

Newsletter

Dear reader,

I proudly present our first newsletter on the inspiring North Sea Supply Connect project!

This newsletter, filled with loads of information on what our project is all about, follows the first joint partner meeting and joint Political Advisory Group meeting with our twin project Baltic Supply. Perfect timing for a debutante, as we just took a huge step forward together during those meetings in Brussels in March, not in the least because our high level representatives showed their full support and enthusiasm in the Political Advisory Board.

Please read on! This newsletter explains content and objectives of our project, which is basically about trying to make it easier for small companies to get contracts abroad. And in this case abroad means the North Sea and Baltic Sea regions. In fact, we build upon the historic Hanseatic League which provided prosperity in the Baltic and North Sea area centuries ago.

During that time trade and networking took their time by ship and horse, over-seas and over land. Now we are using EU Interreg funding from two separate EU Interreg regions to establish a virtual Business Development Platform on the internet, with roots in the off-line and 'real life' services of the partners in our project.

And what is in it for you? Content, contacts and, hopefully in the end, contracts! We will try to achieve an inspiring network of contacts, linking opportunities, partner search, training facilities, and more - all based on mostly existing offerings: we try to link smart! For example you can read about the Enterprise Europe Network further on in the newsletter.

Our work is under construction and we learn a lot during the process. But I am already proud when I think forward to the second newsletter: I am confident we will then to present you a pilot version of our virtual platform!

Kind regards (and be sure to read on!)

Caroline Couperus
project manager NSSC

**North Sea
Supply Connect**

Transnational SME Supply Clusters along the North East Corridor

Featuring

- Ten countries represented at first Political Advisory Group Meeting
- High attention for cooperating projects at Brussels reception
- Successful seminar Renewable energy and offshore wind energy
- Business Development Platform rooted in off-line services



*Caroline Couperus
Lead Partner Province of
Groningen, The Netherlands*



North Sea Supply Connect and Baltic Supply: **All about improving the competitive advantage of regional SME's**

Overview of project

North Sea Supply Connect and Baltic Supply are European funded projects, which are aiming at creating better business opportunities for the many Small and Medium Sized businesses (SME) located in the North Sea and Baltic Sea regions. The projects are focusing on European supply markets and are looking to set up supporting structures for SMEs in order to increase access to inter-regional supply markets in these regions.

Key objectives

- To support SMEs in accessing supply chains across the North Sea and Baltic Sea region
- To develop a business development platform, which will include training & innovation programmes, electronic SME innovation partnership exchanges, company register / search facility and more
- To remove barriers to trade, creating new markets and new opportunities for trans-national trade and relationships
- To establish three Supply Clusters for Energy, Food & Health, and the Maritime sectors

Key benefits for SMEs

- To support business growth alongside developing innovation based relationships
- To help SMEs identify opportunities to access tendering opportunities

- To improve SMEs capacity to trade within the North Sea and Baltic Sea region

Key benefits for OEMs

- To identify new innovative products & services
- To support business growth and expansion
- To identify opportunities to collaborate with innovative SMEs to develop new products

To accomplish the challenge

The projects are comprised of partners that work with businesses every day: regional development agencies, chambers of commerce and intermediary organizations that know about the challenges that our regional economies face. Coupled with the expertise from knowledge institutions and policymakers within the regions, the projects will successfully deliver the aforementioned benefits to SME's. The project partners are identifying businesses across the entire region, understanding not only their specific needs, but also their areas of expertise and competences, and with this knowledge aim to match the buyers with the suppliers and provide businesses with the right tools for tendering and self-assessment.

Both projects are also setting up virtual SME supply clusters that will help businesses navigate the procurement processes of larger businesses. You can find out more about our project at www.northseasupplyconnect.eu.



The Political Advisory Group members



Eva Kjer Hansen from Denmark emphasizes the need to reduce bureaucracy



Raul Allikivi from Estonia: sustainability is the key factor'

North Sea Supply Connect

Ten countries represented at first Political Advisory Group in Brussels

The first Political Advisory Group (PAG) meeting, hosted at the South Denmark European office in Brussels, was very well attended by the project partnership and EU services. There was a lively debate with substantial exchange of experience, mutual invitations to initiatives and meetings later in the year 2011. The scene was set for a discussion of the future course of the Business Development Platform (BDP) for the Baltic Supply and the North Sea Supply Connect projects.

It was pointed out that for the first time, two projects across two EU-funded program regions are as closely connected as in this case. In this context reference was made to the "Hanseatic League" which for centuries provided prosperity in the Baltic and North Sea area. Today these two projects are focussing on three economic clusters that form the economic basis for many regions in Europe; at the same time the cooperation inspired by hanseatic traditions is continued within the context of EU-Interreg funding.

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises are the focus and future

Eva Kjer Hansen, Member of the Danish Parliament underlined that partners should "concentrate on what they are good at." She called for reduced bureaucracy to make the market mechanisms more efficient and at the same time emphasized the need for contact and reliability in order to build trust between actors.

Rob Engelsman, Chair of the meeting from Northern Netherlands, pointed out that 95 % of Northern Netherlands companies are SMEs. Local and regional

programmes have been set up to facilitate innovation and business development. Cluster policy needs the research edge and hence we work with the triple helix of company's, government and research institutions. Energy, Water technology, Sensor technology, Agribusiness and healthy ageing are the five clusters the Northern Netherlands are concentrating on. Therefore they support the proposal of Business Development Platform and will offer their own existing services to it.

Rob Engelsman motivated the advisory board to support and promote these projects and the many practices that are used in the regions.

Jean de Bethune, Chair of Province Council West Flanders-Belgium, stressed that SMEs need assistance. Their often limited capacity must be taken into account; 'we must be realistic on what SMEs can achieve' was the message.

Raul Allikivi, Ministry of Economic Affairs Estonia, pointed out the similarities between the Europe2020 and the aims of the BS/NSSC projects. The average founding time of a company is very telling – sustainability is the key and of course to reduce bureaucracy.

Thomas Palmgren, Member of the EESC for Finland, talked about FINEnterprise, the Finland state-financed portal ensuring effective use of business development resources in Finland by pooling action, facilitating access to public procurement and recognising innovation potential. EU programs require large capacities, which is often not available for SMEs. He finished by stressing that quality should be the primary priority, not price.



Convenor Buchanan much appreciated the likemindedness that he encountered across the table

Projects' contribution to the Small Business Act

Simeon Chenev, DG ENTERPRISE, presented the status of the Small Business Act (SBA) three years after its installation in 2008. The principle "think small first" in policy-making has resulted in a reduction of company set-up time from 12 to 7 days. 100.000 SMEs have benefited from CIP financial instruments - each loan generating an average of 1.2 jobs. The impact assessment will be continued and further activities are the opening of SME centres in India and China.

Sławomir Halbryt, Member of several Management Associations in Poland, informed that the 10 principles of the SBA have been implemented in the Pomeranian region and that the Pomeranian energy platform was founded in alignment with the SBA concept.

Dr. Dirk Kühling, Ministry of Economic Affairs of Bremen Germany and co-chairing the meeting, presented how Bremen has been implementing the "Think Small First" principle with a clear cluster promotion focus and by fostering innovative capacities of companies.

Anders Carlberg, Maritime Affairs Region Västra Götaland Sweden, brought the message that maritime and energy clusters are new fields for applying the SBA. The Swedish Marine Technology Forum, despite not having a shipyard for decades, promotes supplying companies. He invited partners to cooperate by reducing dependency on traditional ship energy (bunker fuel) and consider concrete steps in LNG and for the Clean Shipping Index.

Round off and future collaborations

Skaidrite Rancane-Slavinska, Entrepreneurship Competitiveness Department Latvia, pointed out how important particularly the food and the energy sectors are to Latvia. She invited the partners to RigaFoodTrade Fair in September 2011, which was welcomed by the Danish cluster coordinator for the food sector.

Tom Buchanan, Convenor of the Council of the City of Edinburgh Scotland, encouraged the food sector to tell the story: where the food is coming from and thus create value for the entire food chain.

Carsten Westerholt, Interreg Secretariat North Sea Region, concluded the discussion, by pointing out that a high-ranking political meeting like this plays a special role within a project and contributes to European policy. He stressed: "In Norway they teach children how to start a company and how to manage it. The joint story of BS and NSSC is interesting as a prototype for the cooperation of various European programmes!"

As a result of the enthusiasm amongst the Political Advisory Group members, the next meeting is scheduled in October 2011, during the Baltic Development Forum in Gdansk



Helga Trüpel, MEP from Bremen, welcomes all guests at the Bremen House in Brussels

High attention for the two projects at Brussels reception

The reception at the Bremen Brussels Office held in honour of the first Political Advisory Group meeting on March 15th was a great success with around eighty participants. Representatives of all 29 partner organisations of the eleven involved countries, including business organisations, Chambers of Commerce, knowledge institutions and public bodies met with established Brussels representatives of the key innovative industries: Maritime, Wind Energy and Food and Health.

Helga Trüpel, MEP from Bremen, congratulated the Members of the Political Advisory Group on their constitutional meeting and underlined the importance of transnational hands-on actions to support the EU strategies for the macro-regions Baltic and North Sea.

Successful seminar renewable energy and offshore wind energy

On the 14th of march, the POM West-Flanders (Regional Development Agency of West Flanders, Belgium) organized a seminar called “Renewable energy and offshore wind energy” as a side event to the European Wind Energy Conference in cooperation with the Port of Oostende. The seminar was oriented towards suppliers and stakeholders for the emerging market of offshore energy. In total, 98 participants from Belgium, the Netherlands, Ireland, Sweden, France and the UK, were welcomed.

The seminar showcased the enormous opportunities for suppliers in the offshore renewable energy market

and illustrated some state of the art projects such as flanseas (wave energy generation) and the conversion of the ports of Oostende and Ramsgate. Afterwards, the participants visited the renewable energy competence centre Greenbridge, where some energy generating projects were illustrated and governmental support and projects (such as North Sea Supply Connect) were presented. The seminar was concluded with a networking drink.

The next day, workshop participants were offered a Belgian day programme at the European Wind Energy Conference in Brussels. This conference included an exhibition with the latest technology in wind energy and is the ideal location to meet with large OEMs, which are active in the wind energy market. At the Belgian booth, participants were offered the occasion to meet business contacts. To that extend, a specific matchmaking tool was developed and made available at the events' website (belgiumatewea2011.be). By the use of this tool, companies were able to arrange a meeting programme with prospective businesspartners.



Business Development Platform rooted in off-line Services

Services such as information, coaching, training, partner-search and funding are the daily business of most of the project's partner organizations. This way Business Development Organizations, Regional Development Agencies and Cluster Organizations play an important role in order to enable Small and Medium-sized companies (SMEs) to establish new business contacts with OEMs. The Business Development Platform (BDP) follows the same objectives and will be based on existing services. To increase the efficiency of the partners' work and the benefits for the companies the BDP adds new essential elements.

Transregional Cooperation and Internet-based Services

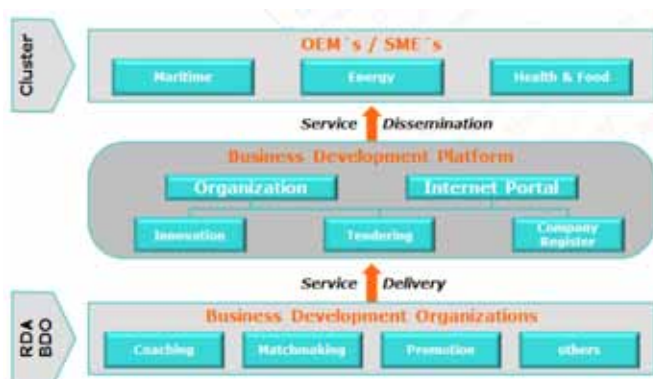
The first is to establish transregional cooperation within the participating partner network, especially the Business Development Organizations. The second is to share and provide advanced tools and methodologies to meet the requirements of SMEs. Modern Internet technology will help on both sides to disseminate the offered services and allow efficient teamwork. In that way the BDP can be defined as jointly provided services that are offered within a combination of an internet-based portal and related organizational structures and processes (off-line Services). That way the BDP works as an intelligent link between the existing structures of Business Development and the needs of OEMs and SMEs in and across the regions.

More services to come

The partners of the Baltic Supply and the North Sea Supply Connect project are currently defining the service portfolio for the BDP. They also take into account existing forms of transregional partnership such as the EEN Network. Excellent relations to other public institutions, industry associations and private companies will ensure the success of the two projects.

Start in 2011

For the start of the BDP in the second half of 2011 we will focus on services which enhance direct contacts between companies or stipulate new business opportunities: joint events, matchmaking, self assessment and training on tendering processes. Information on leading-edge technology trends, derived from innovation surveys, will also be part of the BDP service concept.



Baltic and North Sea Supply Connect working together with EEN towards the same goal:

Create new business opportunities for innovative SMEs

The Enterprise Europe Network brings together business support organisations from across 47 countries. They are connected through powerful databases and know Europe inside out. What's more, they have been working together for years, some even for decades. The network currently includes 570 business support organisations in the EU and beyond. So it is well placed to help companies find suppliers, distributors, trustworthy export partners and ways to find and sell technologies.

The main objective of the cooperation between partners of the two projects BalticSupply (BS) and North Sea Supply Connect (NSSC) and the project Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) is to use synergies:

- bring together products, services, technologies and research ideas of the branches energy, food industry and maritime technology from the Baltic- and North sea regions, and arrange transnational linkages to support business cooperation.

For this purpose it is intended to establish – in each region of the projects – cooperation between a project partner and the corresponding regional EEN partner. These partners should commit themselves to the following tasks:

- The project-partners will be in close contact to companies and institutions of the respective industries, offer existing cooperation profiles to their clients and collect offers and/or requirements for international cooperation (cooperation profiles) from their clients.
- The EEN-partners will provide the project-partners with European wide cooperation offers within the respective industries and will enter international partner search profiles into the databases of the Enterprise Europe Network.
- Both partners will inform each other about Expressions of Interests made by regional clients and about Expressions of Interest received by

external clients. And both partners will support each other in fulfilling necessary project-specific formal procedures like e.g. the documentation of successful partnership.

This cooperation has already started in Bremen, Germany (location of the Baltic Supply Lead Partner) and will be extended to the other participating regions in the near future.

For more information, please contact WfB Bremen, Jesus. Zepeda-Juarez@wfb-bremen.de
Further reading on EEN on www.ec.europa.eu/enterprise-europe-network



Business Support on Your Doorstep

Meet the Buyer Event

'A proven service to increase accessibility at OEM's'

April last year, Basildon Council organized their first 'Meet the Buyer' event. The event itself was a tremendous success. The feedback from buyers and suppliers was excellent. In total fourteen original equipment manufacturers (OEM's) and ninety-one suppliers, SME's, attended the event. This resulted in three-hundred-seventy meetings, in which SME's were given the opportunity to introduce themselves in order to access OEM's supply chains. The event definitely increased the accessibility of OEM's and further follow up evaluations showed the willingness of OEM's to do business with SME's. New business secured by the event between suppliers and buyers who met at the event total up to £ 966.511,97 (first quarter results). This success led the Basildon Council to make it an annual event with a focus on trans-regional business as well.

'We were overwhelmed with the outcome of the Meet the Buyer event and would definitely participate in another one'

*Quote from a suppliers'
Commercial Director:*

Objectives of such an event are to facilitate short meetings, so called speed dates, between OEM's and suppliers and to assist companies in procurement opportunities and procurement requirements. To do so, a pre-event for suppliers is organized preceding the main event. Suppliers are told what to expect from the main event, are able to make bookings for the event and more importantly, suppliers are informed about the procurement process and how they can actively tender for work in the future. A Meet the Buyer event is also a perfect opportunity to host procurement workshops. The Meet the buyer event

is an ideal service that addresses the goals of the North Sea Supply Connect project and the Baltic Sea project. The event increases an OEM's accessibility, increases the understanding of procurement within suppliers and leads to concrete results.

Best practices, recommendations and support are available from Ms. G. Edwards at Basildon Council. Basildon Council is happy to share their success and experiences with all our partners. Information on the next Meet the Buyer event, along with the invitations, will follow soon.

Some results from the Meet the Buyer event:

- 69 follow-up meetings in the first quarter after the event;
- 56 new buyers added to OEM's supply chain databases;
- 18 tenders generated by suppliers;
- 1 million of new business resulted in just the first quarter after the event.

North Sea Supply Connect

Objectives, approach and outputs

Five Work Packages will make up the NSSC programme, covering:

- Project management and administration
- Dissemination and communication
- Clustering of industries and supply markets
- Small and Medium Sized Enterprise cluster Management and services
- Training, innovation and pilot operation

North Sea Supply Connect cooperates closely with the Baltic Supply Project, covering the same topics in the Baltic Sea Region.



The consortium will concretely:

- extend knowledge for better SME performance on Northeast European supply markets;
- enhance the integration of North Sea Regions' small businesses into North European Supply Chain logistics.

partners



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