

NENA – Network Enterprise Alps

Enhancing sustainable development, competitiveness and innovation through SME and cluster co-operation

1. Introduction

The Alps are a strong economic area in Europe covering a number of enterprises and clusters with high innovation potential and top performance regarding sustainable development. At the moment, sustainable development is still focussing too much on the environmental sector. Improving all three aspects – economic, social and ecological – of sustainable development in the Alps is highly depending on a better involvement of Alpine core economic sectors. The SMEs are those who create and save jobs in the Alps, and competitiveness of the Alpine SMEs in a tougher worldwide market finally is a matter of innovation!

The little use of the existing innovation potentials is often caused by lacking manpower, networking and market-orientation and by lacking strategies and ideas how to mobilise co-operation synergies within and between the different economic sectors. This weakens the competitiveness of enterprises, clusters and the Alpine economy as a whole compared to other European regions.

2. Project aims

NENA intends to act on the above problems, to boost selected core economies and to build an Alpine-wide network of and for SMEs. By strengthening clusters and co-operations between urban and rural areas NENA wants to help to attenuate the increasing polarisation between strong urban areas in the valley floors and less favoured and declining areas. NENA intends to build an Alpine-wide network of SMEs. The exchange of know-how, the initiation of co-operations, the offer of training as well as image enhancing measures for SMEs are the tasks of this network. NENA will contribute to a better use of existing co-operation potentials by mobilising synergies within and between the different economic sectors.

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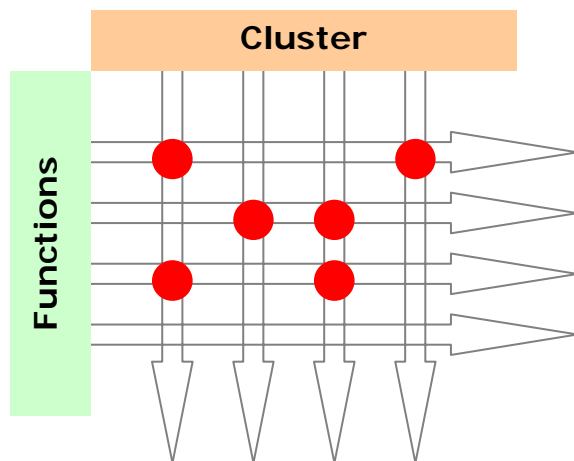
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3. Main activities and expected results

3.1 Activities

To make NENA a successful project, the partners are convinced that they have to focus on core fields. Issues that are of paramount interest for the participating partners, SMEs and clusters will be addressed simultaneously with the development of the network. Hereby NENA is concentrating on two core fields:



(1) 'Renewable Resources' with the clusters:

- a.) 'Value added chain of wood'
- b.) 'Energy from renewable resources'
- c.) 'Saving energy – passive house'

(2) Crossing Functions 'Innovation and Technology':

- d.) Innovation management
- e.) Education and training
- f.) Process optimisation and certification
- g.) Interface management.

a) Value added chain wood

Ecological relevance: Wood is not only an important renewable resource. Wood also stands for cultural landscape, nature protection and for high importance with regard to climate issues. The best way to protect forests is to use them in a sustainable way.

Economic relevance: The value added chain of wood includes many processing steps and a high number of businesses in the Alpine area.

Social relevance: The value added chain wood is of great importance in the area of employment. The numerous small and medium sized enterprises have proven their stability in the past decades. The use of regional wood enhances the identification of the constructors and owners with their natural environment. They become conscious of being socio-economical actors in their region.

b) Production of energy from renewable resources

More and more businesses are concentrating on renewable resources and the different technologies connected. It is a field that, because of the price erosion of renewable resources on the one hand and the wish to fulfil ecological goals on the other hand, constitutes a strong mainspring developing a cluster. But this relatively young cluster still is a 'lone fighter'. The distribution of information,

the promotion of co-operations and training measures are important factors for advancement. The cluster is of high ecological relevance but also increasingly relevant for employment.

c) Energy saving – Passive House

Energy efficiency is an environmental must. At the moment an increasing number of businesses are getting involved in energy efficiency, constructions and products and are advancing innovations. The passive house is a concrete object. The reason why it is so special is because so many occupations are connected to it: planning, trading, construction physiology, technology (heating, air condition, measurement and control, etc.). The implementation of suchlike objects constitutes an optimal field for co-operation between the participating businesses. One of the challenges is the improvement of interfaces between the businesses. The proportion of dwellings in the passive house standard is quite low (e.g. only 1% in Austria). Therefore this product has a high growth potential.

d) Innovation management

SMEs generally have difficulties to access the field of research and development. The concept of 'Innovation Assistants' could be a way to improve the situation: SMEs or even clusters are supported temporarily by young academics with a marginal financial burden.

e) Education and training

Education and training are crucial for implementing innovation. In the framework of NENA, the participants will design training curricula and offer training measures to the SME's of the arising network. The training programs apply to issues like construction, process optimisation, relaying of know-how, project and innovation management, sustainable development, energy efficiency and also the development of social competence.

f) Process optimisation and certification

This cross section function is of utmost importance because technological advancement and the optimisation in production operations are indispensable competition criteria. NENA will initiate co-operation projects and include interested businesses in the improvement of operations.

g) Interface management

One of the largest economic potentials probably is the improvement of interfaces between businesses, between SME's of value added chains, between clusters. As a result of increasing specialisation, the requirements regarding the links between the highly specialised units are increasing, too. Exchange of know-how, frameworks for co-operations, the use of ICT and the detailed management of interfaces become crucial issues for co-operation and innovation success. This is also true for the links between economical, social and ecological aspects of sustainable development.

In NENA, specific cases will be looked at and methods of resolutions will be worked out in transnational co-operations.

3.2 Work plan

The project will start with an analysis of potentials, synergies and feasibility of co-operations between Alpine clusters and enterprises (WP5). Hereby, the team will already put the focus on the two core fields selected.

In parallel, a communication concept will be elaborated and specific activities started (WP4).

After having jointly detailed and prepared the trans-national co-operation activities (WP6) pilot projects will be carried out in the partners' regions (WP7). The experiences gained in the regional projects will be exchanged again on transnational level (again WP6). Parallel to WP6 and 7 the NENA-team will start to build up network structures (WP9) and to prepare marketing activities (WP8).

3.3 Expected results:

The 'Network Enterprise Alps' offers the involved enterprises and clusters an intensive exchange of knowledge and experience, new co-operations and business relations as well as access to new regions and markets. The network will help to strengthen selected Alpine core economies by mobilising existing synergy and innovation potentials. Expected outcomes and products at the end of the project:

- WP5: Analysis of potentials, synergies and feasibility of innovation and co-operations between Alpine clusters and enterprises
- WP6: Co-operation activities and projects are prepared in common by the partners. Project implementation standards and guidelines are elaborated. First implementation experiences are exchanged in workshops including the partners and the involved SMEs and clusters. The workshop results are documented by the NENA-team. Further co-operation activities are planned.
- WP7: In work package 7, pilot examples will be developed and implemented on regional level. These examples are based on the joint preparation and exchange activities in work package 6. Thus it is desirable for the participating regions to carry out similar or complementary activities. The following pilot activities will be implemented either individually or in parallel by the involved partners:
 - a) Establishing the "Innovation Assistant";
 - b) Mobility and training of young professionals;
 - c) Innovation Contest „Timber Construction“;
 - d) Master Course "Timber Construction";
 - e) Native Resources Certificate;
 - f) Process optimisation;
 - g) Raising energy efficiency in the building sector;
 - h) Study Program Energy Efficiency.

- WP8: Marketing activities are prepared and partly carried out
- WP9: A network structure including an international co-ordination unit and national network-units is established. There are network members from all Alpine countries, from urban as well as from peripheral regions. The network partners have a common basis for permanent know-how exchange and for ongoing project co-operation. Some network services and activities including newsletter, workshops, excursions, qualification and education measures have been carried out and are scheduled for the future.

A summary report of knowledge gained in the project as a result of monitoring and assessment of network activities is disseminated.

The results and experiences are transferred between the network, political decision makers and research institutions in order to influence political decisions as well as programming and research activities.

4. Time schedule

| Work packages | 05 | 2006 | | | | 2007 | | | | 08 |
|--|----|------|----|----|----|------|----|----|----|----|
| | Q4 | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | Q1 |
| WP1 Project preparation | | | | | | | | | | |
| WP2 Transnational project management | | | | | | | | | | |
| WP3 Regional project management | | | | | | | | | | |
| WP4 Information and publicity | | | | | | | | | | |
| WP5 Analysis of innovation potentials | | | | | | | | | | |
| WP6 Developing and carrying out trans-national co-operation activities | | | | | | | | | | |
| WP7 Developing and carrying out regional pilot projects | | | | | | | | | | |
| WP8 Developing marketing strategies | | | | | | | | | | |
| WP9 Establishing an alpine-wide network | | | | | | | | | | |

5. The NENA partners

NENA includes partners from all 7 Alpine countries, different sectors and governance levels. The wide partnership consists of umbrella and governmental organisations like Development Association Nature and Cultural Heritage Vorarlberg, Autonome Provinz Bozen, Regione Piemonte, Soča Valley Development Center, Tiroler Zukunftsstiftung, Innovation Transfer Zentralschweiz and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Lyon. The team also includes research partners like Fachhochschule Rosenheim and Energieagentur Judenburg-Knittelfeld-Murau. All these partners are network organisations with SME`s behind.

The lead partner represents members of 52 communities and a number of cluster organisations such as 'Work Room Bregenzerwald' with 80 SME`s, 'Wood Construction Art', an association of 60 SME`s, 'Architect Institute Vorarlberg',

‘Vorarlberg Energy Institute’, the ‘Forest Owners Association’ and the ‘Consortium of Renewable Energy’ made up of 25 SME’s.

CIPRA International, the alpine-wide NGO focussing on the strengthening of sustainable development in the Alps will ensure the exchange between the economic sector and more than 150 NGO’s in the Alps.

Lead Partner (LP)

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The **NENA homepage** will be available soon.