

# A Gender Equal Cluster initiative

*- practical experiences from  
the Quadruple Helix project*



**Quadruple Helix reports 2011:3**

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ISBN: 978-91-979487-8-4



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**QUADRUPLE HELIX Lead Partner:** Municipality of Norrtälje (Sweden). **Partners:** Stockholm county administrative board (Sweden), BalticFem (Sweden), Royal Institute of Technology, Industrial Economics and Management (Sweden), Åbo Akademi University (Finland), Eurohouse (Estonia), Läänemaa Tourism Association (Estonia), Foundation Saaremaa University Center (Estonia) - [quadruplehelix.eu](http://quadruplehelix.eu)

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## INTRODUCTION

The following document is a curriculum for gender equal cluster creation built on the lessons we have gained in the project Quadruple Helix, which in addition to cluster-building also has a cross-border dimension. The project ran from 2009-2011 and included the tourism industry in three countries, Sweden (Roslagen), Finland (Åboland) and Estonia (West Estonia). The aim was to develop clusters, local and transnational, and bring together technical research with small business operations. Participants in the project was the Royal Institute of Technology, Åbo Akademi University, the County Administrative Board of Stockholm, BalticFem women's resource centre, Eurohouse, Läänemaa Tourism, Saaremaa University Centre and Norrtälje Municipality who also was the lead partner of the Central Baltic INTERREG IV A project. A special focus was on gender and on that the project would develop a curriculum for gender equal cluster building.

## PREREQUISITES

### LESSONS LEARNED:

At the start of the project all involved were unclear about the purpose of the project and it took a long time to interpret the meaning and what each of the partners would do. It was also difficult to sell the project to the target group, the entrepreneurs, because their time is so precious and it was unclear what they benefit from it.

There were several, perhaps too many goals in this project, gender equality, cluster building, technology development, cross-border activities, which made the project very complex. All major stakeholders were identified in the project but it took time to tie them together.

In Estonia it was perceived that the project was too short to have the time to achieve all goals. It took a long time to get started. It was difficult here too, to bring together the E-team participants and quite hard to motivate entrepreneurs to participate. One project goal was to build an international cluster but this did not succeed entirely. The Entrepreneurs require tangible dividends to engage internationally. They want guarantees that it will be profitable. The local network built in the project regions were not strong enough to engage in international ventures. Also, language barriers existed for some small business owners, all do not speak English.

### We recommend

*When planning a cluster, it is important to spend a lot of time initially to commit all involved participants. The entrepreneurs – as the foundation. The authorities – that promote manage or assist. The organisations and NGOs – that can represent the industry and form the link between companies and authorities. Science and universities – through participating researchers that can abstract new knowledge from the project. The rootedness of the project in all participant organisations is important, especially in the Lead partner organisation and it helps if the purpose is clear for all involved at an early stage.*

## START-UP

### LESSONS LEARNED:

At the starting seminar (December 2009) in Estonia many business promotion organisations and government agencies (in the project called Multi Actor Partnerships abbreviated MAP) were invited, with good marketing effect. In Sweden the MAPs were involved later at a seminar the autumn 2010 when it existed some research reports but not so many practical lessons yet since the cluster construction had not started. We learned that much more time needs to be used to keep in touch with MAPs. It seems like the MAPs in Sweden haven't been quite as rooted in the project as for example in Estonia where there has been a new tourism program developed during the project period. It should be noted though that the timing were really most successful in Estonia were the projects timing and the timing of the development of the new tourism program were optimal. In Sweden we were a little ahead of the time-table of the regional tourism program which is under development but we still had some impact on their work. In Finland the timing made us more forced to just accept what was already in place and the project had little impact on the tourism organisations way of working.

#### We recommend

*Contacts with the organisations and authorities who are to absorb the experiences from the project and implement them in their ordinary operations should be established already at the start of the project and then be maintained with all knowledge derived from the project. It is not enough with a webpage there should be at least a newsletter also but preferably there should be cooperation.*

At the start-up in Norrtälje there was theory mixed with good practical examples from clusters in other industries. There were local entrepreneurs from both Sweden and Estonia and representatives from Finland, as well as university representatives, researchers and government representatives.

At a brainstorming workshop a common vision as well as several local visions emerged. We thought it important to find what was common and unique, and decide whether the cluster should be a large common cluster or several local clusters. The conclusion where more or less the latter even if the vision of a ring road between us and other cooperation work also existed.

#### We recommend

*Start with a workshop including entrepreneurs and other involved parties where the vision and the cluster are defined; the scope, purpose, uniqueness and what the cluster will result in. If there is to be a cross-border cluster begin to build the national sections, local and from the bottom up, while keeping the vision of the cross-border latent in the meantime.*

## LOGISTICS

### LESSONS LEARNED:

According to the project time-table there where a lot of work that should be done simultaneously. One lesson learned is that it is important to start with the actual target group first so that you have something concrete to report on later to get the business promotion players interested. Input from scientists has been good ever since the start, highlighting differences of men and women in business and living conditions in different countries. But we went from the abstract to the concrete in the project; perhaps it would have been better to do the opposite.

### We recommend

*Start with the most important first, the entrepreneurs. Get them to formulate their vision and start building from the bottom-up considering their own common interests. They must be able to see the gain in order to put in time. The clustering should be done by them, not for them.*

## CLUSTER COACHES

### LESSONS LEARNED:

We realised that cluster coaches were needed to form entrepreneurial groups. But it was unclear who would have this role, someone in the group or outside it. Also it was unclear what the coach should convey/do.

### We recommend

*A cluster coach is needed in the formation of clusters, someone who leads the group and provides the tools to work from. Cluster coach can be a consultant on the basis of leading the work of the development program. It can also be useful to designate a group member as a supervisor, with responsibility to carry on the network after the project period.*

# THE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR ENTREPRENEURS

## LESSONS LEARNED:

During the first year (2010) there were several conferences, on a monthly basis in Sweden, on themes of women's entrepreneurship in a more global perspective / gender perspective on business ventures, networking and social media, marketing on the web, environmental consulting and more. There were also brainstorming sessions about development of ICT services for mobile phones, suitable for the tourism industry.

During the autumn of 2010 the work of E-teams in Sweden came to take a firmer shape to make a mobile map and mobile guide for Roslagen hiking trail. Then came the idea to develop a package around a bicycle route. Four meetings were organised with a solid group of entrepreneurs based on the vision to link the cluster to a bicycle route. The group consisted of about fifteen entrepreneurs situated close to the bicycle route who participated in a development program with workshops, lectures, networking events about business planning, what is unique in the region, pricing policy in the packaging and internally, marketing, packaging, added value and increased sales, profitability, demand, market etc.

In Estonia it is estimated that the project provided the opportunity to entrepreneurs to develop and also to the internationalization of all co-operation which could evolve in the future. It also provided an opportunity to deepen the networking locally. Läänemaa Tourism's together with E-teams and MAPs has created a cluster strategy for the organization an action plan that includes both the regional and international levels. The project has led to a new five year development plan for tourism. The project has given good knowledge for coming activities on different levels. Especially appreciated is the joint marketing and the project's technical product – the mobile guide.

## We recommend

*Hire a skilled consultant as cluster coach, who is familiar with the industry and the situation of the entrepreneurs. Get the entrepreneurs to unite around a common idea, vision or something else that ties them together. Help them to develop and package their services and products. Offer them necessary knowledge in technical support, pricing, marketing, market analysis. Encourage them to do joint marketing, online magazines, mobile application and trade expos. Increased marketing opportunities as a group instead of as fifteen separate companies.*

# COMBINING THEORY-PRACTICE

## LESSONS LEARNED

It has been immensely valuable to have had researchers in the project that has been able to follow the development and give input at the right moment. At the beginning of the project researchers made overviews of gender relations in the various countries that showed the similarities and differences. It gave us an overview of what we had to work with. Later, researchers analysed the concept Quadruple Helix, what the non-profit organisations brought in the process of cluster building. The technical research was based on the entrepreneurs' activities' and built up an application according to their needs. This part was a long time quite unclear what it would be but it was still interesting for entrepreneurs to reflect about their businesses from a technical point of view. At the end the application became very real, considered needed and added value to the project.

### We recommend

*In a clustering should be included researchers of various kinds since the contact between companies and research often leads to innovation. According to the surveys made in the project very small business owners usually do not have a single contact with researchers or specialist and to facilitate such contacts is essential in building clusters. A cluster will be constantly evolving.*

# GENDER MAINSTREAMING

## LESSONS LEARNED

In this project we had with us, gender researchers focused on entrepreneurship and practitioners, the county administrative board gender expert and women resource centre BalticFem. Jointly the project possessed broad expertise on gender equality. The project followed up the entrepreneurs in the tourism industry in three countries from a gender perspective. It was found that the industry was dominated by women, many small self-employed or small businesses, a little cooperation with other companies, no contact with universities, research and government relations were characterized by inspection and regulatory constraints. They had the most contact with regard to compliance with environmental and health administrative regulations, building permit regulations. The municipality rarely asked the entrepreneurs for comments in regards to infrastructure development etc...



## We recommend

*When the cluster is built it should be supported and monitored by local and regional authorities to facilitate construction in every way. It is important that the municipality, county administration and other business support actors such as banks (and in Sweden also organisations as ALMI, Nyföretagarcentrum, and Innovationsbron) and others are just as willing to support women-dominated industries as male-dominated. They should recognize that innovation and development can take place even in the new women-dominated industries and the actors should take women in business seriously and not discriminate against women with regard to loans, land, investment and grants. It is easy that this happen because women owned business often are smaller, more fragmented, and initially do not have the same economic scale. But women want their enterprises to grow to the same extent as men and there are both large and small firms in women-dominated industries. Often the differences between men and women in business disappear after several years of operation.*

## THE TECHNICAL PERSPECTIVE

### LESSONS LEARNED

The task of Åbo Akademi University was to introduce new innovative means to promote entrepreneurs in the archipelago in the three countries. In these areas the electronic infrastructure is often weakly developed so mobile phone applications are a great addition.

A mobile guide for tourists has been developed as part of the project. It is an application that can be downloaded free of charge for smart phones (iPhone, Android) and other type of mobile phones. The application is a program for phones with GPS, which provides information about interesting things around the point where the phone is located. The application will also work without Internet connection as it can be downloaded in advance anywhere in the world. The application can update the information if you allow it (roaming charges can be expensive if you are abroad). The application contains a map that shows preselected categories (i.e. companies/spots of interest such as restaurants, hotels etc.) and the linear distance to them. The map is completed in the application and works without a connection. It is accurate, but not as detailed as for example Google map. The information about companies and activities is located on a server and are updated when needed by the entrepreneurs themselves.

In the application you get information about companies in all three regions so as a user you get information about the whole northern Baltic Sea at once. Thus a common cross border information/marketing platform is created. Developing such an application implicates difficulties. You are getting data from three different databases and combining them in the projects database/server, which is a challenge since all three countries have their own way to range their data. Another challenge is to make the application work

and being up to date without constant Internet connectivity in order to avoid expensive telephone costs when crossing borders.

At the beginning of the project we believed that the application would be ready and up and running during the project period so that it could be put to use and be tested during the project. That was not the case. The task was larger and more complex than anyone realized initially. The application is truly a concrete product of the project and something that will really give entrepreneurs a joint marketing boost when in use.

### **We recommend**

*It always takes longer than you think to develop new things. If you are dependent on getting other actors cooperating before you can start building your product, like in this project where we had to have the cooperation of three different regional tourism organisations before we could really start the actual programming of our application, make sure you have enough time so you can benefit from the product in the actual project. It is always possible to try and get the product sustainable and run by someone else (like a consortium of participants) after the project but then it will be difficult to evaluate the effect of the product within the project period.*

Maybe it's the technical dimension that will be the permanent transnational effect of our clustering?





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