

*EU Research Information Event: 'Towards Integration into the European Research Area'  
Belgrade, June 29th, 2009*

# Pathways to develop a cluster approach: Experiences from the EU Food Cluster



**Prof. Dr. Xavier Gellynck**  
Coordinator Food Cluster Initiative  
Ghent University - Belgium

# Content

1. Introduction
2. Regional food clusters
  - 2.1 Clusters as regional economic dynamic
  - 2.2 Cluster policy
  - 2.3 Steps in food cluster development
3. **EU cluster approach: Food Cluster Initiative**
  - 3.1 From regional to EU clusters
  - 3.2 Objectives of the Food Cluster Initiative
  - 3.3 What is the impact ?
  - 3.4 Conclusion

# 1. Introduction

Clusters are:

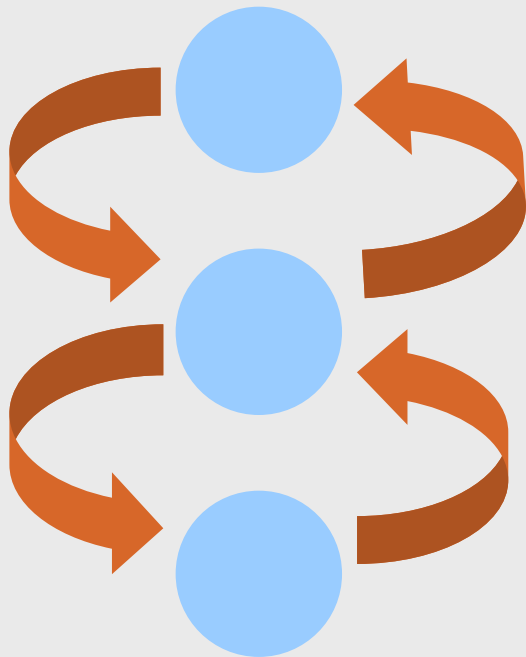
- Spatial concentration ...
  - Food companies
  - Complementary activities (eg. packaging, biotech)
  - Organisations (eg. scientists, financial bodies, public sector organisations)
- ... in geographical proximity ...
- ... leading to enhanced levels of exchange & cooperation
- ... and finally enhancing innovation & growth

## 2. Regional food clusters

Concept is understood in twofold way:

- Clusters as regional economic dynamic
  - Interaction between economic actors
  - ‘Chemistry’ between actors, can not be artificially created
- Clusters as policy concept
  - Set of policy instruments to stimulate development of clusters in first way
  - Foster existing dynamic

## 2.1 Cluster as regional economic dynamic

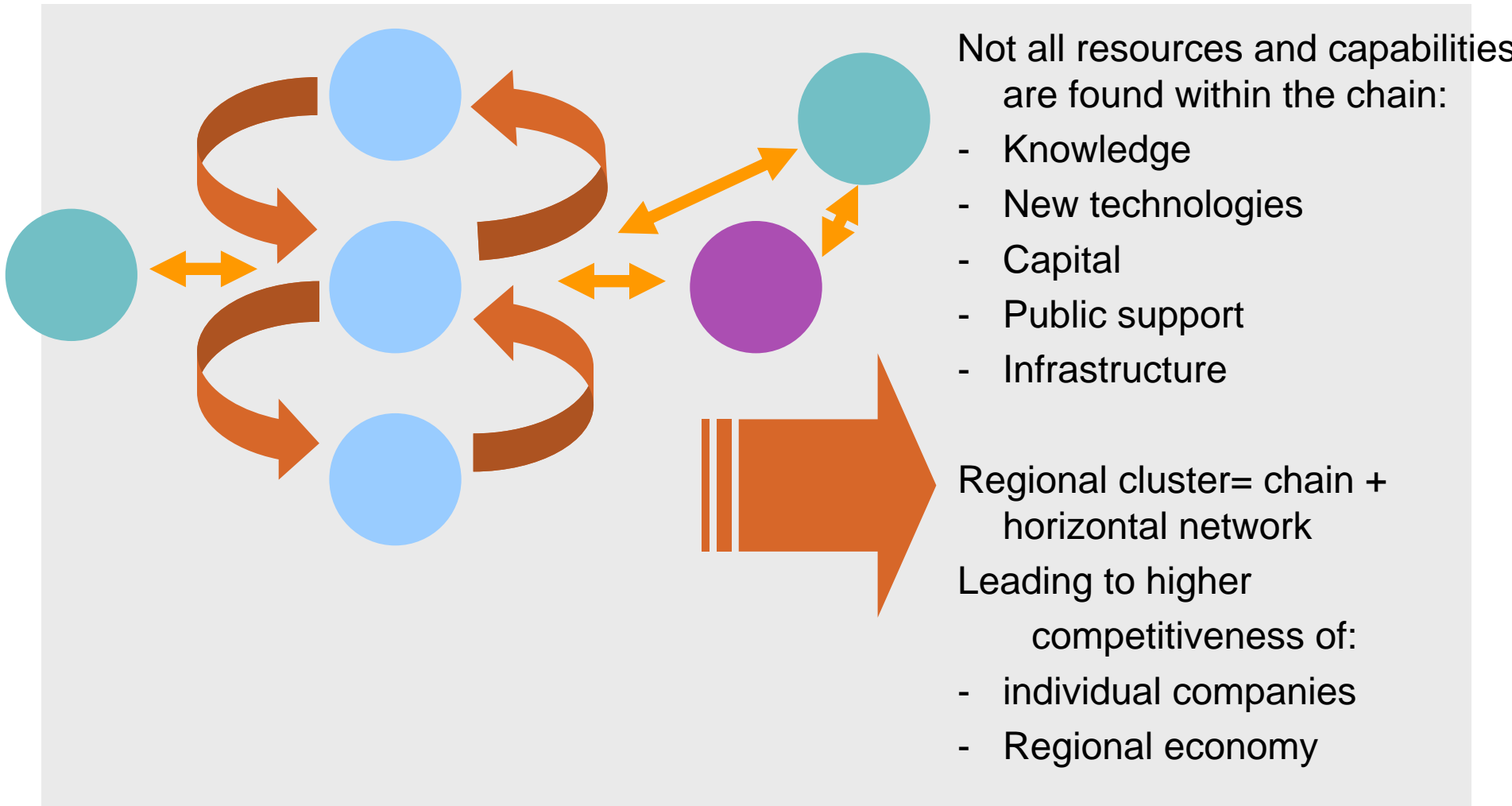


Food chain embeds:

- **resources**
- **capabilities**
- **competencies**

In intensive interaction  
to deliver higher added value

- by improving the quality of chain relationships.



## Emilia-Romagna: food cluster



- Traditional and industrial production of typical food products: eg. Parmesan cheese, parma ham, vinegar, etc.
- Explained by:
  - Tradition of artisan businesses within rural households
  - Extensive networks between small businesses (farms, producers, distributors) leading to a high degree of flexibility

## West-Flanders:

Frozen vegetables cluster

46% of European production

18 companies employ (in 2003): 2260  
directly and 1740 indirectly



- Located in centre of production area: NI - Fl. – N. France
- Leading-edge skills in automation and packaging (due to high labour costs in Flanders!)
- Export-profile Belgian economy
- Flexibility -> adapt to changing markets
- Social ties between the companies
  - Copycat strategies
  - Fierce competition
  - Active role of local and regional institutions



## 2.2 Cluster policy

- Linking companies, people and knowledge at a regional level
- Focus measures on networks rather than individual companies
- Capitalising on regional assets:
  - Specialised sectors
  - Competitive resources, capabilities, competencies

Combine instruments from different domains:

- Science & Technology policy
- Regional policy
- Industrial and Enterprise policy
- Education policy

## 2.3 Steps in cluster development

### Step 1: Create multiple support for cluster development

- Obtain legitimacy
- Articulate common ambition (e.g. economic growth, well-being, food identity)
- Involving policy makers, industry representatives, research community

# Step 2: Strategy development

## 1. Where do we want to go?

Vision/mission

Objectives

## 2. Where are we now?

### SWOT analysis

Internal audit

External audit

## 3. How do we get there?

Strategic Orientation (SO)

Strategic objectives



**S**pecific  
**M**easurable  
**A**ttainable  
**R**elevant  
**T**ime-bound

## Step 3: Develop action plan

Triple helix perspective

- Policy domains and levels -> facilitating
- Companies:
  - Funding for R&D
  - Based on open innovation attitude
- Research:
  - Valorisation of research results
  - Efficient Technology Transfer

## Step 4: Implementation & management

Issues to be decided upon:

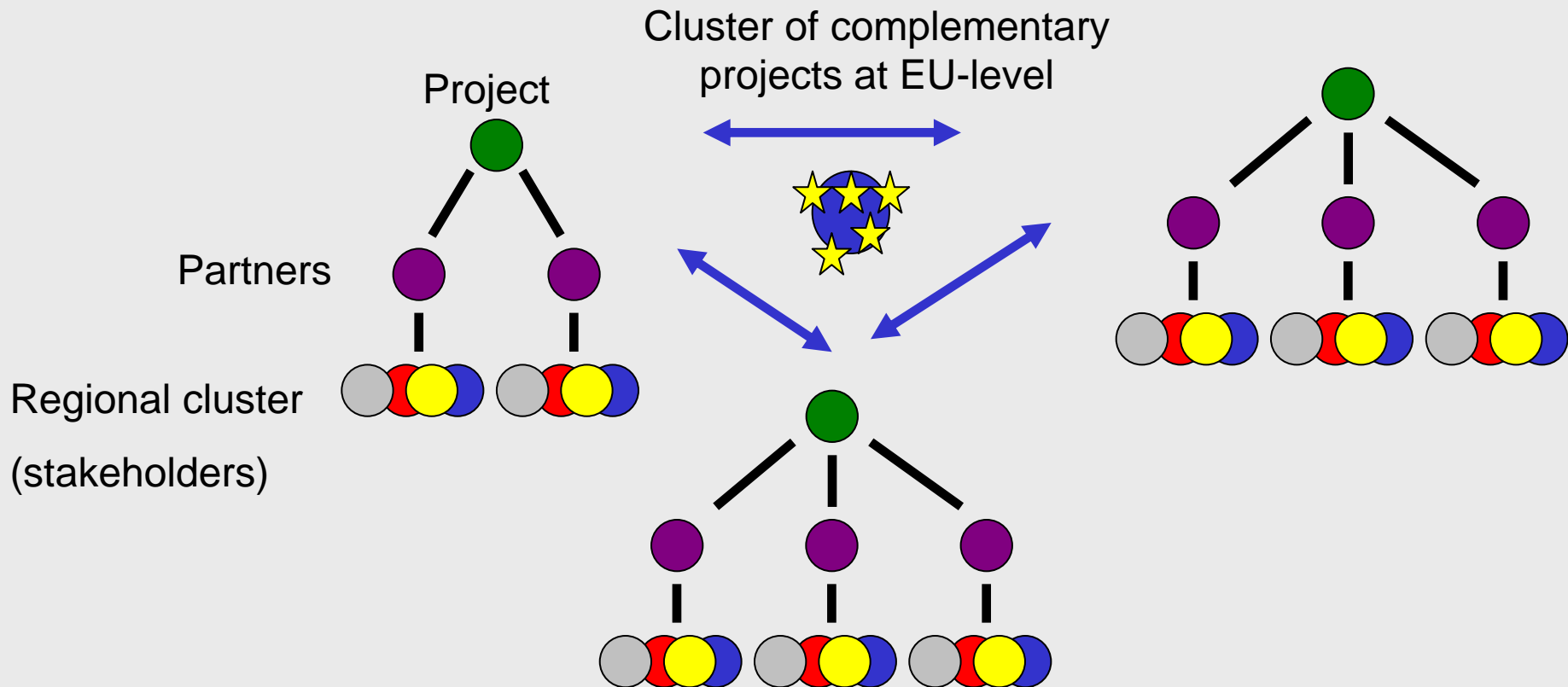
- Decision making procedures
- Control system
- Workable!!!

# Step 5: Monitoring & feedback

- Based on ex-ante evaluation and definition of indicators
- Strategic re-orientation if necessary

# 3. EU cluster approach: Food Cluster Initiative

## 3.1 From regional to EU clusters





## 3.2 Objectives Food Cluster Initiative

- Strengthening EU food clusters by inter-regional cooperation
- Defining regional food RTD policies and strategies
- Making the EU regional food RTD landscape transparent
- Investing in the combined regional strengths to create excellence in the ERA



## 3.3 What is the impact ?

For projects:

- Increasing project effectiveness
- Enhancing project management capabilities
- Extending international network
- Developing regional strategies in global economy

For the EC:

- Better access of New Member States to community instruments
- Increase return on public expenditure



## 3.4 Conclusion

**Complementarity** has been realised:

- Common strategic vision
- Building international network

**Synergies are being initiated:**

- Research development
- Building Pan-European food network
- Growth of the cluster