg Europe project representatives from the TO1 and TO3 communities namely Research and innovation, and SME competitiveness around the theme of clusters. The workshop offered an opportunity for participants to hear about the latest cluster policy developments and learn about the various services available from the cluster support community at the EU level, and to discuss the policy approaches of the Interreg Europe cluster-related projects. Project partners shared their own views, presenting their experiences, lessons learned and success stories, thereby sowing the seeds for future project cooperation and inspiration for tackling common challenges. Indeed, a number of projects highlighted the benefits they had already secured through the organisation of joint meetings and visits, for example the CLUSTERS3 and CLUSTERIX 2.0 projects.

Participation

A total of 12 Interreg Europe projects were represented at the workshop (nine from the Research and innovation topic and three from the SME competitiveness topic). These projects were selected and invited because of their links to the cluster policy theme; either having clusters at the core of the project theme or having clusters as an important stakeholder group with high relevance for the project objectives.

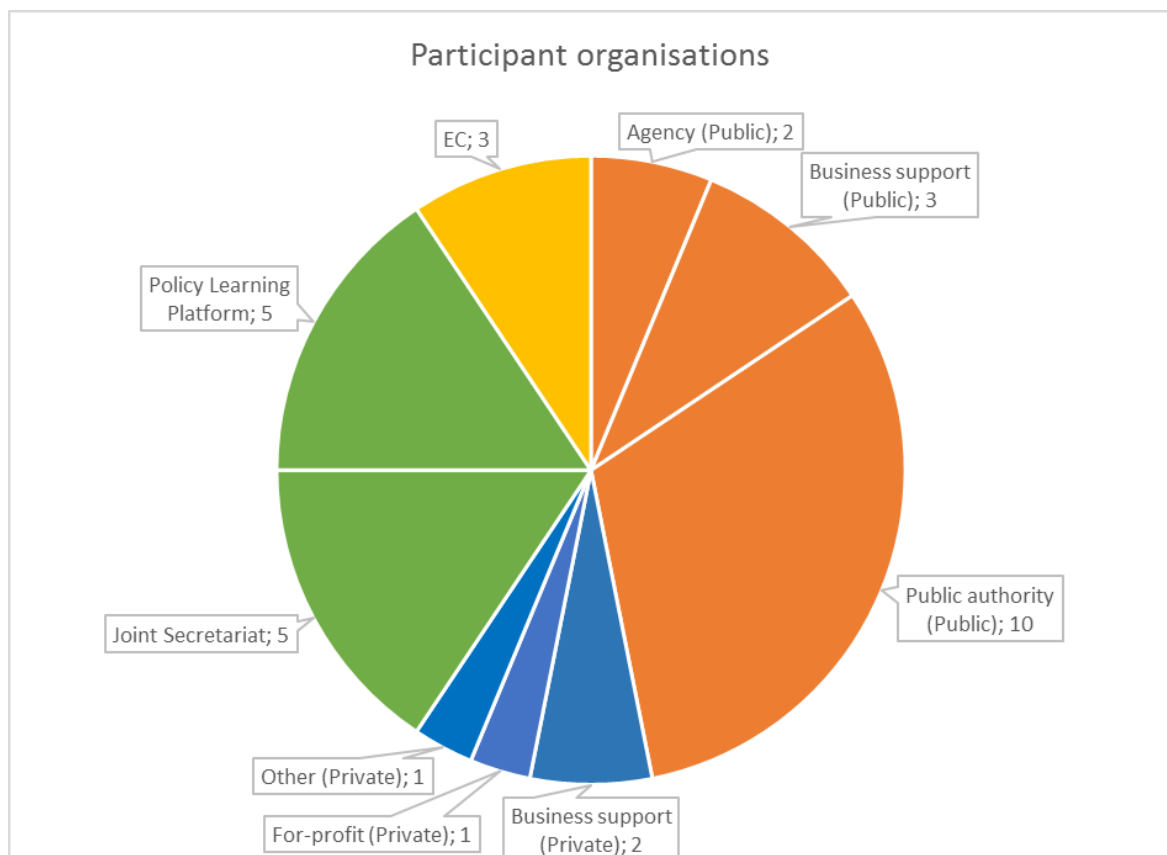
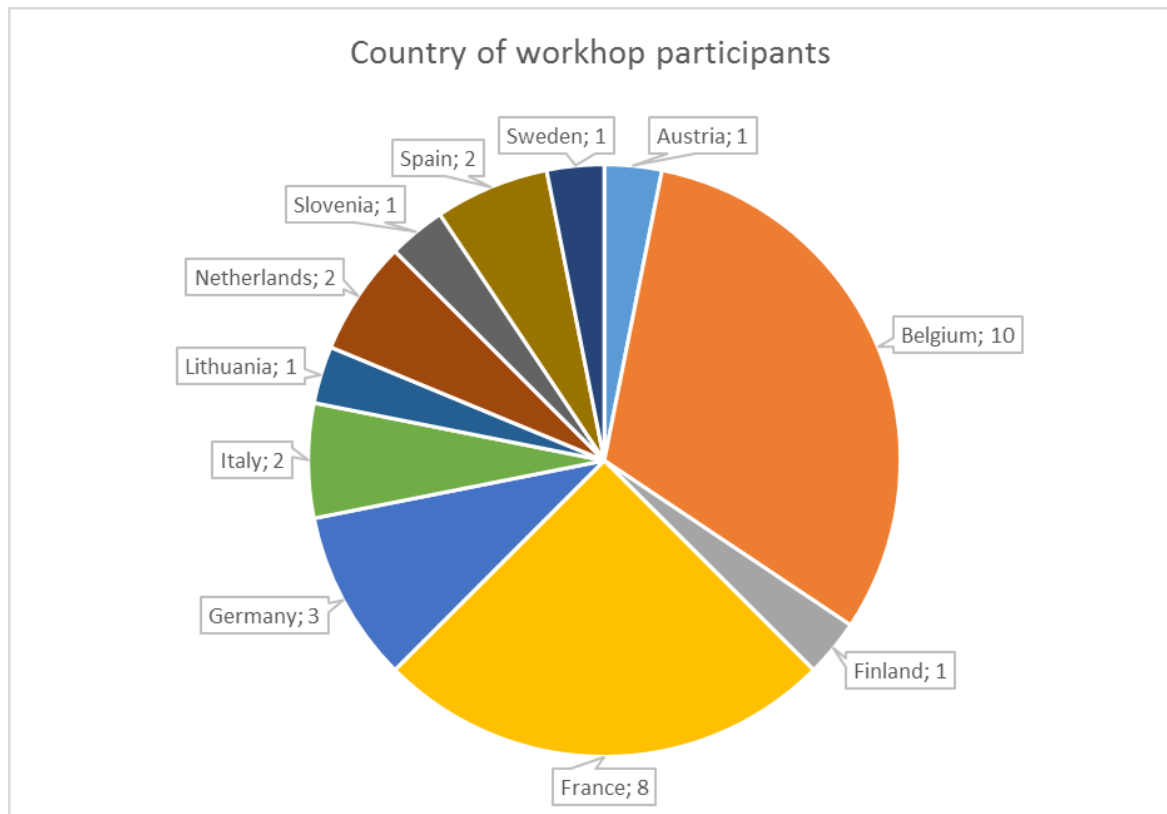
In total, 32 individuals participated, including 16 representatives from Interreg Europe projects, along with representatives from Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship, the European Commission's DG GROW and DG REGIO, Enterprise Europe Network (EEN), the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP), the Interreg Europe Joint Secretariat and experts from the Policy Learning Platform.

The following projects were represented:

 CLUSTERS3 Interreg Europe	Leveraging Cluster Policies for successful implementation of RIS3 www.interregueurope.eu/clusters3
 ClusterFY Interreg Europe	Fostering Clusters' Interregional Collaboration and Integration into International Value Chains www.interregueurope.eu/clusterfy
 CLUSTERIX 2.0 Interreg Europe	New Models of Innovation for Strategic Cluster Partnerships www.interregueurope.eu/clusterix2
 STRING Interreg Europe	STrategies for Regional INnovative Food Clusters www.interregueurope.eu/string

 <p>S34Growth Interreg Europe</p>	<p>Enhancing policies through interregional cooperation: New industrial value chains for growth www.interregeurope.eu/inno4sports</p>
 <p>NMP-REG Interreg Europe</p>	<p>Delivering Nanotechnologies, advanced Materials and Production to REGional manufacturing www.interregeurope.eu/nmp-reg</p>
 <p>REMIX Interreg Europe</p>	<p>Smart and Green Mining Regions of EU www.interregeurope.eu/remix</p>
 <p>Inno4Sports Interreg Europe</p>	<p>Sport for Growth and Healthy & Vital Communities www.interregeurope.eu/inno4sports</p>
 <p>Medtech4 Europe Interreg Europe</p>	<p>Optimizing the impact of public policies in favour of research and innovation facilities in the field of medical technologies www.interregeurope.eu/medtech4europe</p>
 <p>CLIPPER Interreg Europe</p>	<p>Creating a leadership for maritime industries - New opportunities in Europe www.interregeurope.eu/clipper</p>
 <p>INTRA Interreg Europe</p>	<p>Internationalisation of regional SMEs www.interregeurope.eu/intra</p>
 <p>KISS ME Interreg Europe</p>	<p>Knowledge & Innovation Strategies involving SME in the context of INTERREG www.interregeurope.eu/kissme</p>

The following two graphics provide an insight into the country coverage of the attendees and the nature of the organisational profiles of the attendees. In the first pie chart the high number of representatives from France can be explained by the presence of the Joint Secretariat Lille based team. Meanwhile in the second pie chart the information reflects the different participant organisations that together provided a good basis and diversity of actors for developing policy exchanges during the workshop. Details of the attendees can be found in the annexes.



Three workshop sessions

The workshop was organised into three distinct sessions:

1. **Presentations on cluster policy updates** – learning from Expert Speakers from the European Commission and Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship about European and regional cluster policies. Panel discussion with representatives from Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) and the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP);
2. **Practitioner panel discussion** – showcasing and learning 1) Project Experiences regarding cluster engagement and 2) the role clusters can play in driving interregional cooperation.
3. **Project partner breakout sessions** – group discussions sharing experiences and identifying cooperation experiences in two parallel sessions.

The event agenda is included in Appendix A and the presentations are available [via the Policy Learning Platform](#).

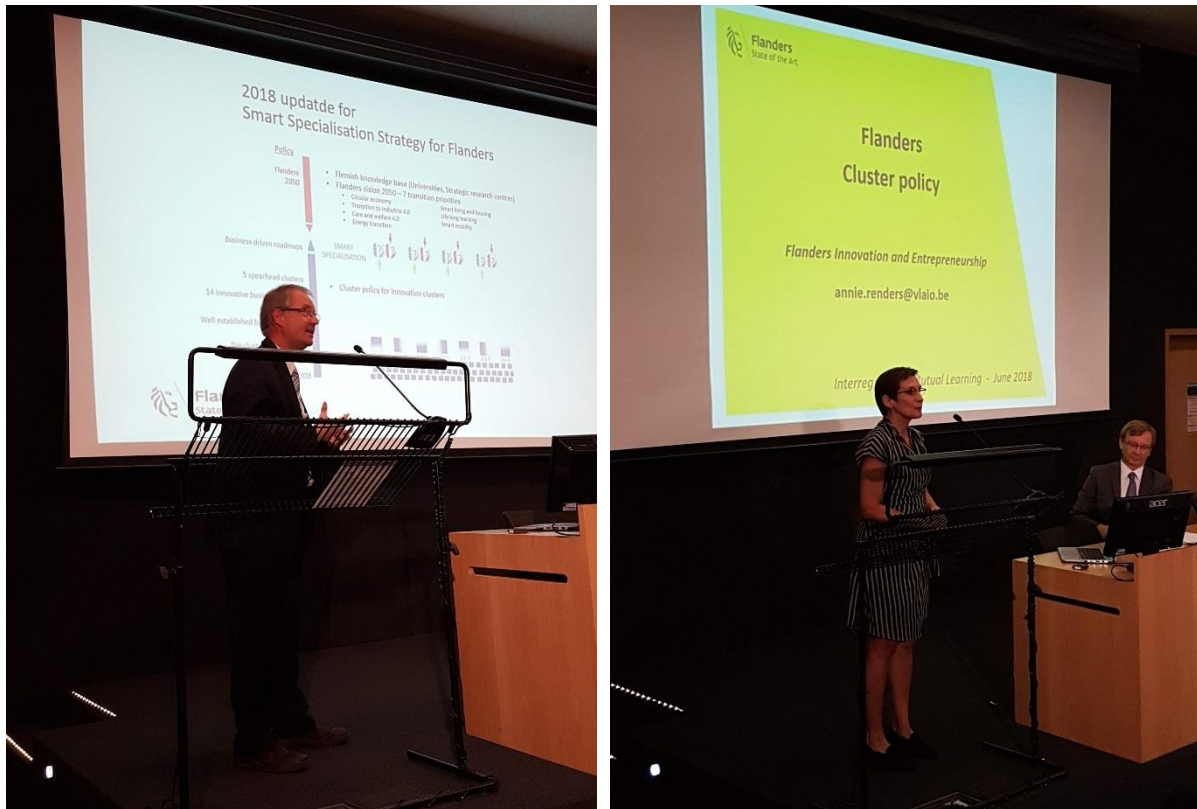
Session one: Presentations on cluster policy updates – learning from the experts

This first session aimed at providing attendees with an insight into the current and future cluster-related policy instruments deployed by regions and by two different European Commission DG's. It was further enriched through a panel discussion with representatives of European SME and cluster network organisations. The session was aimed in particular at helping project partners get a better overview of how their projects can be utilised to enhance regional competitiveness and support interregional cooperation.

Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship

Bernard De Potter, General-Administrator of Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship, welcomed the participants and opened the workshop by sharing some recent updates of the Smart Specialisation Strategy for Flanders notably how the approach has enabled the region to combine a “top-down and bottom-up approach” and co-develop a regional innovation road map for the future. Mr De Potter highlighted a couple of points in particular:

- The coming challenge for clusters is how to shift towards a broader innovation and SME development focus, leading to the set-up of demonstration projects and thus going beyond a purely research and technology development focus.
- Skills and people are important, not least cluster managers, for the entrepreneurial activity and to overcome cultural differences.
- Cluster cooperation is a means to drive internationalisation and the creation of EU and global value chains that would help strengthen regional competitiveness.



Annie Renders, Head of unit 'cluster policy' at Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship, presented an overview of the Flemish research and innovation landscape in general, and the region's cluster policy in particular. The Flemish cluster programme is characterised by clusters as bottom-up initiatives with companies taking a clear role as drivers, committing financially to cluster development. There is a strong focus on active collaboration, with a clear competitiveness programme to achieve goal fulfilment. The main objective of the cluster programme is to increase competitiveness and create economic value through knowledge creation. Ms Renders highlighted her organisation's cluster support scheme, currently addressing six Spearhead clusters and 14 Innovative business networks. Some of the key features and results include:

- The Spearhead programme provides cluster organisation with a long-term perspective (10 years) and a stable policy framework that facilitates business commitment and encourages co-investment.
- The support includes financial support to cluster organisations and activities like peer learning and training for ESCA-labelling¹.
- As for results, the first year of support generated the involvement of more than 2000 companies, and close to 200 cooperation initiatives were launched.
- A specific call for inter-cluster projects resulted in 13 collaborations between clusters. Early projects have included bio-based collaboration between partners from the chemical cluster and digital led projects in the construction cluster. Some of these projects already have an international dimension.

¹ European Secretariat for Cluster Analysis

DG GROW and DG REGIO: EU Cluster Policy Overview and Support Mechanisms

Carsten Schierenbeck, Team leader clusters, social economy & entrepreneurship, DG GROW, presented a number of current EU cluster initiatives targeting investment in cluster excellence, the promotion of cluster collaboration and the development of cross-sectoral value chains:

Cluster excellence	Knowledge and Innovation Communities Cluster Excellence Programme
Cluster collaboration	European Cluster Collaboration Platform Cluster Internationalisation Programme, European Strategic Cluster Partnerships Interreg
Cross-sectoral value chains	S3 Platform European Observatory for Clusters and Industrial Change Cluster facilitated projects for new industrial value chains (Horizon 2020)

Lessons from these cluster actions include the shift from supporting clusters, to using them to create growth opportunities; the need to overcome sectoral and regional silos; the importance of having the right mix of partners to make strategic connections across ecosystems and building stronger links to smart specialisation; and the gap in funding necessary to make strategic partnerships sustainable. The partnership with DG REGIO is considered highly relevant to maximise the impact of these various initiatives.

Mr Schierenbeck highlighted some points regarding the future evolution and direction of European cluster policy:

- New call for cluster excellence planned for 2018 with a budget of EUR 3.6 million.
- This will include activities regarding a pilot mobility scheme for cluster managers. This will cover promotion, recruitment, matching and follow-up of short-term visits, with facilitating support from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform.
- Future programmes will seek to focus on “Cluster Joint Initiatives” necessitating the need for more interregional cooperation, for example along S3 thematic priorities.
- Up to eight European Strategic Cluster Partnerships for S3 will be launched during the autumn that will demonstrate further how clusters can play a role in enhancing interregional innovation and SME-based cooperation and leading on the “experimentation path”.

Finally, policy maker exchanges will be intensified through the Cluster Policy Forum and through the establishment of a Cluster High Level Expert Group. A number of important cluster events are planned for the autumn 2018 and also in May 2019 (Bucharest tbc Cluster Conference).



Alessandra Lepore, Project Officer, Smart and sustainable growth, DG REGIO, discussed cluster policy from an interregional perspective and clusters' role in strengthening EU industrial value chains. Previous experience indicates that clusters make up an essential part of the triple helix, their proximity to both market and investors is crucial, and they play a key role in regional mapping of industrial stakeholders. Ms Lepore highlighted an ongoing [pilot action on interregional innovation projects](#), designed to accelerate the work of the [three S3 Thematic Platforms \(Energy, Agriculture, Industrial Modernisation\)](#).

Key points of the pilot action include:

- A total of eight partnerships selected to receive tailored support provided by the Commission and external experts; the objective is to prepare fundable projects and business plans for commercialisation and scale-up.
- Building on the results of the pilot action, a new component of the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) regulation is foreseen.
- The Interregional innovation investments will bring together researchers, businesses, civil society and public administrations involved in smart specialisation strategies.
- The investments propose to allocate 11.5% of ETC budget to commercialisation and scaling up of interregional innovation projects having the potential to encourage the development of European value chains.

DG REGIO also works along with DG GROW supporting the S3 Thematic Platforms, notably via the ReConfirm initiative to support the ten Industrial Modernisation partnerships such as ClusSport and Medtech (both of which have recently secured funding from Interreg Europe) and include cluster actors. This represents a further opportunity for clusters to help create the conditions for enhanced interregional cooperation. In the words of Marc Lemaitre, Director General, DG REGIO:

"If we want to make Europe's industry more competitive we need to make a better use of clusters: strengthen their interregional, cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary collaboration in common domains of specialisation."²

² Marc Lemaitre, EU Industry Day 2018

Cluster and SME Support Network: Panel discussion

The purpose of this discussion was to allow project stakeholders to identify the human and network resources that are available through Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) and the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP) to support their cluster stakeholder communities. They also provided opportunities for enhancing interregional networking and identifying cooperation actions, for example responding to EU funding calls.

Lutgart Spaepen, Director at Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship, and a member of the EEN thematic group on clusters, outlined the work of Enterprise Europe Network and its support and services to European SMEs. EEN facilitates international partnerships, gives advice concerning international growth, and supports business innovation. Ms Spaepen emphasised some key points:

- EEN's dedicated working group on clusters helps regions develop synergies through various technology transfer activities and allows regions to create linkages along business development lines.
- EEN and clusters share a common stakeholder group in SMEs – there is a potential for synergies.
- A first step could be via an exchange between EEN and Interreg Europe cluster projects, e.g. through participation in workshops or other events.

Marc Pattinson, representing the European Cluster Collaboration Platform, highlighted the main services available at ECCP that might be of relevance to Interreg Europe partners and especially:

- ECCP enables clusters to present their profiles, networks and activities and facilitates collaboration through matchmaking missions e.g. Hannover Messe organised jointly with EEN.
- ECCP provides support to interregional cluster initiatives and thematic/sectoral networks and organises webinars on topics of interest to cluster managers.
- Through ECCP, policy makers have access to a range of regional policy analytical and mapping tools.
- Showcasing cluster events and activities (for example, a number of Interreg Europe projects have reported the results of their inter-cluster events).
- Accessing information regarding cluster-related funding and cooperation activities, for example in the domain of smart specialisation or cross sectoral and thematic based collaboration.

Overall a good opportunity for Interreg Europe cluster projects to share their results and help regional clusters engage more strongly in interregional cooperation.

Session two: Practitioner panel discussion – learning from the projects

This showcasing and learning panel discussion brought together four experienced practitioners with the purpose of discussing effective policy approaches and experiences regarding clusters' role in driving interregional cooperation.

The panel discussion featured four representatives from organisations and Interreg Europe projects working with clusters in different respects. The discussion was monitored by Marc Pattinson and the four panellists were:

- **Simone Hagenauer**, ecoplus. The Business Agency of Lower Austria, Interreg Europe project CLUSTERIX 2.0
- **Emma Vendrell**, ACCIÓ, Agency for Business Competitiveness, Catalonia
- **David Fernández Terreros**, SPRI Society for Competitive Transformation, Basque Country, Interreg Europe project CLUSTERS3
- **Sina Hoch**, Euregio Rhine-Waal/ Rijn-Waal, Interreg Europe project KISS ME



The panellists were asked common and individual questions on cluster policy links to smart specialisation and SME engagement, and to share their experience of cross-cluster and inter-project cooperation based on clusters.

Simone Hagenauer described how clusters are at the core of smart specialisation strategy implementation in Lower Austria where there is an ERDF-funded cluster programme. The programme has a top-down approach with a strong influence from the regional government and clear links to the regional strategy. Funding and support has targeted pre-competitive research or innovation actions thus facilitating cooperation, notably with SMEs. Clusters are also used to help develop and delve into niche aspects of the Regional Innovation Strategy such as the role of building and construction methods on high level regional policy objectives such as climate change.

The **CLUSTERIX 2.0** project has facilitated staff exchanges between Lower Austria and Romanian counterparts that has resulted in “win-win” cooperation achievements. Through Interreg Europe there was an opportunity to exchange experiences from different approaches and discuss how cluster managers can play a crucial role in the dialogue with policy makers. In Romania, a funding scheme to support cluster management organisations has been launched, in part as a result of the staff and knowledge exchange. **CLUSTERIX 2.0** has also played a role in allowing regional partners access details of the Flanders cluster support programme that is regarded by many as a European level good practice and as a gateway for enhancing interregional cooperation. Project partners/regions have already launched a new materials inter-cluster cooperation project involving cluster SMEs.

Emma Vendrell from ACCIÓ highlighted that in Catalonia, networking and cooperation between clusters has not been left to chance. Starting ten years ago, cluster managers have been invited to a strategic training week every year, visiting international innovative and clusters hotspots such as the USA, Singapore and South Korea. Through these repeated opportunities for exchange, such connections have driven a bottom-up cooperation approach and cooperation between clusters and their SMEs have grown stronger, eventually resulting in new business and innovation projects. The projects can be carried out by individual cluster organisations, by clusters in cooperation with outside companies, or jointly between clusters. ACCIÓ provides some financial support to cluster organisations through co-funding of strategic activities, (approximately EUR 50,000) to “plant seeds” for international collaboration, and for participation in the strategic training week.

Ms Vendrell also shared her organisation’s experience of Baltic Sea Region (BSR) Innovation Express³. ACCIÓ has been an active agency in the cluster domain for a number of years and has placed a high priority on interregional and international cooperation actions. BSR has been really important and the clusters involved have been encouraged and supported. The programme has enabled ACCIÓ to develop a strong connection with Denmark especially in the fields of cluster policy development and evaluation. Furthermore, ACCIÓ and various Catalan partners have utilised the Interreg Europe projects such as S34Growth to test and develop policy instruments. Catalonia is also heavily involved in a number of S3P Smart Specialisation Partnerships such as ClusSport that also have linkages to Interreg Europe.

David Fernández Terreros from the **CLUSTERS3** project explained how the Basque smart specialisation strategy was initiated by the government, and the crucial role played by clusters in engaging different actors of the regional ecosystem, given that they represent the whole triple helix. Clusters are actively involved in steering groups and working groups linked to the implementation of the smart specialisation strategy. The working groups are also involved in setting priorities and finding new value chains within the industrial modernisation framework, and here clusters have played an active role in contributing with new ideas.

Mr Fernández Terreros highlighted the Centre for Advanced Manufacturing (in Basque country) as a good example of how ERDF funds have been used to diversify the regional economy. Clusters have played an important part in developing this initiative notably with a focus on offshore energy development (wind power). A focus on high TRLs 6-8 means that companies are engaged in close to market opportunities. The region has played an active part in Vanguard Thematic projects, Industrial Modernisation and has secured funding from DG MARE and recently DG REGIO’s pilot initiative (see

³ BSR (Baltic Sea Region) Innovation Express is a joint call for proposals implemented within the framework of the BSR Stars programme. Innovation Express represents a common European approach for supporting the internationalisation of SMEs through cluster initiatives.

above DG REGIO presentation), thus illustrating the potential and importance of securing synergies and complementarities with other funding programmes including Interreg Europe.

The **CLUSTERS3** and **CLUSTERIX 2.0** lead partners know each other from before, which has facilitated exchanges between the projects, visiting each other and keeping in touch regularly. The latest collaborative event directly involved clusters in a matchmaking meeting. A delegation of cluster representatives from the Skåne region in southern Sweden recently met their Basque country counterparts to discuss opportunities for cooperation. Such intense and operational level exchanges can play an important part in strengthening interregional cooperation actions.

Sina Hoch from the **KISS ME** project stressed that with its cross-border perspective on SME involvement, the clusters dimension is very important. Clusters in specific sectors, new materials is one successful example, are of great relevance to regions on both side of the borders. At the same time the clusters themselves also benefit from each other, thanks to the interaction opportunities made possible through the Interreg programmes. However, there are also challenges for collaboration – in particular the fact that big differences exist between clusters, ranging from organisational structures, to policy objectives and specific operational activities, which can act as potential hurdles for effective exchange and mutually beneficial synergies.

Lastly, based on their experience of working in Interreg Europe projects, the panellists were asked to provide some advice to the recently started Interreg Europe Call Three projects. Suggestions included:

- Select a narrow focus. The cluster policy benchmarking exercise can be of great help in this process.
- Earn the trust of stakeholders early on and clear indicate the incentives and value added associated with engagement in the project. Try also to increase the frequency of meetings/exchanges, an annual event is not sufficient
- Ensure early commitment of all stakeholders. RIS3 depends on different governments (potential changes) etc., you cannot wait until the Action Plan is written.
- Try to create a good relationship with project partners. Keep local stakeholders interested by sharing interim outputs.

The audience also suggested that a more proactive role is required, for example SME competitiveness projects need to work closely with SME communities (via clusters) to demonstrate the value and benefits that can be achieved through project cooperation.

Questions and remarks: highlights from the audience

- On the value of learning from others: “We have learnt from our Hungarian partners with their companies looking for new markets. Our companies in the Netherlands are older and have different priorities and approach, compared to the Hungarian attitude. It has given us a new perspective.”
- Partner involvement is important for successful interregional and interproject cooperation. The partners of **ClusterFY** have proven to be very active and easily engaged. The project is looking into the possibility to produce joint policy statements that would illustrate common positions held by regions on certain topics, including clusters.
- Actors involved in both Interreg B and Interreg Europe, but with different perspectives, gain new perspectives and insights into new policy tools. Clusters are exposed to different

interregional cooperation opportunities and can become more robust and able to cope with new challenges.

Session three: Project partner breakout sessions – learning from each other

The main activity in the afternoon was structured around two parallel breakout sessions, one focussing on **clusters as drivers of innovation and technology transfer**, and one focussing on **clusters supporting interregional cooperation and clusters supporting and engaging SMEs**.



Breakout session 1: Clusters as drivers of innovation and technology transfer

The role of the project learning process was highlighted, for example to illustrate the importance of clusters in delivering innovation and technology transfer activities, or to enable cooperation with regions and countries sharing a common approach to innovation and technology transfer. The **INKREASE** project exemplified how such an approach had led to a change in the Emilia Romagna regional strategy and resulted in the creation of seven regional triple helix clusters that were aligned with the S3 sector and innovation challenges in terms of value chains and cross sectoral development opportunities. These new clusters are expected to play an important role in implementing regional innovation and technology transfer initiatives, a first outcome of this new approach concerns the organisation of a regional forum on S3 progress and will be followed up by regional funded innovation calls.

Various project partnerships such as **CLUSTERS3** also recognised the role clusters play in helping SMEs access regional RDI assets, build capacity, become more competitive, and promote SME participation in Living Labs and demonstration projects. Clusters also help Research and Technology Organisations (RTOs) deliver more targeted services that better meet the needs of SMEs, for example in the field of vocational training. The Basque country now has a network of 15 vocational training centres. The **MedTech4Europe** partner from Lombardy highlighted the important intermediary role that clusters can play between SMEs and university technology transfer offices both in terms of awareness raising and developing shared needs/service requirements. The experience of Lower Austria in this matter

illustrates how identifying and focussing on “pre-competitive” needs to enable SMEs to cooperate rather than compete can be a powerful tool for enhancing take up of innovative solutions.

Many of the partners provided examples of the role of clusters in designing and delivering cross sectoral cooperation. These have proven to be effective means to accelerate technology diffusion as they are strongly aligned with business opportunities. In Lower Austria (**CLUSTERIX 2.0**) the example of the space and food sector was given, in Lombardy digitalisation and industry 4.0 was highlighted; along with IA/big data/drones that also has links to the agrifood sector (**STRING**).

Technology and competence mapping exercises led by clusters can promote a demand-led understanding of the research and innovation needs of SMEs. Clusters can also help translate large societal challenges into smaller ones, thus enabling contributions or solutions to be delivered by individual SMEs. Such experiences have been encountered in the **STRING**, **CLUSTERIX 2.0** and **CLUSTERS3** projects.

All projects agreed that cluster impact and evaluation approaches need to take into account and blend both quantitative and qualitative indicators to reflect the interactions and complex nature of innovation ecosystems. Indicators need to be aligned with what programme “owners” want to achieve and contribute to steering policy in the right direction. Cluster organisations and management teams need to ensure that their internal monitoring tools capture the relevant information to inform policy makers of the progress being made towards regional impact targets. Also, enough time must elapse before cluster impacts can be assessed and there is a challenge associated with understanding cause and effect.

In a series of final comments attendees made the following remarks regarding cluster policies:

- Cluster policies must be seen as a tool within a broader policy mix that address innovation and research priorities that are aligned with regional S3 priorities;
- Cluster policies should remain flexible policy instruments to reflect the need to operate in complex multi partner ecosystems where flexibility and responsiveness are key characteristics;
- Cluster manager skills training should not be overlooked in the design of cluster policies instruments and their implementation (training, mobility, best practice visits) and can be supported through interregional cooperation;
- A review of the forthcoming Action Plans will provide an interesting insight to the types of policy instruments that have been tested and deployed by regions. The Policy Learning Platform and Joint Secretariat will discuss ways in which this information can be capitalised.

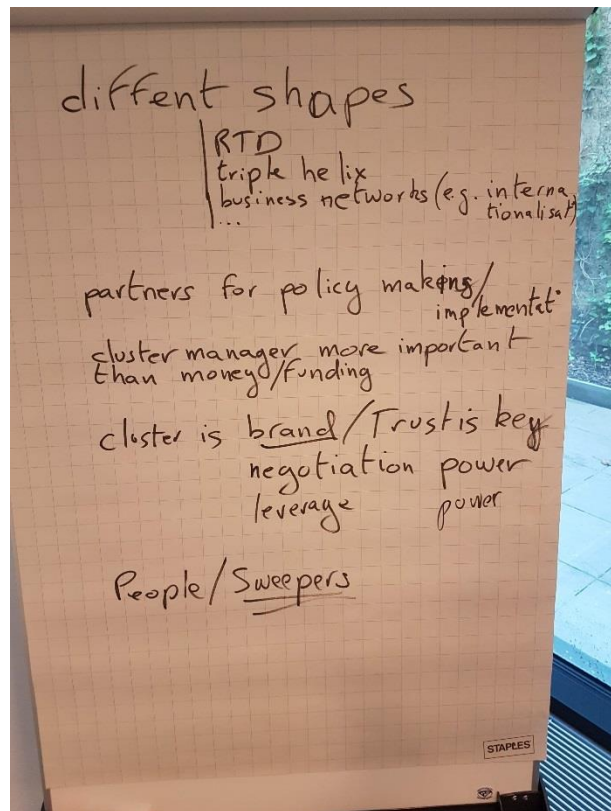
Breakout session 2: Clusters supporting interregional cooperation and supporting and engaging SMEs

The projects noted that different interpretations and notions of the cluster concept play a role in both interregional cooperation and the relationship with SMEs. It could differ in content, e.g. it could be a group of companies in the same industry getting together, but also a large association of companies, universities and institutional partners (like the French “pôle de compétitivité”) or yet a different constitution; clusters also differ because of different levels of development. The **CLIPPER** project partner from Pays de la Loire stressed that clusters are important in the region, particularly for engaging with SMEs and in value chain activities. But just thinking about “clusters” in a French or English context can make a difference that becomes evident in cluster cooperation; in France, business-

oriented networks would also be considered clusters that could take on the role as partner. Understanding these difference views of what constitutes a “cluster” is important for cooperation to work.

Interregional cooperation is also affected by how clusters are organised in different countries. The **KISS ME** project exemplified the case of the Netherlands and Germany. The former has an umbrella organisation for clusters, facilitating interregional cooperation, while the latter does not.

The support to interregional cooperation provided by clusters was characterised as stemming from their networks and connections. The **MedTech4Europe** project partner from Limburg noted that clusters pick up on what is needed in the region, they see what happens in other clusters, and working with them means being “grounded” in the region and understanding what the improvement objective is. All of this provides a valuable input to interregional cooperation policy development context.



Concerning the role of clusters in supporting and engaging SMEs, the importance of clear incentives – measurable economic benefits – for the SME to get involved was highlighted by the **ClusterFY** project partner. Clusters need competent managers to achieve this, thus training and support to cluster managers is a key factor.

A number of partners pointed to internationalisation as a concrete example where clusters can make an important difference for SMEs. For an individual SME it is challenging to go international/interregional, but a cluster can act as a channel to find markets in other countries, or partners in other clusters and gather and disseminate market or sector information. Projects also noted that cluster membership can function as a brand, giving credibility to a company when trust is key. Furthermore, the cluster can provide negotiating power and leverage in discussions with suppliers, customers or partners.

Lastly, the experience of the **KISS ME** project partner illustrated that that a cluster can function as an inward channel, bringing business from outside clients. By knowing the competence and expertise of its SME members, a cluster can connect a client having a problem with one or more SMEs offering a potential solution; reinforcing the value of clusters as “single points of entry” in both policy and business-related matters.

Workshop Conclusions

The workshop ended with rapporteurs from the two breakout sessions reporting back on what had been discussed. This was followed by some closing remarks from Marc Pattinson regarding what had been said during the day, the state of play in the “cluster world” and highlighted some of next challenges and opportunities regarding the role of clusters in regional innovation, SME competitiveness and interregional cooperation. These final points are drawn from the presentations, panel discussions and breakout sessions and they focus on the themes of:

- the role of clusters as drivers of regional innovation,
- clusters and SME competitiveness and
- clusters and interregional cooperation.

These points help identify and highlight the types of challenges faced by policy makers keen to exploit the power of clusters to drive regional innovation and competitiveness and also the type of concrete policy outcomes that can be derived, for example through greater engagement with SMEs.

Clusters as drivers of regional innovation

- Clusters can play a key role in smart specialisation implementation, bringing together actors from industry, academia and public organisations. Several examples were showcased during the day, for example the experiences of the Emilia-Romagna region, lead partner of the **INKREASE** project, and the recent launch of seven clusters aligned with S3 challenges.
- Cluster-led cross sectoral collaboration can help regional authorities test and develop new policy instruments, such as sector value chains that bring together SMEs and technology and actors from their regions; an experience that for example Lower Austria and Noord-Brabant regions share. Regional competitiveness can be enhanced through the delivery of new policy measures and targeted funding to encourage cross sectoral business cooperation.
- Clusters can be used to test and deploy new policies and working methods such as “open innovation” techniques, for example between large organisations and SMEs based on a business opportunity approach.
- Clusters are “grounded” in their local and regional context, making them valuable partners in policy making and implementation, as experienced by the Province of Limburg, a partner of the **MedTech4Europe** project, and the Pays de la Loire region, active in **CLIPPER**. Thanks to their connections with regional SMEs, clusters are well-positioned to give input to policy makers. Clusters are effective tools for accelerating technology diffusion and can act as brokers between SMEs and other stakeholders.
- Cluster managers are key facilitators and must have a complete skill set to meet the different needs of the regional policy makers and the innovation ecosystem; an insight highlighted by for example Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship, partner in the **CLUSTERIX 2.0** project.

Clusters as drivers of SME competitiveness

- Clusters are often aligned with S3 priorities and provide a direct link to business/SME communities that are key actors for S3 implementation.
- Clusters are an important source of support and facilitation to SMEs. Clusters provide infrastructure for knowledge and technology transfer and help to integrate SMEs into new value chains and access new regions and/or international markets.
- Clusters offer SMEs negotiation power and leverage, and enhanced visibility to engage with the research community and large companies; benefits identified by MITA in the Lithuanian context, among others. Clusters act as facilitators of SME internationalisation and help manage inter-cultural challenges, for example when adapting good practices.
- Clusters can also help groups of SMEs identify common or shared challenges and engage with RTOs to find solutions and create suitable policy instruments, as experienced in the Basque country by SPRI, lead partner of the **CLUSTERS3** project.
- SMEs need to better understand the incentives and outcomes of cluster/innovation engagement, a point high on the agenda for MITA, lead partner of **ClusterFY**. This also requires clusters to be more transparent on the performance indicators and activity measures that they seek to deliver.

Clusters as drivers of interregional cooperation

- Cluster organisations can play an important role in the implementation of European cohesion policies, for example by stimulating cooperation between advanced and less advanced regions, accelerating technology diffusion and supporting the growth of SMEs.
- Speakers from both DG REGIO and DG GROW noted that the alignment of S3 priorities, often involving cluster stakeholders, represents a concrete means to identify the scope for developing interregional cooperation actions.
- Clusters are playing a key role in the design of the Smart Specialisation Thematic Platform co-investment projects, notably in the domain of Industrial Modernisation, that have close linkages with a number of Interreg Europe projects; something the region of Catalonia has first-hand experience of.
- Cross-cluster cooperation brings value to regions, organisations and projects. The organisations SPRI and ecoplus, lead partners of **CLUSTERS3** and **CLUSTERIX 2.0** respectively, have promoted this through exchange between the two projects. Thematic based cooperation can be facilitated through exchanges via cluster managers.
- Cluster managers are key to cooperation, creating a context for them to meet and learn from each other can catalyse the cooperation process, as ACCIÓ has successfully achieved in Catalonia. Skills development activities can be developed through cluster manager exchanges and best practice missions/visits, something explored among partners of the **CLUSTERIX 2.0** project.

Support provided by the Policy Learning Platform

- Project partners are keen to share project progress via the publication of good practices on the Policy Learning Platform. They note the importance of ensuring that cultural and economic factors, that could accelerate or undermine adoption by other regions, are clearly identified.
- The Policy Learning Platform can support Interreg Europe cluster projects, by helping them find and realise cooperation opportunities and capitalise on the knowledge and experience of others. For example, experts can spot and highlight Good Practices of particular relevance or identify themes or particular issues of common interest that groups or pairs of projects may tackle through cooperation.
- The Policy Learning Platform can also facilitate the exchanges between Interreg Projects and other networks/partnerships such as ECCP and S3 Industrial Modernisation Partnerships, notably along thematic or sectoral lines.
- The Policy Learning Platform will continue to provide opportunities for interaction such as face-to-face workshops and online webinars. Such events are also opportunities to involve external networks and organisations with links to the wider cluster community.
- The Policy Learning Platform Team will also maintain strong links with other relevant networks such as EEN and ECCP.

What's next?

Closing this report, we do not want to miss the opportunity to inform you about the upcoming activities of the Policy Learning Platform. Please already mark the following dates in your calendars:

1. 13 September 2018 – Lunchtime briefing at the Committee of the Regions:

- On 13 September, we will have the possibility to present the services of the platform and our good practice database at the Committee of the Regions in Brussels. Spotlight will be given on selected good practices from running Interreg Europe projects. Learn more about the agenda and follow the event online [here](#).

2. 8-11 October 2018 – Policy Learning Platform at this year's European Week of Regions and Cities (EURegionsWeek):

- In the framework of this year's European Week of Regions and Cities, Interreg Europe is awaiting you with a diverse yet targeted programme for interregional learning. Register via our [event page](#) and stay tuned for further details.

If not done yet, please also feel invited to learn about the latest developments in interregional cooperation by subscribing to the [Interreg Europe newsletter](#).

Other relevant information

- Short video summarising the [thematic workshop](#)
- Policy learning platform, Policy brief on [the Vanguard Initiative](#)
- Policy learning platform, Policy brief on [S3P-Industry and Interreg Europe project synergies](#)
- European Cluster Collaboration Platform [website](#)

Contacts

Marc Pattinson m.pattinson@policylearning.eu

Carl Arvid Dahlöf c.dahloef@policylearning.eu

Appendix A – Workshop agenda

Clusters as drivers of regional innovation, SME competitiveness and interregional cooperation

Thematic workshop, 20 June 2018, 09:00-17:00

This thematic workshop will allow participants to discuss, share experiences and learn about the role of clusters and related policies.

09:00-09:30	Registration and coffee
09:30-09:40	Welcome from Interreg Europe JS Team and from representative of Flanders Monitoring Committee of Interreg Europe Bernard De Potter General-Administrator of Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship Mar Martin Policy officer - Interreg Europe Joint Secretariat
09:40-10:00	Welcome from the Policy Learning Platform Research and Innovation Team Marc Pattinson and Carl Arvid Dahlöf Thematic Experts - Research and innovation
10:00-10:30	Interactive introductory exercise and presentation from Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship on cluster policies Annie Renders Head of Unit 'Cluster policy' - Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship
10:30-11:00	European cluster policy updates Carsten Schierenbeck European Commission - DG GROW Alessandra Lepore European Commission - DG REGIO
11:00-11:30	The cluster support community: panel interview Panellists: Lutgart Spaepen EEN Marc Pattinson ECCP
11:30-11:45	Coffee break
11:45-13:00	Interactive panel discussion on effective approaches promoting clusters' role in driving interregional cooperation Panellists: Simone Hagenauer , ecoplus. The Business Agency of Lower Austria, Interreg Europe project CLUSTERIX 2.0

	<p>Emma Vendrell, ACCIO, Agency for Business Competitiveness, Catalonia David Fernández Terreros, SPRI Society for Competitive Transformation, Basque Country, Interreg Europe project CLUSTERS3 Sina Hoch, Euregio Rhine-Waal/ Rijn-Waal, Interreg Europe project KISS ME</p> <p>The second half of the session will be reserved for questions from the audience.</p>
13:00-14:30	Networking lunch
14:30-15:45	<p>Project Partner Session discussion on specific cluster thematic areas</p> <p>Working group 1: Clusters as drivers of innovation and technology transfer Run by: Marc Pattinson, Thematic Expert, Policy Learning Platform</p> <p>Working group 2: Clusters supporting interregional cooperation Run by: Carl Arvid Dahlöf, Thematic Expert, Policy Learning Platform</p> <p>Working group 3: Clusters supporting and engaging SMEs Run by: Luc Schmerber, inno Group</p> <p>A set of guiding questions will be prepared for each working group.</p>
15:45-16:00	Coffee break
16:00-16:30	Reporting back from the break-out groups by experts/group rapporteurs
16:30-17:00	<p>Wrap up and conclusions</p> <p>Marc Pattinson and Carl Arvid Dahlöf Thematic Experts – Research and innovation</p>

Appendix B - List of Participants

First name	Last name	Organisation	Project	Country
Seppo	Ahola	Kemin Digipolis Oy	REMIX	Finland
Justine	Barrett	Interreg Europe Joint Secretariat	N/A	France
Alberto	Bichi	European Platform for Sport Innovation	Inno4Sports	Belgium
Laura	Carniel	Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform	N/A	France
Carl Arvid	Dahlöf	Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform	N/A	Sweden
Pieter	de Boer	Noord-Brabant Region	STRING	Netherlands
Bernard	de Potter	Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship	N/A	Belgium
Fabrizio	di Marcantonio	European Platform for Sport Innovation	Inno4Sports	Belgium
Rima	Dijkstra	Agency for Science, Innovation and Technology (MITA)	ClusterFY	Lithuania
Alessia	Federiconi	Foundation Cluster Technologies for Living Environments	MedTech4Europe	Italy
David	Fernández Terreros	SPRI	CLUSTERS3	Spain
Simone	Hagenauer	ecoplus: The Businesss Agency of Lower Austria	CLUSTERIX 2.0	Austria
Sina	Hoch	Euregio Rhine-Waal	KISS ME	Germany
Anouschka	Kuijsters	Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship	NMP-REG	Belgium
Angelica	Laterza	Emilia-Romagna Region	INKREASE	Italy
Ariane	Lecerf	Pays de la Loire Regional Council	CLIPPER	France
Alessandra	Lepore	DG REGIO, EC	N/A	Belgium
Mar	Martin	Interreg Europe Joint Secretariat	N/A	France
Jason	Martinez	Interreg Europe Joint Secretariat	N/A	France
Marc	Pattinson	Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform	N/A	France
Kirsten	Petersen	Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform	N/A	Germany
Dirk	Plees	Province of Limburg	MedTech4Europe	Netherlands
Ilaria	Ramaglioni	Interreg Europe Joint Secretariat	N/A	France
Annie	Renders	Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship	CLUSTERIX 2.0	Belgium
Philippe	Rousseau	Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship	N/A	Belgium
Carsten	Schierenbeck	DG GROW, EC	N/A	Belgium
Luc	Schmerber	Inno AG	N/A	Germany
Nicolas	Singer	Interreg Europe Joint Secretariat	N/A	France
Sabina	Sneider	Maribor Development Agency	INTRA	Slovenia
Lutgart	Spaepen	Enterprise Europe Network Flanders	N/A	Belgium

Annalisa	Tessarolo	DG GROW, EC	N/A	Belgium
Emma	Vendrell	ACCIÓ	S34Growth	Spain