



Deliverable 7.6 Intermediated ACTTiVAtE Sustainability Plan

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Abstract

This paper presents the Intermediated Sustainability Plan for the ACTTiVate project because of analysis, feedback and group workshops inside the consortium. Our analysis indicates a market demand for a cost efficient, scalable and tech-oriented accelerator programmes providing access to SMEs and the technology for the Investors and access to market for the SMEs. The paper advocates for creating a Virtual Multi Cluster Accelerator programme with the open call for application. As this is an intermediated paper, the further work is needed to analyse external stakeholders and examine possibilities of external funding.

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1. THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Among the objectives of ACTTiVate were to lay the foundations for innovative cross-sectoral cooperation and to create the conditions for a sustainable model of innovation for SMEs.

The ACTTiVate project aims to foster cross-sectoral innovation among SME's from four different sectors, Aerospace, Agri-food, Health and ICT allocating 85% of the project budget to SMEs. The project will focus its effort in setting up strategies that allow clusters to lead the engagement of SMEs in activities intended to create new services and products and therefore the generation of new value chains and emerging industries across Europe. Furthermore, ACTTiVate intends to set up strategies to achieve stable growth of cross-sectoral and cross-border innovation beyond the project.

The sustainability strategy aims to ensure that the outcomes of the project remain widely used and available to all stakeholders after the project ends. In this document, we describe our action plan, which will have two main goals: to increase the scope of the outcomes and to leverage the benefits of the created cross-sectoral and cross-border partnerships.

In this sense, both the medium-term involvement of the clusters and the identification of stakeholders and their involvement in the project are essential.

For this, we base our strategy on strong foundations, which are the cross-clusters business network, and a project communication strategy. We will also identify internal and external stakeholders who are crucial to help sustain the project in the long run.

The purpose of this document is to provide a comprehensive overview of the actions to be implemented. This strategy will help ACTTiVate move beyond its lifetime and to be acknowledged as an important stepping-stone towards the establishment of a cross-sector cooperation and entrepreneurship based society that combines strong innovation supply and strong market demand.

2. THE ACTTIVATE PARTNERSHIP

ACTTiVate consortium was created aiming for excellence and complementarities in the contributions of its partners. The expertise provided by the members addresses the topics of the INNOSUP call, and their leadership in their fields allows the consortium to cover a broad range of competencies, in order to achieve the objectives defined in this proposal. That is why ACTTiVate combines experience coordinating previous European projects as well as knowledge in clustering, competitive calls for SMEs, acceleration of innovative projects, training, technological research and impact assessment.

For covering the value chain of the project, and to cover all the aspects related to ACTTiVate goals, each partner is part of the consortium for a specific reason and the role they play in the project, reflected through their WP contribution. In addition, the European Cluster Excellence Initiative awarded the “Silver” Label to the project coordinator (MAC). 13 partners comprise ACTTiVate consortium, 6 of which are representing clusters, 4 are RTDs (Universities or other research organisations), 2 are accelerators/facilitators and 1 is an SME specialized in impact assessment.

The call was launched on the basis that it opened a new line of collaboration between European clusters and institutions, using a very innovative approach. On this basis, ACTTiVate proposed a very innovative project and that even proposes to extend beyond the project a sustainable model that take advantage of the tools, methodologies and experiences accumulated throughout it.

One of the tasks that the coordination team has had to undertake has been to facilitate the integration of different cultures and points of view on the concepts of innovation, trans-sectoral collaboration or creation of regional value. In this sense, the accumulated experience in the negotiation of the points of view of each partner, the creation of an autonomous tool that allows the qualification of each project in a neutral and absent of biases or the process of selecting technologies, counts among the results intangible of greater value of the project. A sustainability plan recommends putting value on this accumulated experience and assessing its future use.

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE STAKEHOLDERS

At the beginning of the project (M8), the list of the potential bidders and stakeholders was created to have a broader view of the innovative companies related to the fields of ACTTiVate technologies based on the existing network of the involved cluster organizations.

In total 257 potential bidders were collected all situated in the poles of ACTTiVate.

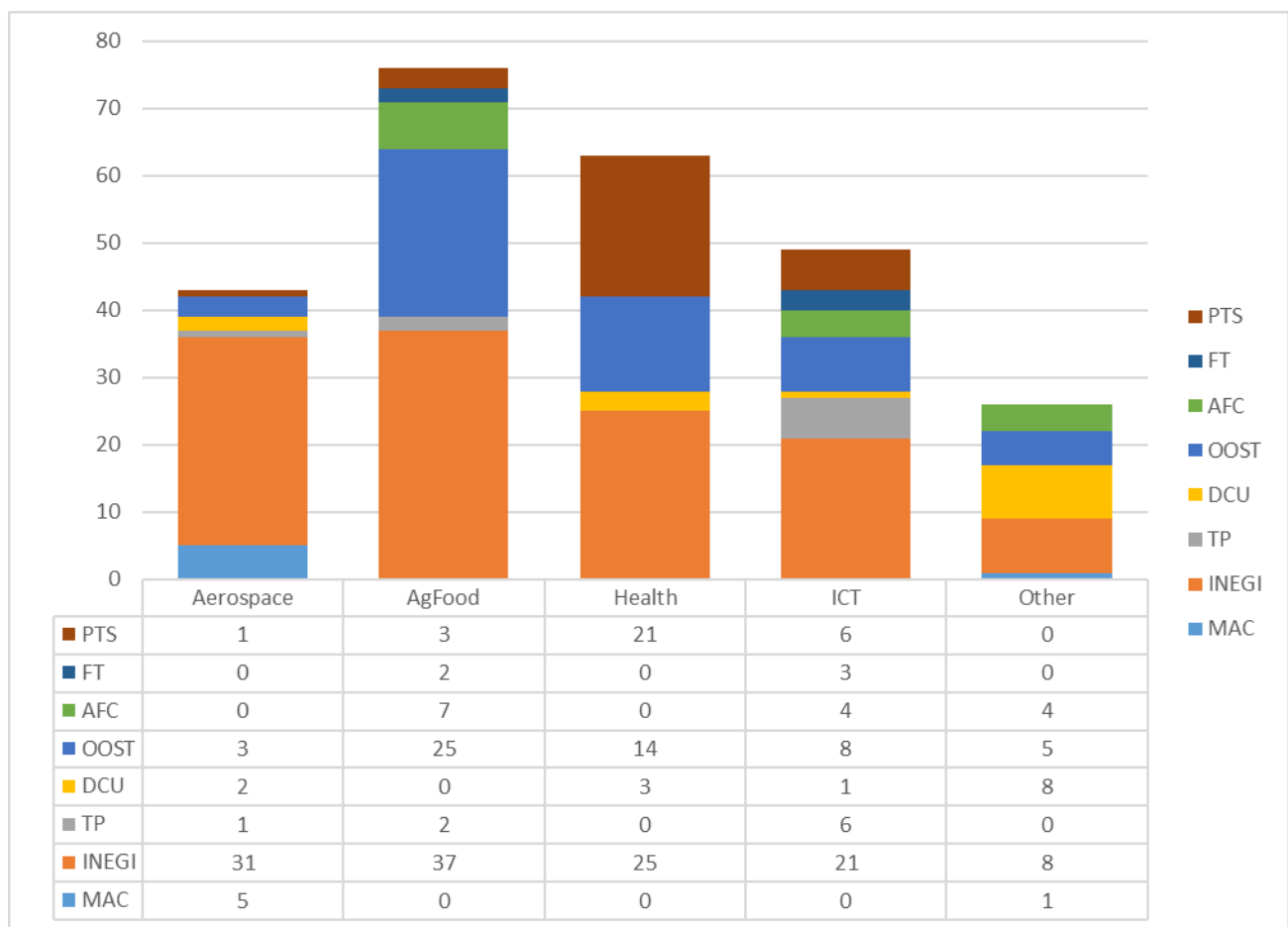


Table 1.1, Distribution of stakeholders per sector per partners.

(ACTTiVate Project Partners - PTS, FT, AFC, OOST, DCU, TP, INEGI, MAC)

But the stakeholder definition for this project seems to be much broader and should be expanded to maintain project sustainability.

4. ACTIVITIES TO DEPLOY SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY

This Sustainability Strategy is an integral and fundamental part of the overall project. It aims to ensure that the outcomes of the project remain widely used and available and that they directly address the main objectives of the project, which are:

- a) to encourage cross-cluster innovation at the SME scale,
- b) to actively exchange of innovations in a given industry context, adapted to other industries to reinforce their utility and functionality.
- c) to look for opportunities to take advantage of technological developments in one of the four sectors chosen and their application in a different one.

Our action plan will be based on following actions:

- a) The first step will be the second stakeholders' analysis (both internal and external) with the emphasis on the funding programmes to leverage the project impact and the financial contribution of the SME's,
- b) Once the stakeholders are mapped, we must consider the screening and the selection of the regional programmes which can be feasible to connect with the ACTTIVate project,
- c) Cluster Collaboration Tool will be upgraded, connected and possibly monetized connecting the needs of both demand and supply sides,
- d) The next step will be internal stakeholders meeting on creating cross-cluster agreement on cooperation which is crucial to binding the project partners with the activities beyond the project scope,
- e) The end of the ACTTIVate project is the beginning of the sustainability actions and the best moment for the 1st X-Cluster¹ Conference under local government support, with the SME's pitch competition as one of the main events on the agenda,
- f) Maintaining the sustainability of the project after the project ends by creating the Virtual Multi-Cluster Accelerator with the continuous call for applications to X-Cluster,

The consideration of the above steps leads us to the following reflections and conclusions:

¹ X-Cluster (cross cluster)

Regarding a) and b): Taking into account the lessons learned, the project team is now more aware and sensitive about the proper and valuable stakeholders. The new screening process would be tested during the B2B Brokerage Events organized by the project partners, matching SMEs with the investors and corporates (external stakeholders). Another very interesting option for approaching external stakeholders is to connect with existing funded EC projects focusing on the same goals as ACTTiVate (Agri-food, Health, ICT, Aerospace) for example EIT Food, EIT Health, EIT Digital, CleanSky2, and European Space Agency. Between M24-M30 we will approach Internal Stakeholders to test possibility of additional funding or future monetization scenarios. In addition, the regional specialized programmes targeting SMEs or Cluster seems to be the best option for joint activities. In any case, the provision of additional resources is highly recommended.

Regarding c): The Cluster Collaboration Tool (CCT) could be one of the assets of the Virtual Multi-Cluster Accelerator after boosting it with extra funding and tweaking it with the training materials that could be prepared by project partners (IESE, EBN), integration with other scientific databases like dialog4projects.eu and some functionality modifications.

Regarding d): The project should use the potential of the network of all partners gathered within clusters and create the coherent strategy and procedure on how to cooperate in the future. The benefit of the cooperation between SMEs and Clusters after ACTTiVate ends is twofold:

1. For the clusters: the fast access to innovative ideas and solutions (IP) that can be implemented in the organization or become an opportunity for investment.
2. For the SMEs: the access to market and directly to the Investors decision makers.

This belongs to the innovation model of the clusters, so it is reasonable to use it and provide them with complementary means and facilities, if possible. In any case, it is recommended to protect the effort made by the clusters in projecting ACTTiVate beyond what was established by the call.

Regarding e): Potential of the project should be exploited and boosted by the joint cooperation of all the participated clusters under one scheme called X-Cluster Cooperation (Cross-Cluster Cooperation) or Virtual Multi-Cluster Accelerator. Connecting the X-Cluster conference with the SMEs pitch competition should be concerned as a benefit both for the SME-Cluster as well as for the invited Clusters Investors, external Corporate Venture Capitalist or the Local Government authorities.

Regarding f): using a very small amount of the Clusters membership fees could be beneficial to create a new or expand the existing role for maintenance of Continuous Call for Applications into the X-Cluster “accelerator programme”. All the submissions will be collected and presented during the X-Cluster pitch competition twice a year. The best ones will be presented and could be rewarded during the X-Cluster yearly conference.

5. FINANCIAL PROJECTIONS OF INNOVATION ECO-SYSTEM GENERATED BY ACTTIVATE

The financial projections generated by the ACTTiVate project on innovation eco-system regarding the sustainability strategy will be measured during the M25-M29. The SMEs survey and the process of collecting data will be designed.

6. THE VALUE OFFERED TO THE SME´S

Many small companies in the EU struggle to internationalise their business even with an open and fair trade framework in place. Only 25% of EU-based small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) export at all and an even smaller portion export beyond the EU. Entrepreneurs understand that having an innovation with little visibility and access to markets does no good. SMEs are now seeing the need for opportunities to tap into existing networks and markets, coaching, exposure and resources, offered by incubation and accelerator programmes.

Better access to global markets and knowledge networks can strengthen SMEs’ contributions, but trade and investment barriers undermine SME participation, and poor physical and ICT infrastructure prevents SMEs from operating efficiently and accessing international markets at competitive costs.

Digitalisation offers new opportunities for SMEs to participate in the global economy, but SMEs are lagging behind in the digital transition and disruptive effects need to be considered. One of the biggest advantages of the ACTTiVate project is giving the SME´S direct access to Cluster Collaboration

Tool (CCT) an ICT solution for facilitating cooperation between ACTTiVate's clusters and technologies offered by the SMEs. It will allow clusters to bring together the information gathered in each pole and region. The platform will include a set of tools and proposals of organizational solutions, including structural, procedural (processes), communication and coordinating components, thus enabling the following:

- Identification and presentation of a technology offer
- Identification of demand for technologies (business needs)
- Exchange of information between potential suppliers and potential recipients (buyers) of technologies,
- Assessing whether the potential buyer is ready to implement and operate the technology (assessment of organizational, technical and personnel readiness, assessment of benefits for the company - the buyer of the technology, including
- improvement of its competitive position, increase of the production scale, cost reduction, entering new markets, expanding the range products manufactured and services, assessment of the scope and extent of needs in respect of support for the company implementing the technology, and others)
- Negotiating the terms of technology transfer
- Tools and mechanisms for supporting technology transfer
- Tools and mechanisms for monitoring the technology transfer process

The Cluster Collaboration Tool (CCT) will be upgraded and disseminated across: SMEs having responded to the ACTTiVate call, especially those receiving support in the form of grants, ACTTiVate Clusters' members, other groups of SMEs, corporates and finance providers (VCs, business angels).

The CCT will focus on three aspects:

- Knowledge database. The CCT will gather all relevant training materials developed during the project and will make them publicly available in a comprehensive way. Besides the materials, interactive tools will be developed for e.g. SMEs / inventors being able to receive, through providing responses to a series of questions, an indicative assessment of their investment readiness level. Links to other sites containing relevant knowledge will be provided.

Connection with other relevant knowledge bases will be analysed and potentially implemented (if possible from technical and required resources points of view).

- Technology demand and offer forum. Providers of technologies and / or technology-based products, like e.g. beneficiaries receiving grants within ACTTiVate, will present their offer. Companies and institutions looking for specific technologies and solutions will be able to display their demand. Contact details and links to additional information, e.g. web pages, will be provided. This information will also be publicly available.
- Investment forum. SMEs / inventors looking for external financing will be able to display their presentations. The presentations will be hidden to the public, and visible only to those VCs / business angels that a particular SME will preselect from the list of potential investors registered in the CCT. Therefore, the SMEs will be determining who and when will be able to see their materials related to an investment proposition. On the other hand, the VCs / business angels registered in the CCT will be able to post their profiles including investment policies and a description of targets they are looking for (in terms e.g. of the value range of the investment, industry, maturity of the technology, geographical coverage, etc.) so that SMEs know who to contact with their particular proposition.

The tool was one of the strategic starting points of the project and one of the most demanding, due to its nature and the need to filter all the experience accumulated in the management of the companies, their projects and the interaction of the different actors. Access to international markets for the SMEs is one of the biggest European Commission concerns and of the biggest advantages and the biggest value offered to the SME's under the ACTTiVate sustainability programme.

7. MILESTONES

The following milestones have been identified for the implementation of the ACTTiVate Sustainability strategy:

MILESTONE DESCRIPTION	ACHIEVEMENT DATE	MEANS OF VERIFICATION
Meetings with the main regional stakeholders organized in each of the ACTTiVate regions	M30 (November 2018)	Minutes of the meetings
Regional funding programs for ACTTiVate SMEs identified	M30 (November 2018)	Report on main regional funding programs of interest for the SMEs
CCT with improved functionalities ready to be presented to ECCP in BRUSSELS	M32 (January 2019)	Presentation of the CCT in Brussels to the ECCP representatives.
X- Cluster conference organized	M34 (March 2019)	Final Conference organized in Brussels.

8. FEASIBILITY PLAN

An ACTTiVate feasibility plan will be delivered in the Final Sustainability Plan (D7.8) to analyse the potential of ACTTiVate to be maintained once the EC grant agreement is finished. It will be based on the following factors:

- a) Technical Factors: The IT tool which will allow to make ACTTiVate sustainable is the CCT. A technical assessment of the CCT will be done.
- b) Legal Factors: An assessment of the legal framework of ACTTiVate will be done to assess the sustainability of the project. The feedback from the EC to the ACTTiVate project will be crucial for the sustainability of the project as well as the feedback from the regional and national authorities.

- c) Operational factors: An assessment of the human resources needed to make ACTTiVate sustainable will be done. The assessment will be based on the partners interest and availability to continue with the project.
- d) Schedule feasibility: An assessment of the main milestones and deadlines to be achieved before ACTTiVate can be considered as sustainable will be done.
- e) Financial feasibility: An assessment of the external financial resources needed to make ACTTiVate sustainable will be done.

9. UNCERTAINTIES TO ANALYZE AND SOLVE

The cluster collaboration tool (CCT) and the methodology used to select projects and SMEs are two powerful tools that offer great potential. However, its possible adaptation to collaboration environments already established as Cluster Collaboration Platform, and others, should be analysed. If this is properly done, the results of ACTTiVate will be integrated into the ordinary flow of tools at a European level, valid both for SMEs and for investors interested in innovation. **In this way the benefits of the project will extend beyond it and will allow the creation of a new self-sustaining ecosystem of innovation.** To make this possible, a dissemination of results oriented towards this purpose must be carried out, including making available to them Regional, National and European funding sources and private funds (the extended ecosystem of stakeholders). This will only be possible if the EC and its officers understand that the potential of ACTTiVate can go beyond the fulfilment of its objectives and value the effort put into action for the creation of a sustainable model. The accumulated experience of the active participation of a large number of actors in the management of a model oriented to the promotion of trans-sectoral innovation is worth taking into account. Over the next few months each of the challenges identified in the creation of this model will be addressed step by step.