NanoSafety Cluster Review
EU Networking and Community Building

Elina Drakvik, Brussels, 10 December 2014

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Context briefly

- Nanosafety - maturing field of research, first papers published in the beginning of 90s.
- Progress even though major breakthroughs are still missing.
- Highly complex research field and takes many years to develop the answers needed
- Increasing number of papers being published, stricter criteria ensuring better quality

Cluster:

- DG RTD initiative, organised around 8 thematic Working Groups + Steering Group (Coordinator + WG chairs).
- Objectives and activities have grown and evolved during the existence of the Cluster

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EU networking and community building

Assigned to Kai Savolainen, WG Chairs, Rainer Hagenbeck, Flemming Cassee

- Developed a short questionnaire to this small group to receive input for the review (questions on achievements, shortcomings, challenges in collaboration, future issues):
- the focus was not on individual projects, but joint Cluster work.
- Received feedback and opinions for the Review (we have reflected those also in the synopsis document): Thank you for your valuable answers and comments!

Community building in FP7 projects

- All collaborative projects can be considered as networking and community building activities
- During FP7 the number of actors and stakeholders in nanosafety community has grown, and an increasing number of projects have been funded (in 50 projects 390 unique organisations of which 135 were enterprise partners)
- By the 50 projects, there have been
  - 28 conferences
  - 68 workshops
  - 32 training events or schools

  A total of 128 networking and community building events

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Joint Cluster work and achievements

- Major achievement so far: **Strategic Research Agenda**
  - evidence-based Cluster contribution for the H2020
- Regulatory Research Roadmap (currently being drafted)
  - Scientific knowledge needed to support health, safety, environment and consumer protection measures
- Closer to the Market Research Roadmap (currently being drafted)
  - proposed actions to strengthen the interface with the industry
- these three complementing research roadmaps provide elaborated views of research community to tackle the current knowledge gaps and needs for action

➢ from individual projects towards a more strategically planned joint research and action & larger community perspective

Collaboration between projects and cross-project talk

- Cluster has brought together researchers to discuss, plan and coordinate the European efforts in the nanosafety field. The Cluster has **promoted networking and sharing of information**.
- The meetings emphasize the 'community' perception, enabling some **inter-disciplinary cross-project talk**.
- The interaction and collaboration between projects **depends a lot on the attitudes of individual persons**. However, the platform provided by the Cluster and the overall push by the Commission is a positive factor.

➢ Even though scientific competition may partially hamper the collaboration efforts between the projects, it seems that collaboration efforts have increased.

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Collaboration with national funding agencies

- The transnational collaboration of national funding agencies and public authorities as well as the harmonization of national and regional funding programmes addressing nanosafety issues has been established by the ERA-NET SIINN but **could be further improved** and enhanced.
- ERA-NET SIINN itself a member of Cluster and all research projects resulting from ERA-NET SIINN, funded by national funding agencies, are asked to participate in NSC.
- However, the **link to purely national activities and projects is missing**.

➢ An idea is to nominate one national contact person per country who participates in the NanoSafety Cluster. This would bridge the gap between national/regional and European projects.

Challenges: Funding and Commitment

- The networking works well only between projects that have funding to travel and to network. It is a real **challenge to reach the community at large** (meaning those who work in nanosafety but do not receive EU funding)
- Cluster does not engage so much the younger generation of scientists; the Nanosafety Forum for Young Scientists this year (2014) was an excellent innovation, and this event should be maintained (to be organized bi-annually)
- The current funding system for Cluster activities is not enough
- There is willingness to participate, but there are other competing obligations, and the time is limited

➢ In general, no clear responsibilities for the Cluster members. **There should be separate funding,** e.g. from the Framework Programme **and a specific budget for meetings, workshops and training events and commitment to deliver "deliverables" in an agreed time frame.**

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Challenges: Organizational issues

- the Working Groups are a good platform for exchanging ideas and networking, but in terms of actually promoting coherent practices and delivering tangible results, there seem to be challenges**: few colleagues are committed to the actual tasks** (lack of time and commitment)
- The assignment of projects to a WG is considered helpful, maybe some **specific tasks could also be assigned to the individual projects**
- **The most optimal frequency, length and structure of the NSC meetings has to be considered**. There is also a need for science-related discussions, e.g. 1-2 short talks, to highlight current research and topical questions to be addressed and discussed.

➢ **Updating the NSC working style**

Challenges: Visibility

- Cluster is well known by now to most scientists in the field, but there seems to be lack of sufficient visibility outside of the community. There is a **need to "advertise" the Cluster work** in a better way to promote best practices
- The **website is a useful resource** that could be used better to highlight the activities and progress
- The Cluster could also consider **publishing more joint papers** or commentaries in journals and provide science-based consensus opinions on nanosafety issues.

Conclusions

- from individual projects towards a more strategically planned joint research and action (roadmaps)
- the Cluster has promoted networking and sharing of information, enabled ‘community’ perception
- perhaps an overall strategy and new ways of working needed to overcome the lack of funding, commitment and visibility - conscious and informed decisions on how to continue (business-as-usual, or other options?)
- need for increasing stakeholder dialogue, especially with industry, national funding agencies and general public
- despite the challenges, there seems to be generally positive spirit among the members of the Cluster and understanding of the benefits of this kind of collaboration

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