



NORDICHUB

# NATIONAL FINNISH CLUSTERS EVENT – The power of clusters: Making history together

in Kokkola, Finland, Sept. 3–4, 2024

## Takeaways from the first Finnish cluster conference and outlook for cluster development in Finland

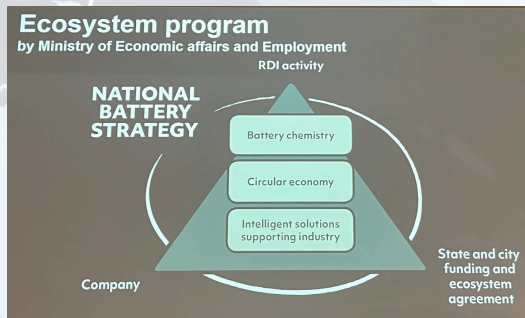
Organised by NORDICHUB on 3–4 September 2024 in Kokkola, the event – the first of its kind – gathered more than 60 representatives of cluster organisations and cluster stakeholders such as universities and research organisations, public authorities and institutions for an **important mission: to find the common voice of the Finnish clusters towards their development through a national cluster platform. To enhance connectivity, collaboration, lobbying, and operational support for the Finnish clusters, while positioning them effectively within the European context, respecting their common voice.**

### Platform for Finnish cluster activities

- Presents and connects Finnish clusters
- Develops clusters' activities
- Promotes information exchange and awareness of clusters and cluster work

### Nordic network for Finnish clusters

- Bridge builder, connects Finnish clusters with Nordic clusters
- Promotes cooperation with Nordic partners
- Promotes joint projects and overall solutions through ecosystems thinking



The event was designed in such a way to bring in on day one **relevant information from Finland**, with opening words of Stina Mattila, mayor of the city of Kokkola, presentation of the investment and ecosystem agreement in Kokkola area done by Jonne Sandberg, development director of the City of Kokkola, followed by a visit to the Kokkola Industrial Park, inspiration from a Gold Labelled Finnish cluster from Johan Wasberg and Defining collaboration , clusters and networks by Olli Voutilainen, the Finnish Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment.

At the same time, given the importance of the **integration of the Finnish clusters in the European community**, the event brought in the perspectives offered by the European Clusters Alliance and European Cluster Collaboration Platform – represented by Antonio Novo and a practical example of how the Clusters of Sweden network was set up and operates, with insights offered by Ola Svedin, its chairman.



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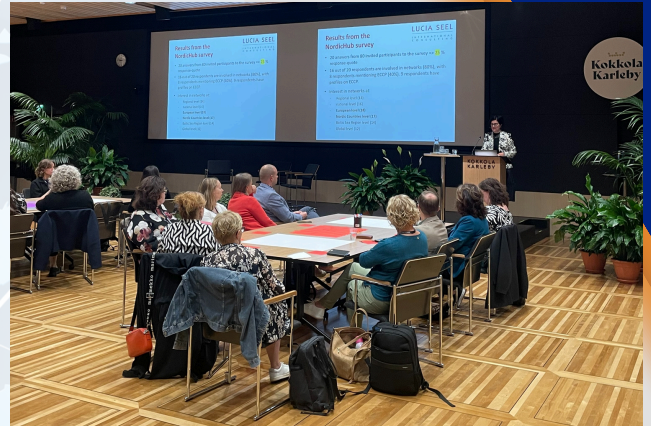
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The second day was dedicated to working together in interactive sessions facilitated by Lucia Seel, international cluster expert, towards **finding the key denominator for the Finnish clusters regarding the expectations from a national platform servicing them.**

In preparation to this event **NORDICHUB** organised prior to the event sent an **online survey** to the registered participants to better understand and identify the key needs of cluster networks from national support structures to enhance networking and cross-sector collaboration. The results of the survey were shared with the audience (see presentation) and served as basis for dynamic and fruitful discussions among participants.

The **workshop discussions** revealed **key needs for clusters in Finland that a national cluster platform could address.** One central issue was funding, with participants calling for access to long-term funding beyond project-based financing. Support in navigating the legal system was emphasized, while ensuring regional and post-project funding was considered vital. There was a call for clearer methods to measure the impact of clusters and for regular evaluation processes, as well as guidance for servicing SMEs, including membership structures.



Participants expressed the need for clearer national understanding of what constitutes a cluster. Collaboration with academia and sharing experiences between clusters were seen as ways to strengthen cluster ecosystems based on experience-sharing opportunities.

There was a strong desire for enhanced cluster-to-cluster and cluster-to-society interactions, focusing on attracting funding, fostering networks, and

sharing know-how. Additionally, education/capacity building, mentorship, and guidance in cross-border cooperation were seen as essential for long-term cluster development.

One of the key areas of interest was related to the importance of creating incentives for companies, especially SMEs to join, helping them better understand the tangible benefits from participating in a cluster initiative.



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In summary, the discussions pointed to a comprehensive need for strategic guidance, sustained funding, and improved collaboration mechanisms to foster cluster growth in Finland. **A national platform should provide long-term financial backing, foster knowledge exchange, and strengthen the broader cluster ecosystem to ensure sustainable growth.**



The floor for discussing how these needs can be covered by **services offered by a national cluster platform** was opened by Lucia Seel who prepared an analysis of the services offered by the cluster associations and networks operating in Europe at national or regional level. These were clustered in five areas: (1) collaboration/networking; (2) advocacy/lobbying; (3) capacity building/knowledge; (4) internationalization support; (5) information; (6) economies of scale.



The discussions revealed several key expectations for services that Finnish clusters have from a national cluster platform. A clear need emerged for a more defined understanding of what constitutes a cluster, including its status, role, and differences from ecosystems or other innovation entities. Participants suggested that webinars, a dedicated website, and national events could help provide this clarity. The website should also list all Finnish clusters, offering transparency on their location and structures.

The importance of regular meetings to foster collaboration and networking was emphasized. Guidance on European funding opportunities is expected as a service. The platform is also expected to facilitate capacity building by providing mentorship, practical advice on cluster formation, and information on funding. Awareness-raising efforts to highlight the benefits of joining clusters for companies were seen as crucial. Additionally, the platform shall put under spotlight success stories and make advocacy efforts to ensure that decision-makers recognize the importance of clusters.



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In summary, a national platform should focus on building a collaborative, well-defined cluster ecosystem, adding value by providing knowledge, guidance, and visibility.

Lucia Seel wrapped up the workshop with a presentation on the **power of effective communication** to unlock the full potential of a cluster to create impact.



The two-days event, a première in the Finnish cluster development, was more than a busy networking and learning event; the participants showed a strong interest (via surveys and interviews) for continuing and expanding the dialogue and creating the path for collaboration.

If **NORDICHUB** launched the invitation to **make cluster history together**, it certainly succeeded to write the first page!



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