

Summarisations of NRW view on the STRATINC project

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1. SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE INITIAL SITUATION

1.1. Institution

The ZENIT GmbH is located in Mülheim in North Rhine Westphalia. ZENIT was founded in 1984 to assist small and medium-sized enterprises in North Rhine-Westphalia in the development and introduction of future-oriented innovations and thus to support the structural change urgently needed in the region. The three equal shareholders of the organisation, which was unique at the time in Germany, were the Federal State of North Rhine-Westphalia, the *ZENIT Trägerverein e.V.*, an association of some 250 enterprises from a wide variety of sectors, and the *Westdeutsche Landesbank*. Through the consortium of banks which now includes the Association of Private Banks and the *Westdeutsche Genossenschafts Zentralbank (WGZ-Bank)* as well as the two other equal shareholders, ZENIT has direct contact and access like no other consulting company to enterprises, the financial sector and to political players. The model which describes the joint activities undertaken to handle the structural change is known as a “Public Private Partnership”.

Partly with the support of the Federal State of North Rhine-Westphalia and the European Union, ZENIT gets its customers fit for the European market as well as for globalisation and helps them open up new markets and initiate useful national and international partnerships. In concrete terms that means the organisation of successful joint stands at international exhibitions, intensive assistance before, during and after the event as well as the mediation of interesting business contacts through international networks.

On behalf of the Federal State, ZENIT organises seminars and workshops on topics relevant to small and medium-sized enterprises and its practice-oriented consulting services are a source of assistance for firms with innovative ideas and technologies.

In the framework of its role as Euro Info Centre and Innovation Relay Centre of the European Commission, ZENIT also helps its clients in all issues concerning Europe as well as in their applications for European funding and the pan-European marketing of technical and technological innovations.

1.2. Economic context of the area in the beginning of the project

The region of North Rhine Westphalia within the STRATINC project is representing the sector of New Materials. In the beginning of the project the sector of New Materials NRW had in total 10.154 companies. This corresponds to 26% of all German suppliers in the field of materials in Germany. Concerning the R&D suppliers and universities NRW has a dense structure with around 60 organisations. This number comprises universities, universities of applied science, research institutes (fraunhofer institutes) and science centres included. Remarkable is the high

figure of companies in the chemical sector and in the production of plastics. These are foremost bigger companies with many workstations and are very important for NRW.

According to its dimension NRW can be distinguished again into several regions. The land can be compared to States as the Netherlands, Belgium etc. Within NRW there are many different regions and characteristics of enterprises in the sector of New Materials. NRW has large multinational companies as Degussa, Thyssen or Bayer (for example) who are leading the sector in their specific field of action.

With regard to existing service centres, NRW has several business developments agencies at its disposal, who support SME within the sub regions.

1.3. The context in terms of existing or potential network, partners, stakeholders

The versatile characteristics can be shown in the already existing networking in the field of New Materials, which can be divided into three categories, polymers, metal and textile materials. The **polymer industry** is the youngest material sector (set up in 1950). Today three initiatives can be exemplary specified,

- Chemsite,
- ChemCologne and
- K-Sektor.

The initiative “Chemsite” in the Emscher Lippe Raum as well as “ChemCologne” in the region of Cologne and Leverkusen. They are working on innovation for plastic processing. The “K-Sektor” initiative comprises around 200 companies in the field of plastics with competences in developing, production and marketing. Their aim is to support the collaboration between the enterprises and to exploit synergy potential.

Metal material and metal material research has a long tradition in NRW. Furthermore it has a huge impact regarding the advancements of old materials or the identification of new areas of application (simply or combined with other materials). NRW is the most important place respectively metal producing and –processing in Germany. More than 45% of employees in the metal sector in Germany are employed in NRW.

One further established cluster is the FORMETA Metalworking Forum. The FORMETA competence network is distinguished by a wide range of industrial metalworking and metal processing expertise and is characterized by a unique regional concentration of enterprises based in and around the cities of Wuppertal, Solingen and Remscheid. This cluster of industrial skills is strengthened by links to:

- industry-related research by institutes spread throughout Germany,

- industrially orientated, business-sponsored training and education programmes from trade apprenticeships to degree-level studies,
- product testing/certification and film/surface diagnostics with a
- common transfer and presentation platform.

FORMETA is operating (internationally known) in Solingen with cutting goods and in Remscheid with tool kits in cooperation with the University Wuppertal. In Südwestfalen the focus is laying on surface engineering, surface finishing, tubes and rollers. The region around Düsseldorf and Duisburg has a big steel industry and it dominated by large-scale enterprises.

The third sector is the **textile sector**. Within Germany the textile sector is undergoing a structural change process. The offer of revised and innovative products with new quality profiles (technical textiles) is the key sector for the future. NRW takes the leading position in Germany with the Zukunftsinitiative Textil NRW (ZiTex) established in 1996. Their objectives are technology transfer and innovation potential for SME, internationalisation, enhancing of learning aptitude and qualification of SME and employees and increasing experience exchange.

2. THE INTERREGIONAL ACTIVITIES DURING THE STRATINC PROJECT

2.1. The working groups constitution and meetings

The constitution of the working groups (steering and working group) has been rather simple compared with their maintenance during the project lifetime. The steering group has been formed of representatives of the ministry of economic and labour as well as Zenit as project representative. The steering committee has been informed and been asked for their opinion regularly. Due to difficulties in availability of the members the communication was mostly carried out via email and telephone conversations.

The working group has been formed by ZENIT representatives and by regional actors/stakeholders. We have started a cooperation with the NeMa association, which has been established in 1998 in order to advise, bring together and actively support suppliers and prospective users of New Materials in this continuously growing market. Meanwhile, NeMa is a network of more than 85 companies and research institutes for material technology. Up to 2004 NeMa succeeded to become an attractive and flexible Marketing Service provider for all companies and Universities which develop in different material sections high tech products and key technologies. This approach allowed the members to concentrate on their research-, development- and construction competence. NeMa phased out marketing relevant activities.

Due to often changes of personnel within NeMa it has been difficult to keep a continuous workflow in the NRW STRATINC activities. Furthermore in the end of 2005 NeMa was unable to pay its debts and activities (some of which were related to STRATINC) had to be ceased. Within the following part, the problems occurred and respective actions will be explained.

2.2. Some political changes

In summer 2005 there have been elections in NRW. The elections have been followed by the political change of the NRW government. After a period of over 30 years the government changed from the Social Democratic Party to the Christian Democratic Union. The changes effected the STRATINC project only marginally. The ministries have been reorganised and the responsible person within the Ministry has changed.

2.3. The survey and the interviews

The survey was conducted in the beginning of 2004. The NeMa supported ZENIT here with competent contacts and interview guidelines and carried out very well the analysing procedures. Unfortunately the response from the SME has been fairly weak (26 out of over 700). The interview phase implied two stages, firstly a questionnaire sent by email and faxed back and afterwards telephone interviews with the SME who have answered the questionnaires.

2.4. Selection of a software tool

The selection of the software tool has been made relatively contemporary and was not linked to the recommendations of the lead partners study. The reasons were, that the study results have been circulated late and it was very important for the NRW target group to have a software in German language.

ZENIT investigated appropriate software tools and identified three. The responsible of the chosen target cluster (FORMETA) had the offer to opt for one. But the collaboration as well as the communication stagnated, because they were not been interested in strategic intelligence a collaboration with STRATINC, but in a website for promotion purposes. They accepted an offer from a local initiative to attend their web appearance and their need was satisfied.

The consequence was, that we had to identify another appropriate cluster interested in collaboration and SI tools.

The NeMa network has been very interested in the selected software tool and we have shifted from metal to new materials in general. The created synergies out of being the appropriate cluster and the subcontractor coevally made communication easy and fast.

2.5. Diffusion of information

Diffusion of information about the STRATINC project was organised via the established Newsletters both from ZENIT and NeMa. Furthermore on the ZENIT web site there is information about the project and its partners available. Nevertheless it is difficult to gain interest as the new materials environment is very diverse.

3. DECISION TAKING CRITERIAS IN THE PROJECT?

3.1. Regarding the software tool?

With regard to the decision for the software tool see 2.4, where the implications have been already explained.

3.2. Regarding the subcontractor implementing the PSIP

The BOV AG is the software provider and they have developed a simple but convincing tool, which is characterised as a community solution. For the establishment of the PSIP in NRW it seemed promising because of its singularity and simplicity. Furthermore the price was convincing as well.

The representative of the target group, in this case the FORMETA respectively the NeMa association, agreed on that software, too.

As already illustrated in 2.4. NeMa was a very important player in STRATINC. They were a subcontractor and delivered services to the project but they also represented the supported cluster. Due to financial circumstances which are beyond the scope of our influences NeMa association ceased its activities since October 2005. This, obviously led to some delay and problems in the implementation of the STRATINC activities. However, the main relevant Ministry of Economic Affairs decided in January 2006 to transfer the STRATINC relevant NeMa activities to another organisation located in the Ruhr valley.

3.3. Regarding the PSIP itself

With regard to the regional situation we have decided to set up a new platform for grouping experts and stakeholders in the field of new materials. As in NRW there are already several websites of organised networks in different fields of new materials (plastics, ceramics, metals, textile, etc.) existing, it is difficult get regional stakeholders involved in additional engagements. The STRATINC partners were provided with detailed information about the diversity during the Meeting in Mülheim in January 2006. The decision was to start with a core group, explaining the functions of the software and then to broaden the participants up to at least 100. As this approach collapsed due to the implications with NeMa and the hesitation of the core group to commit their knowledge in the platform.

Likewise in January the decision was take to combine the project from the Ministry of Innovation of NRW and the STRATINC platform. The expert platform shall now serve as a forum for initiatives active in the field of New Materials. The launch is planned for the beginning of March 2006.

3.4. Sustainability of the instrument: human resources, financial resources

The ZENIT GmbH is analysing possibilities to sustain the platform. It is possible to integrate the platform into a newly emerging website from the new materials sector. After the collapse of NeMa it is of vital importance to connect the platform to a well-known player in the material scene in order to maintain the platform and to make it interesting for new potential users.

With regard to the financial resources, the host of the platform is the ZENIT GmbH. At the moment there are no more investments necessary apart from running costs for personnel.

4. IMPACT ON SECTORAL CLUSTER ACTIVITIES

One main output of the project is the recognition of a well organised new material scene within NRW. The Länder government supports cluster activities of the new materials sector in a sufficient but indiscriminate way of distribution.

The STRATINC impact on the total sectoral area is however relatively weak. The highly diversified material sector in NRW is one reason for that. Another reason is NRW is not perceived as a leading region in the field of innovative materials and lacks clear profile (results of a study from the IAT). 13 local clusters/networks/initiatives could be identified with a broad spectrum of topics and regional profiles with different emphasis. This are many networks who did not know each other and who did not interact. The need for cooperation and networking is evident and with STRATINC we are still trying to contribute to the amelioration of the situation.

5. THE MAIN RESULTS OF THE PROJECT

5.1. Qualitative appreciation of the PSIP

STRATINC helped to develop a valuable PSIP tool for NRW. However, we were not able to promote it sufficiently to the target group. On the other hand, ZENIT is still trying to animate the platform and to revive the expert network on new materials. Generally we have to state that the user rate of our PSIP still do not meet the expectations.

5.2. Qualitative appreciation of the Blueprint

The blueprint will be a valuable deliverable of the STRATINC project. We compass to have a manageable paper, which is readable as well for people who are not familiar with this topic.

However, we needed two attempts to achieve the current state-of-the-play. The time pressure now is high to conduct the blueprint until the end of the project with translation and printing efforts.

5.3. Situation within your cluster, has it changed?

As already explained in prior parts of this paper NRW has to handle around 13 initiatives within the field of New Materials. The situation within the cluster has not changed due to STRATINC activities but the relationship between stakeholders and the public body is intensified. With regard to the supply of SI services we have to observe the needs expressed by the companies and be very carefully in providing tools which are not required.

5.4. Do you think that your organisation has gained visibility?

The fact that ZENIT is active in this region for over 20 years now, the visibility is not significantly higher than prior to STRATINC. There are now more links to the New Materials scene and we have linked the cluster activities within our organisation.

5.5. Capabilities improved through the transfer of methodologies?

With regard to the mentioned methodologies the project has intensified its knowledge within our organisation. The STRATINC project enabled an intensive engagement to the transfer of methodologies, especially the Foresight Day integrated in the Mülheim Meeting in January 2006.

Due to the meetings we all have attended during STRATINC lifetime, it was possible to learn the approaches from the different regions and to compare them to the own situation.

The similarities found out in the different regions and different sectors made some significant outcomes of the project. It is not possible to build a cluster only on digital and virtual base. You always have to integrate a personal level, otherwise the network do not function because of lacking trust amongst the participants. You need quite a lot of time to implement a well running network, as the trust building before needs a lot of time as well.

6. WHAT ARE THE LESSON'S LEARNT?

Lessons learnt are:

- Interregional exchange is difficult when there are different sectors involved.
- With regard to the implementation of “strategic intelligence” within a region and a cluster you need to have a driver and sufficient support from the stakeholders.
- In large and well developed region the implementation of new and additional instruments needs to be well verified before.
- Clusters and regions without an already existing cluster policy have a real benefit out of the activities

7. CONCLUSION, YOUR OPINION ON...

COHERENCE OF THE RECENT PROJECT COMPARED TO THE INITIAL PROPOSAL

In all conscience I think the actual project is very close to the initial STRATINC proposal. May be in terms of interregional exchange the implementation is slightly weak but writing a proposal and implementing it are two different things. It is necessary to keep a realistic level.

EFFECTS ON REGIONAL CLUSTER BUILDING

What I have seen from other regions as the Spanish ones, I think STRATINC ameliorates the cluster building to a certain extend. Concerning NRW the effects on regional cluster building are however relatively weak. The reasons have been described in prior sections of this paper. It is may be helpful to raise the question of appropriateness for the region. In NRW cluster, or on a lower level, networks, are already developed and are not looking for support and interventions from a third party.

INTENSITY OF INTERREGIONAL COOPERATION

The interregional cooperation was not very intense due to lacking ideas and time. We are now trying to emphasise more on interregional cooperation and try to implement sectoral workshops during the COCOM meetings.