

„The SHE Factor: Gender & Diversity to increase cluster competitiveness“: impressions from a challenging workshop dedicated to the theme, (Clusters in Europe II Conference, Budapest, April 2013).

It seems the year 2012 switched on the spotlights on a new theme in the cluster development: the gender potential to be exploited through clusters. Every big international cluster conference has it (formally or informally) on its agenda (European Cluster Conference in Vienna – with the set up of ClusterWene (Cluster Women European Network), the TCI Conference in Bilbao and the most recent one, Clusters in Europe III in Budapest, 11-12 April 2013). It takes visionary thinking and courage for the organizers to plan such a workshop in direct competition with others, also on cluster relevant issues, but it is rewarding at the end of the day to be able to say it made a difference. With a panel showcasing gender and cultural diversity in perfect balance (from North to South and East to West EU), the workshop generated intensive discussions following the key-note presentation of Petra Püchner, Managing Director of Steinbeis-Europa-Zentrum.

The panelists and the audience brought their own views (sometimes different, but sometimes strikingly similar) on questions like: How is the gender issue perceived within the cluster (at management and company level)? Is the SHE Factor acknowledged as a trigger for innovation? What do statistics say on gender representation in the cluster management, board of advisors, or within cluster member organisations? Are there studies/programmes/strategies developed? If yes (the examples from Norway and Sweden), how could these be transferred?

The output of the workshop can be summarized as follows:

Gender in an innovation-system like clusters is not an issue of equal participation or anti-discrimination. The driving force for including gender and diversity as a strategic topic is to explore un-used resources for innovation, new products and services, new business models and still un-exploited market potential. This has been made clear by the Nordic Countries and their success stories and was the underlying topic of the key note.

Statistics were an entry point to the discussion. „If you don't have the **numbers**, you don't have the awareness“ said Petra Püchner. But the numbers are still missing. They can be helpful in triggering a change in attitudes, together with **success stories** (case studies). These do exist: in some parts of Europe like the Baltic Sea Region they are available, but through **targeted communication** they can have a leveraging effect in other meta-regions, reaching not only the cluster level, but also the policy level - to enable change.

The gender theme is not only about encouraging women to gain more **visibility** (for example by increasing their participation at the competition for the European Cluster Manager of the Year) – and reach (through quotas?) **positions** enabling them to unfold their potential – it is much more about a healthy **gender-mix** at all levels (company, cluster, policy), whereas the

company level is decisive for inducing innovation. The gender-mix is important also in the various mentoring programmes: not only from women-to-women, but also from men-to-women (enabling women to learn from role models sharing their experiences).

As the cluster-machinery is fueled by ingredients like entrepreneurship, research, cooperation, internationalisation, with the goal to generate saleable innovation and increase competitiveness, why shouldn't gender be part of the cocktail? A couple of years ago, the SME internationalisation was still a white space in the strategies of many clusters; today, after intensive efforts to create awareness for its potential, joint international strategies through partnerships are implemented. So how about putting the gender theme on the cluster strategy? „This is what our clusters do in Norway“, answers Eivind Petershagen from Innovation Norway.

All participants agreed with the answer to a challenging question „How would we like to see this topic being discussed in 5-10 years' time? “: Not at all. It shouldn't be discussed anymore, because the cluster development would show by then a balanced evolution of gender and diversity, thus fully exploiting the innovation potential of our valuable human resources.

Christoph Beer, ICT Bern Cluster Manager, concluded: “Let's not wait for the numbers, we need to take action”. So let's start now!

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http://clustersineurope.magzrt.hu/sites/default/files/CEC_agenda.pdf

Join the ClusterWomenEuropeanNetwork (ClusterWene as LinkedIn Group or as community on clustercollaboration.eu).