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Danube Transnational Programme
DanuBioValNet

EUROPEAN UNION

BBCEI

The BioBased Cluster Excellence Initiative

July 2017

**Promoting cluster management excellence
in the Danube Region to foster the BioBased industry**

An Initiative under the DanuBioValNet Project,
WP 5.1: Tool Development

Interreg

Danube Transnational Programme
DanuBioValNet

Cluster Development in BioBased industries in Baden-Württemberg, Upper Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Romania,Bulgaria and Montenegro

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Introduction

Many countries have developed cluster policies to support regional competitiveness and innovation. Cluster initiatives provide governments with a strategic opportunity to address social and economic challenges. In this regard, cluster management excellence matters for many reasons: it contributes to greater prosperity in regions, better competitiveness for businesses, and higher returns on investment for investors. Cluster management excellence is one of the most effective approaches to increasing clusters' contribution to economic and social development. In 2009, several initiatives were launched in Europe to drive improvements in cluster management, and they have had clear positive impacts[1].

The BioBased Cluster Excellence Initiative (BBCEI) is based on the previous work of the **European Cluster Excellence Initiative (ECEI)**. This initiative, supported by the European Commission, DG GROWTH, aims to develop and introduce a framework of indicators and an assessment methodology in order to identify cluster management organizations with excellent working practices, which could potentially serve as key partners for policymakers in achieving their goals for regional economic and social development. The initiative has also developed a training concept and training measures to support cluster management organizations in their quest for excellence.

Nowadays, the benchmarking and quality labelling used under the ECEI approach has become a byword for excellence in cluster management, and many countries and regions have embedded this approach in their national/regional funding schemes. To continue the successful work of the ECEI, the European Secretariat for Cluster Analysis (ESCA) was established and tasked with implementing the labelling scheme all over Europe. Today, the ESCA is a network of cluster experts from more than 30 countries that has benchmarked more than 1000 cluster initiatives worldwide.

Cluster Management Excellence in the Danube Region

Cluster Management Excellence is still not fully developed in the Danube region. There is a lack of advanced cluster policies and systematic cluster support schemes in the individual countries of the Danube region, and existing clusters often lack the critical mass of industry. None of the previous EU programmes has addressed this issue properly.

Excellent cluster management is required in order to maximize the benefits that can be achieved by cluster initiatives in their efforts to support industry, research, and education in the region. In parallel, these strategic cluster activities support public authorities in their regional development efforts focusing on improvements in competitiveness.

Cluster initiatives focusing on bio-based industries face significant challenges as they operate within an emerging industry with specific demands that cannot be properly addressed by traditional networking and matchmaking.

The DanuBioValNet synthesis report has identified more than 100 cluster initiatives dealing with elements of bio-based industry. At least 50 of them address the core topics of this sector.

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[1] For example the **NGPExcellence Project – Cluster Excellence in the Nordic Countries, Germany and Poland**. This initiative developed a method for comparing the characteristics of clusters and their management activities against relevant peers (from the same technology area or industrial sector and from the same country or region). From these comparisons (benchmarking) with peers, recommendations for improvements are derived which help the cluster management organizations to improve their activities. More than 100 cluster initiatives participated in the NGPExcellence Project.

The BioBased Cluster Excellence Initiative for the Danube Region – BBCEI

The idea of the BBCEI is to support bio-based cluster organizations in improving cluster management excellence in the Danube Region in order to better address the upcoming challenges in the field of bio-based industry within and beyond the DanuBioValNet project. This can be achieved by mutual benchmarking and Bronze Labelling of cluster organizations according to the European Cluster Excellence Initiative approach (www.cluster-analysis.org).

The initiative has two key objectives:
- To support cluster managers in their constant effort for excellence and professionalization, based on the European Cluster Excellence Initiative approach;
- To increase the European visibility of cluster initiatives from the Danube region in the bio-based industry sector.

The benefits are:
- New insights and findings that can promote cluster management excellence and enhance the quality of clusters and services for businesses;
- Cluster management organizations will learn from each other when assessing and analyzing

results from the benchmarking and labelling processes – not only from their peers in the region, but also from good practice used by other cluster management organizations in their particular industry sector;
- Increased international visibility due to the widely recognized ECEI Bronze Label, also opening up a pathway to sophisticated EU cluster development programmes and funding, such as the European Strategic Cluster Partnership under the COSME programme.

Policymakers will receive more information and gain better access to information about bio-based industry-related cluster development in their region. They will also receive a broad range of inputs and advice for drawing comparisons with other regions and their strategies for development.

BBCEI is a joint undertaking of the DanuBioValNet partners (for more information see www.interreg-danube.eu/danubiovalnet) and is coordinated by ClusterAgentur BW in close cooperation with the ESCA.

Who is eligible?

Cluster organizations from the DanuBioValNet sectoral scope are eligible if:
- they have been listed in the DanuBioValNet synthesis report;
- they have not yet been benchmarked or ECEI labelled, or
- they no longer have a valid Bronze Label;
- they have been nominated by one of the DanuBioValNet partners[2].

Participation of selected cluster initiatives is free of charge. Related costs will be covered by the DanuBioValNet project. It is only possible

to nominate candidates via the DanuBioValNet partners (a full list of the partners is given at www.interreg-danube.eu/danubiovalnet).

[2] See eligible partner regions: www.interreg-danube.eu/danubiovalnet

The BBCEI Initiative Schedule for 2017

by 15 August   The DanuBioValNet partners nominate up to five cluster initiatives listed in the DanuBioValNet synthesis report or meeting the other eligibility conditions.

by 30 August   Final approval of all candidates by the DanuBioValNet Steering Committee.

by 15 October   All benchmarking interviews are conducted.
The benchmarking interviews are conducted by the partners during a joint benchmarking exercise beginning in October (place and date to be decided).

by 15 November   Benchmarking reports are completed and Bronze Labels are awarded to cluster organizations. Eventually, a joint event for sharing experience among participants can be organized (to be decided).

BBCEI Secretariat

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ANNEX 1

The European Cluster Excellence Initiative (ECEI)

This initiative, supported by the European Commission, DG GROWTH, aims to develop and introduce a framework of indicators and an assessment methodology in order to identify cluster management organizations with excellent working practices, which could potentially serve as key partners for policymakers in achieving their goals for regional economic and social development. This initiative also developed a training concept and training measures to support cluster management organizations in their quest for excellence.

Since 2010, more than 950 cluster management organizations from 35 countries worldwide have been awarded the BRONZE Label (introduced in 2011), 75 have received the SILVER Label (introduced in 2014), and 80 have received the GOLD Label (introduced in 2012). This approach to cluster management excellence – including the labelling scheme – represents an internationally accepted standard for professionalization in cluster management.

www.cluster-analysis.org