MED Greenhouses
"Green Growth through the capitalization of innovative Greenhouses"

Agricultural Transnational Innovative Cluster (ATI) – Cluster
(Operation model)

Project Details:

Programme: **Interreg MED 2014-2020**

Priority Axis: **1. Promoting Mediterranean innovation capacities to develop smart and sustainable growth**

Objective: **1.1. To increase transnational activity of innovative clusters and networks of key sectors of the MED area**

Project Title: **Green Growth through the capitalization of innovative Greenhouses**

Project Acronym: **MED Greenhouses**

Reference No: **3082**

Lead Partner: **University of Thessaly**

Total Budget: **1,171,400 €**

Time Frame: **01/02/2018 - 31.12.2019**

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1. The Agricultural Transnational Innovative (ATI) Cluster (operation model)

This document presents the proposed operation model of the ATI-Cluster, as this was agreed by the partners of the MED Greenhouses project and after taking into consideration their input and a number of consultations that took place between them, during the implementation of the project.

1.1 Vision – Mission - Objectives

ATI Cluster's Vision

To operate as a bridge between researchers, enterprises, farmers and policy makers in order to improve the environmental, economic and social conditions of the rural areas across Mediterranean region.

ATI Cluster's Mission

ATI Cluster's main mission is to stimulate and promote sustainable production techniques by facilitating the dissemination and the transferring of the information and innovative technologies among key actors of the agriculture/greenhouse sector.

Specific Objectives
- Increase the rate of success and effectiveness of the projects implemented by its members.
- Enhance competitiveness within local and international market, promoting environmentally friendly and cutting-edge technologies.
- Enhance the quality and increase the production agricultural products with minimum water and energy sources.
- Evaluate & deploy new agricultural techniques.
- Create & Encourage synergy between members and key actors of the sector.
- Stimulate, assist & promote eco-innovation, identifying financial mechanism and financial opportunities including potential investors.
- Develop & boost the economic development of innovative companies.
- Produce Economy of Scale (costs decrease when company size increases) and Network Effect (the value of a product or service increases when it is used more)
- Facilitate the introduction of innovative technologies in the greenhouse sector and knowledge transfer

1.2 Structure & Governance scheme

ATI Cluster's organisational chart should be flexible, allowing its members to take a leading part in actions and services that can be offered along with their specialised knowledge and experiences. Having taken under consideration the vision, the role,

the main challenges that will jeopardise its viability, as well as the duties of the members of the Cluster, the following structure is proposed:
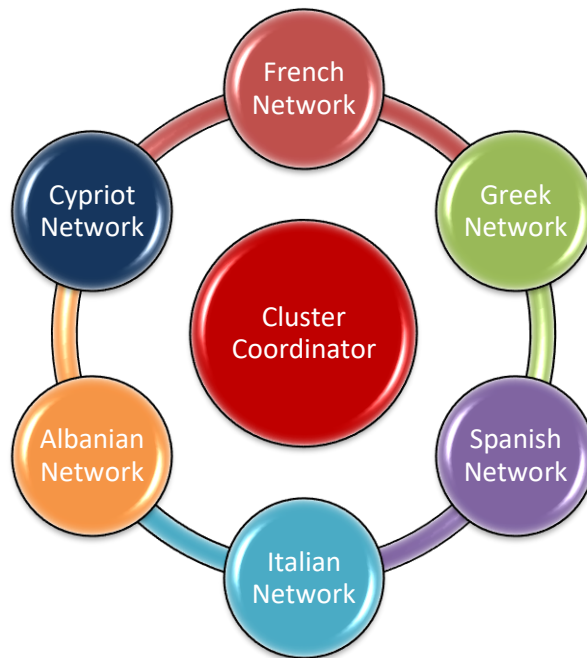

Figure 1 – ATI-Cluster's networks

The Cluster Coordinator

The Coordinator will be responsible for the overall management of the Cluster and coordination of the networks. The Cluster Coordinator could be the Project Coordinator of the MED Greenhouses project or a representative from one of the partners.

Main duties:

✓ Prioritisation of project objectives throughout the operation of ATI Cluster,

✓ Engage and support the National Networks for their effective collaboration,

✓ Represent ATI Cluster in national and international key meetings,

✓ Monitor and assess the overall performance and sustainability of ATI Cluster,

✓ Monitoring and facilitating information and general communication within ATI cluster, anticipating and dealing with potential risks, recognising and evaluating available opportunities and ensuring effective communication between the Management Team (Networks' managers) and the Working Groups (advisors & members) of the National Networks.

✓ Organisation of transnational meetings between National Networks, one every 6 months.

✓ Promote the launch of transitional projects.

  ✓ Expand the ATI-Cluster in other EU countries, persuading key actors of the sector and trigger them to establish New National networks.

National Networks

ATI Cluster will consist of 6 National Countries, the partners' countries of the MED Greenhouses project.

Each National Network is recommended to be represented by 3 persons (in the early stages of cluster's operation): One Network Manager, and 2 advisors. These could be representatives/staff of the project partners.
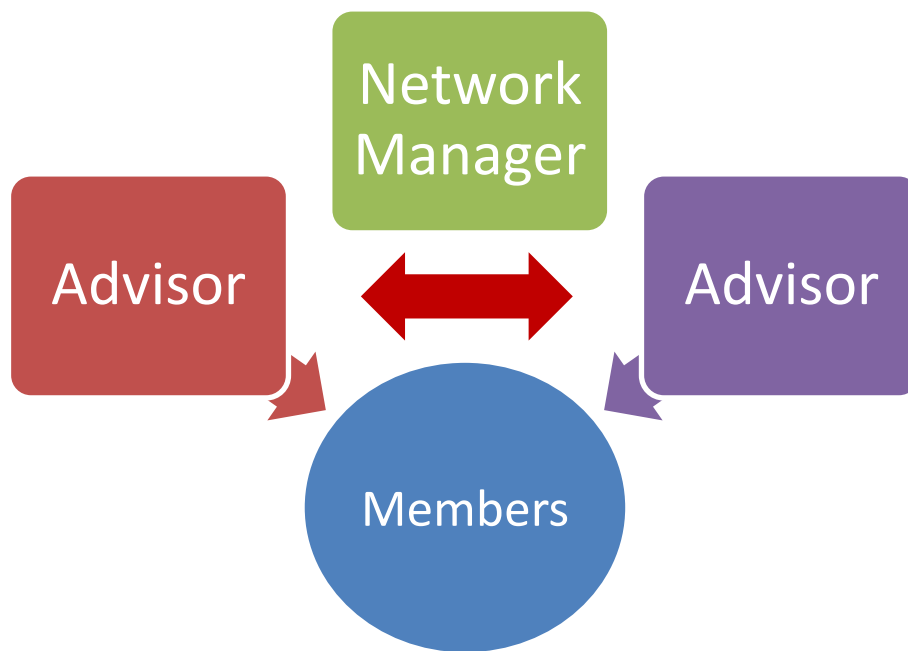
Figure 2 – National Network Structure

Main duties of the Network Manager:
  ✓ Support the objectives of ATI cluster at both national and international level
  ✓ Identify financing schemes and opportunities
  ✓ Promote international tactics and transferring know-how at a local level
  ✓ Engage stakeholders – register members
  ✓ Communicate with the other network managers
  ✓ Develop information campaigns
  ✓ Organise capacity building seminars/webinars
  ✓ Organise working groups with members
  ✓ Promote synergies and develop joint projects
  ✓ Transfer knowledge to members

   ✓ Support the Coordinator in the evaluation and quality control of cluster actions through the collection and provision of quantitative and qualitative objectives)

<u>Main duties of the Advisors:</u>
   ✓ Support Networks' Managers with the offered activities/services,
   ✓ Communicate and advice/inform members for technical and financial issues,
   ✓ Register new members following the marketing/communication strategy of the Cluster,
   ✓ Assess the profile of the members (offered services/products & their needs),
   ✓ Search for grants for Cluster's sustainability,
   ✓ Support the manager in the organisation of working groups with
   ✓ Communicate with the advisors of the other networks, identifying possible collaboration & synergies between members of the networks.

1.3 Proposed Legal Framework

Due to the limited available time, the ATI Cluster will operate without having any legal form, at least for the first 3years of its operation. After this period, the form of a Non-governmental organization will be assessed.

1.4 Proposed support services / main activities offered to members

<u>1. SMEs & Farmers missions to end-users of the agriculture/greenhouse sector</u>
The personal contact and the presentation-promotion of the offered products/ services of farmers and SMEs to end-users / beneficiaries of agriculture sector in individual meetings are an important step for creating collaborations. These missions can include, among others, B2B meetings between selected members of the cluster and agricultural industries such as agro-industry and fertilizer industries to present, promote and match the compatible technologies / services offered by the entire ATI - cluster formation with potential needs of the agricultural sector. Indicative fields of the sector could be:
   ✓ Greenhouse Constructions- Installations
   ✓ Food technology
   ✓ Advanced Packaging
   ✓ Digital agribusinesses
   ✓ Organic foods
   ✓ Agro-tourism
   ✓ Patent Applications (copyright protection support)

<u>2. Networking & Matchmaking</u>

The Cluster coordinator and the Networks' managers, with the support of their advisors, will analyze the activities of the members of the cluster, identify business opportunities and propose transnational synergies - collaborations between the members of each country, taking into account the offered services/products. They will also seek for networking and matchmaking with actors outside the Cluster.

3. Provision of Pitching & Coaching/mentoring services

The visibility of cluster members' activities and their guidance for achieving their goals should be Cluster's priority. The relevant services should identify new business opportunities, their representation in exhibitions and their guidance for the valorization of technological innovations, new business models and their differentiation in the market.

4. Organization of Info days & capacity building seminars

Through the e-learning platform (Del. 3.2.2) and based on produced training material (Del. 3.2.1) as well studies related to financial channels (Del. 3.1.3) and innovative greenhouse technologies (Del. 3.1.1) the Networks can organize capacity building seminars/webinars and info-days informing the members about innovative greenhouse technologies and financing schemes at regular basis (e.g. every 4 months).

5. Other offered services to members:
- ✓ Interactive Mediterranean framework for the creation of innovative projects
- ✓ Sharing success stories from different actors
- ✓ Advice and technical suggestions
- ✓ Provide a database of Mediterranean actors
- ✓ Offer/propose innovative tools for agricultural management,
- ✓ Promotions of members' activities and products
- ✓ Financial advices and suggestions of financial mechanism
- ✓ Chance to share opinion with policy makers – organization of consultations

1.5 Proposed communication/marketing approach in order to register new members and promote synergies/collaborations

The governance scheme should define the business and communication strategy in line with the cluster's objectives in order to increase the number of the members and attract more investors.

A marketing plan should be elaborated identifying potential market segments, customers and new members and define available promotion approaches and channels which could contribute to product/services valorization.

Additionally, the information, communication, awareness raising and dissemination activities will be based on a communication plan. This plan will be the cornerstone of all communication related activities and it will be internally updated at regular basis by the communication officer who will be a member from the management team of the Cluster. Milestones of the Joint Communication Plan are the following:

I.   Establishment of the Cluster's identity (Logo, presentation template etc.)
II.   Define the Cluster's communication approach towards its members and related key stakeholders/players.
III.   Establish the joint communication channels and means
IV.   Define and describe relevant communication material

Key questions that need to be addressed will include:
- Who are the cluster stakeholders?
- Why is it important to communicate with the cluster stakeholders?
- What needs to be communicated to the cluster stakeholders?
- When should this communication take place?
- What communication mechanisms should be employed?
- What are the key challenges for effective communication?
- How can these challenges be overcome?

Potential members:
The main stakeholder groups/potential members for knowledge-intensive ATI clusters should be **farmers** and **SMEs** of the sector.
However, other Key stakeholders can be large companies (etc. greenhouse manufacturers, agro-food companies), Research institutes, national and regional policy makers, development agencies, agricultural associations, Technology Transfer Offices, incubators, NGOs and other supporting structures.
ATI Cluster should present accurate, meaningful and actionable information to a highly diversified audience. It is therefore important to acknowledge the difference between various stakeholder groups and tailor communication to the needs of particular group(s).

Online Market place:
An **online-platform** (market place), facilitating an effective communication and the creation of synergies and collaborations at transnational level should be created. This platform will form the basis for all communication within the cluster and would be the agreed basis for information sharing and dissemination. Failure to communicate effectively leads to delays in collaborative action, reduces the quality of shared information and thus hinders the development of the cluster.

Other Communication aspects to be taken into consideration:

The Communication with stakeholders and the members of the Cluster should be occurred on a regular basis. Communication will be elaborated taking into account that members require daily attention and others that may only need passive communication every few months. Web-enabled solutions allow for a constant flow of up-to-date information to a wide variety of stakeholders (e.g., customized cluster web pages depending on a stakeholder group).

- Communication routines will be developed with different methods and will be used to communicate with different stakeholders. A selection of specific communication mechanisms includes newsletters, Annual Reports, emails to stakeholders, interactive web portals; formal and informal dialogue (e.g., meetings) will be elaborated.

- Communication with cluster stakeholders should be based on a clearly defined communication plan and follows agreed timeline.

- Each Network should have a communication officer (This role can be given to one of the advisors)

- The development of a common brand (including the visual identity of the cluster) should be developed, presenting the cluster at national and international conferences and exhibitions, preparing press releases and giving interviews.

- Media events and press releases will be used for communicating with the media and the outside world. Media events will be combined with network workshops or other cluster events.

For the early years of its operation, the ATI-Cluster can make use of the communication plan elaborated in the context of the MED Greenhouses project.

1.6 Sustainability Factors

1. Grants - Funding Schemes

The funding of the ATI Cluster is one of the main factors for its sustainability. The budget of the Cluster should be exclusively dedicated to the governance, its operational activities and the associated costs in terms of salaries and non-staff costs. Once the ATI - Cluster has a dedicated team to support the member's activities (Cluster Coordinator, Networks Team etc.), sources of funding are required for its operation. These resources could be:

- Venture Capital
- Membership fees
- Business Angels
- Funds from banks
- Public funding (including operational programs)
- European Funding

- Fee-based services (services offered to cluster members or outside)
- Private sources of funding as in-kind (non-cash) contributions (e.g. seconded staff from members)

2. Promotional activities

The governance team shall define the business and communication strategy in line with the cluster objectives in order to increase the number of the members involved and attract more investors contributing to the funding of its activities and its operation.

3. Evaluation of performance indicators

The assessment of the performance of the ATI Cluster should be based on a review of defined quantitative and qualitative indicators addressing categories such as:

- Formalization of economic, technological & scientific objectives
- Evolution of the cluster perimeter (critical mass)
- Number & quality of the actors involved
- Business-research-training synergies
- Qualities of governance
- International visibility & international projects
- Territorial anchorage
- Presence of funders
- Human Resources&Training

4. Follow-Up activities

The partners of the MED Greenhouses project should proceed with the elaboration of special agreements (this is planned to be undertaken during project implementation) aiming at ensuring the continuation of their cooperation after the project's end as well as their interaction at transnational level within the ATI Cluster. These activities should focus on the Eco-innovation and Greenhouses/agriculture sector, setting specific set of actions and framework that will foster the continuation of its successful operation. The Partners of the project should establish special written agreements, in order to ensure their cooperation at transnational level. Among others, the Agreement should include the responsibilities and the privileges of Cluster's members and the terms of the membership including details about member's fee, participation in cluster's regular meetings, conferences, training seminars etc.

5. Links with other Existing Clusters & Network of the agricultural sector

In order to guarantee the sustainability of the cluster it is important to link it to existing clusters. So the National Networks should identified any existing Cluster and create synergies and collaboration with them.

6. Number of members & Fees for membership in order to maintain the cluster activities

One of the main sustainability factors of every Cluster is the number of the registered members that need to be reached. A critical mass for the early years of its operation should be **30 members** per Network (National level). Once the cluster maintains the critical mass of the satisfied members for a couple of years (or increase the number of them), will be able to request a specific membership fee for the provision of tailored services to the members.

1.7 Performance indicators

The assessment of the performance of the ATI Cluster should be based on a review of defined performance (quantitative and qualitative) indicators such as:

- Total number of members registered in the Networks/cluster
- Total number of projects undertaken by ATI - cluster
- Number of collaborative projects undertaken by ATI-cluster
- Number of companies involved in projects
- Presence of investors
- Formalization of economic, technological and scientific objectives
- Number of jobs created
- Number of companies involved in collaborative projects
- Number of research-technology bodies working in cluster projects
- Number of new members per 6 months
- Number of questions asked in the chat zone
- Frequency of the use of the databases
- Participation in cluster meetings & working groups
- Annual satisfaction survey to members