

## Conclusion of Clusnet Conference Oct 13 2011.

Greg Clark, Conference moderator.

To conclude our conference today I want to make a few final observations.

1. We have heard today how much **enthusiasm** there is for the cluster approach to city economic development. This enthusiasm is not just based on the realisation that that clusters offers a robust way to organise economic development, but also upon the recognition that this is a way to unleash **creativity**, and work in new ways. Clusters require us to be more creative and to solve business growth problems directly rather than simply to develop policy. It is a 'hands on' activity. The 10 cities in the CLUSNET project were joined by many people from other cities. The people here are very motivated and creative people that want to see city economic development as a purposeful activity were growth can be unleashed from taking the right steps.
  
2. We also have heard a lot today about **what clusters are**.
  - They are a means to link innovation, business, technology, capital, knowledge, skills, and government in purposeful partnership for growth through business development.
  
  - They are means to connect economy and space at the local and regional level.
  
  - They are orchestrated through collaboration and they foster integrated approaches that bring many different elements together.
  
  - They are business led, in that they start with individual and groups of companies and address their growth needs and then link them in collaboration with sources of knowledge, capital, investment, and regulation. They address shared opportunities and forge longer term working relationships that then shape how all the partners behave and evolve. Separate organisations become a system of organisations to support the cluster and the system takes on its own character and influences the members.

3. We have all recognised that cluster development is an important way to pursue economic development **after the crisis**. Firstly, cluster development is not necessarily capital intensive – it does require so much public investment. Cluster development relies on better connecting growth assets and opportunities within a region and making the existing organisations work more effectively. Second, it is about growing businesses by using a full set of interventions that include problem solving, better harnessing of knowledge and technology, better working relationships between firms and other entities, and improvements in the framework conditions for certain sectors or groups of firms. Clusters are about job creation through business growth, based on finding and implementing new innovations and serving growing markets. It is a good approach after the crisis and the changed economic landscape.

4. We have heard a good deal about some of the **choices that cluster development faces**.

How to organise and manage a cluster: the partnership model or the membership model?

How to finance clusters: through partnership with external investment?

What to measure: the growth of the cluster, the performance of individual firms, or the work of the cluster organisation?

5. The link to **cities**.

Finally cluster development approaches offer an important link to space and place. They are one of the few interventions through which we can focus on the economic performance of places at the same time as working with firms.

European cities have a rich history. Many of them began as places of exchange, trade, and innovation. Cities grew because they provided firms with the scope to adopt new practices and to work together for mutual advantage. The economic rationale of the cities was to be places where the early clusters of firm could emerge and we still see that today in the historical economic strengths of many European cities. In this sense clusters provide insights into what we need to do now to continue the economic evolution of our cities, they offer not just a means to grow and modernise businesses, but also to **renew the economic role of our cities**.