

Responsible Industry Leads the Sustainable Development – Industry Clusters Enhancing Circular Economy

Why do we want to organise event like that:

In the European Union, the Circular Economy has become one of the main concepts in the EU industrial development as most of the EU industrial value chains are dependent of the natural resources. Closing to loop in the different stages of industrial value chains is the core while developing resource efficiency. In the circular economy, the use of materials is carefully planned throughout their life cycle and material loss and waste generation are minimised.

In the industrial circular economy on the other hand, the volume of materials is enormous. For the climate change mitigation and increasing raw material demand, it is essential to manage all resources more efficiently throughout their life cycle and value chains. The pumping of resources back into use has to begin in the early stages of the production value chain. The industrial circular economy is accompanied not only by the promotion of environmental issues but also by huge the business opportunities.

Industrial clusters and associated entities are the ideal vehicle to promote and accelerate investments in order to develop innovation capacity and product development in SMEs, which lack the tractor effect of big industries and therefore suffer from an innovation deficit, cross-sector fertilisation and disruptive potential. Through the promotion of interregional collaboration activities, clusters can leverage additional business support opportunities and secure future public & private investment and funding, thus ensuring the medium and long-term impact and viability of the generated ecosystem through innovation support.

The importance of clusters as drivers of favourable business environments for SME innovation, cross-regional and cross-sectoral cooperation, internationalisation and circular economy has been increasingly recognised in EU policies in recent years. The Council conclusions of May 2019 on an EU Industrial Policy Strategy expressed support to European cluster policy initiatives as an important tool for facilitating structural change and the development of emerging industries by promoting regional industrial modernisation, encouraging smart specialisation and strengthening cross-sectoral collaboration.

Clusters are essential for the successful implementation of smart specialisation strategies; out of 121 billion Euro of innovation-related investments in the current programming period, 2.32 billion Euro of investments from the European Structural and Investment Fund are earmarked by Member States for cluster support and business networking. Especially, in the context of the Smart Specialisation Platform for Industrial Modernisation (S3P-Industry), clusters supports EU regions committed to generate a pipeline of industrial investment projects by complementing the interregional cooperation with the active involvement of European Strategic Cluster Partnerships for Smart Specialisation Investments.

Clusters also play a key role in boosting green entrepreneurship to bring circular economy at the level of local ecosystems and cities. Thanks to the Energy Resource Efficiency Knowledge Centre (EREK), cluster organisations, together with 70 national environmental agencies, regional and local associations of green experts, provide tailored support to European SMEs to both save resources and seize the opportunities offered by the transition to a green economy.

The important role of clusters as springboards of SME innovation is reflected in the results of INNOSUP-1 cluster-facilitated projects for new industrial value chains funded under Horizon 2020. INNOSUP-1 projects develop new cross-sectoral industrial value chains across the EU by building upon the innovation potential of SMEs. Many SMEs need this type of support to generate, take up and better capitalise on all forms of knowledge, creativity, craftsmanship and innovation.

Thanks to the EU Cluster Internationalisation Programme for SMEs under COSME, clusters involved in matchmaking event and in the European Strategic Cluster Partnerships Go International also help their SME members find strategic partners in third markets and access global value chains.

In the forthcoming Single Market Programme (2021-2027), the European Commission proposes an ambitious budget scenario for the Joint Cluster Initiatives with the continuation of funding which allows the industry and public authorities to work together for the entire programming period. The COSME part of the Single Market Programme foresees Joint Cluster Initiatives for 10-20 industrial specialisation areas, where industry-focused actions are envisaged to support the growth of groups of SMEs. The industrial specialisation areas of the Joint Cluster Initiatives will be closely related to strategic value chains and priority areas identified/outlined in the forthcoming Industrial Policy Strategy. The cluster organisations will channel the support to SMEs for the uptake of advanced technologies, new business models, low-carbon solutions, skills, entrepreneurships acceleration and internationalisation. Therefore, these initiatives have great potential in supporting the growth of SMEs in specific industrial specialisation areas and contribute to industrial modernisation through their cross-sectoral outreach, including the circular economy.



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