



CLUSTER General Assembly 2023
Friday 31st March 2023
Polytechnique Montréal

Minutes of the meeting / Jules Vanpée

Materials of the meeting / <https://cluster.org/intranet> (Password: Erasmus1999!)

1. Opening of the Meeting and Welcome

CLUSTER President Luc Sels opens the meeting at 9 a.m. He mentions the activities of the CLUSTER 2022-2024 presidency.

- Taking *blended mobility* to a higher level of maturity and using CLUSTER as an operational network in this endeavor. We successfully organized the first blended intensive program with more initiatives coming in the future.
- Stimulating & benchmarking of *entrepreneurship* in the engineering education. A symposium on this topic is organized mid-April.
- Expanding the network beyond EU, *collaboration with Africa*. We are currently working on a Erasmus+ project with KTH and partners in Tanzania. The overall idea is to develop specific projects on Challenge Driven Education with teams of EU and African universities.
- The *positioning of CLUSTER* amongst the different alliances and towards the EU, CLUSTER should relate to others such as CESAER.

President Maud Cohen gives a keynote presentation on the 'Polytechnique Montréal - 150 Years of History and All the more reasons to innovate'.

- Look to the future: *staying ahead of the game*
 - o Polytechnique Montréal has a lot of international students from all over the world. It is important to teach the engineers of the future about openness and inclusion.
 - o We need to keep looking into the future, keep innovating and see what we can bring to society.
 - o We do not only need to develop the technical skills of our students, but all skills they might need in society, so we want to encourage entrepreneurship.
- Maximize our impact: *shaping the next generation of engineers*
 - o We must question and adapt our way of teaching, how we train the next generation in sustainable research and engineering. This will require a great deal of creativity and innovation. Polytechnique Montréal will organize an event to discuss these topics on the 15th of May. Through the CLUSTER Student Organization, our network is a force for enriching the next generation.

- Accelerate innovation: *strengthening collaborations*
 - o One of the keys to tackling social and economic transactions is collaboration. Our ability to collaborate between industry and researchers both inside and beyond Canada is essential. The CLUSTER network allows us to bring best practices together.
 - o Collaboration begins with the students. If we want to prepare the next generations to work together and solve societal issues, we wish to expand student mobility.

The agenda for the for the General Assembly Meeting on the 31st of March 2023 and the minutes of the General Assembly on the 2-3th of March 2022 are approved unanimously. All meeting materials were sent to the participants of the meeting and are accessible via the intranet of the CLUSTER website.

2. CLUSTER Finances

Eirini Sarigiannidou presents the actuals of the Grenoble INP – UGA presidency 2020-2022. This is approved by the members of the General Assembly.

The financial plan for the 2022-2024 KU Leuven presidency is presented by Jules Vanpée. The proposed changes regarding the creation of the activity fund and the suspension of meeting funds are approved by the members of the General Assembly.

The proposal regarding the new procedure for the auditing of the CLUSTER Budget is presented by Jules Vanpée. The following procedure is approved by the General Assembly:

- The audit will be done internally
- The auditor will be the next CLUSTER president

3. SEEEP, David Smeulders (TU/e)

David Smeulders presents the 2022 SEEEP High Level Doctoral School on 'Resilient Energy Systems'. The presentation starts with a short recap on doctoral schools and a historical overview. The next doctoral school will take place in august of this year.

Discussion: Regarding collaboration with China, many governments are placing restrictions because of the long-term danger for EU communities if sensitive technology transfers to China. We should indeed be aware of this. However, during the CLUSTER communities and collaborations, on an academic level, we see how China evolves and how they would like to collaborate with the EU.

Therefore, David advises against hampering collaborations because we will lose this insight in the ever changing mindset of China. Furthermore, on the basis of collaboration, sharing technology that is not sensitive but is crucial for society in general such as 'energy transition' is still important.

Conclusions: David advises that at the moment collaboration is still better than shutting China out. Working together leads to successful projects, online helps building knowledge but on-campus or in-person is needed to stimulate communities and friendships. The 8th SEEPP PhD Summer School will be held in China during the month of August

4. Revision of the Internal Regulations and Statutes, Jos Vander Sloten (KU Leuven)

Jos Vander Sloten proposes a revision of the Internal Regulations and Statutes based on the advice of the Steering Committee. The General Assembly approves the revision and motions of the Steering Committee.

Summary: The removal of the distinction between WG, Taskforces, Departments.
Modify the wording to allow internal auditing.
Replacing the list of CLUSTER Members to a description of expected characteristics and requirement of CLUSTER members.
Adjustments to Statutes Appendix I regarding the fee, departments, list.

Decision: In the future we will formally refer to these groups of people working on certain topics as Working Groups.
KU Leuven will implement the changes.

5. Update on current activities

5.1. EUI, Peter Van Puyvelde (KU Leuven)

Peter Van Puyvelde summarizes the topics discussed during the last WG meeting and explains the position of CLUSTER within the University Alliances by utilizing the “Union Model”. The strength of CLUSTER is to move fast much like a “spider in the web”.

The WG motions that expanding the web to other continents and other alliances might be beneficial in the long run. For instance, exploring possible synergies with alliances on the African continent is something other alliances are less actively exploring.

Discussion: Onion or the spider

There is positive feedback on the onion model because it is a good way to visualize not only the position a network takes, but also the role it can play.

Change in CESAER’s secretary-general

Currently both the CLUSTER and CESAER presidency is located in Belgium which creates an unique opportunity. During the next WG EUI meeting there will be an update on the meeting between these 2 presidencies.

The WG explains that the potential positive effect of getting with CESAER is because of the synergy this creates. For instance, CESAER is more of a policy making network with a strong foothold within the politics of Brussels. As a fast and flexible network, CLUSTER can sometimes act as a lab by trying something and feeding the

materials and/or information back to CESAER, who in turn can develop a policy. Interacting with other networks can be beneficial for both parties.

Peter clarifies the motion regarding the 2024 General Assembly. It is not the intention to do the entire event jointly, instead there could be a (half) day to connect with CESAER. (Peter refers to 2022 Steering Committee in Torino and the activity with UNITE! as an example: see 'SC II 2022 agenda' on the CLUSTER intranet)

5.2. CLUSTER & Africa, Jos Vander Sloten (KU Leuven)

The presentation starts with a retiring on why we started the working group on Africa. The preparatory process to submit an Erasmus+ proposal was not completed because of the limited time. The work that was done will be used to create interesting spin-off projects. A new proposal will be prepared simultaneously to respond to the call next year (Spring of 2024).

Besides working on the proposal, this WG has additional initiatives they can focus on. Such as defining and implementing smaller projects using elements from the work packages, linking to other networks, support recruitment of students from Africa.

5.3. Sustainable Development, Jules Vanpée (KU Leuven)

Jules gives a short update on the current and future activities of the WG Sustainable Development. The members of the General Assembly have no remarks (the presentation can be found on the CLUSTER Intranet).

5.4. Mobility, Pascale Conard (KU Leuven)

Pascale Conard presents the WG Mobility' preparations regarding a program on "how to organise a Blended intensive Program". The content for this is still under discussion, the WG wants to focus on the quality and not rush this project so it may serve as an example for future, similar BiP's.

As seen in the presentation, some minimum requirements have already been set as well as a list of possible topics. These still need to be further defined and narrowed down. The BiP is planned for Spring 2024.

The members of the General Assembly react positively to this initiative. They also advice to collaborate with other Working Groups based on the list of possible topics.

5.5. Associated Partners, Ana Pipio (IST)

The update on the WG Associated Members is presented by Ana Pipio (see presentation on the CLUSTER Intranet). Because of the European funding for projects, members were more likely to collaborate with other EU universities. However the landscape is changing and we do not always need to rely on EU funding. We are all partners in the same network, it makes no sense to differentiate between types of members. We will start to talk about what we can do as partners and not what we can do with our partners.

Concerning the African partners, this falls outside the scope of the WG Associated Partners because there is still a lot of road to build.

One of the current tasks is to know how to reach new associated members. A few points were already previously agreed upon by the CLUSTER members.

The WG motions the following procedure to identify which universities we wish to approach:

- List of potential countries (up to 3 per member)
- Present 1st Phase results to GA to be voted
- List of potential partners with added value in the country(ies) validated in 2nd Phase (up to 2 per member)
 - o Criteria – Ranked by quantified criteria (see presentation)
- Present 4th Phase results to GA to be voted

During the 1st Phase some universities included names to the list of potential countries. The two countries that were prominently chosen were South-Korea and Japan. The WG asks approval about South-Korea, POSTECH has an advantage:

- They belong to the country most partners voted for.
- They are mentioned by 2 CLUSTER members.
- They have already shown an interest in joining CLUSTER, they already contacted the presidency.

Motion: The WG suggests to vote on South-Korea, on continuing with the other 2 selected countries and thirdly on inviting POSTECH to present themselves at the next GA. This is a long process and the results when identifying universities and contacting potential partners are unsure. The motion is to work back office in parallel on identifying potential universities in Japan and Singapore, and do another iterative process for the countries.

Decisions: The General Assembly gives their unanimous approval for the procedure, to go forward with South-Korea, to invite POSTECH to present themselves and to start identifying potential partners in Japan and Singapore (a maximum of 2 per country).

5.6. *Communication, Klaus Rümmele (KIT)*

Klaus Rümmele presents the current activities and objectives of the WG Communication. Everyone is asked to think about interesting things to communicate with our CLUSTER members using our CLUSTER Channels.

The second main topic are 'Testimonials'. The WG is looking for a way to involve or inform more people about the network. Two possible formats are a video or a text. The testimonial written by the CSO chair can be used as an example. Not just for students, but also professors or researchers can write testimonials.

Decisions: The WG will develop an easy guideline for the text and video testimonials. Each university will provide one contact person. This can be a representative or a person from the universities' communication team willing to work with us.

5.7. *Entrepreneurship, Yolande Berbers (KU Leuven)*

The chair of the working group explains that they are currently focusing on talking with the students, because the aim of this working group is developing or stimulating the entrepreneurial mindset of students. For that reason they collected presentations concerning the way other universities incorporate entrepreneurship. In order to learn from each other, these presentation are available on the CLUSTER Intranet.

Secondly, there is the Symposium on the 14th and 15th of April which is held in person at KU Leuven. An event that encompasses what the working group is trying to achieve, stimulating an entrepreneurial mindset and sharing best practices/learning from each other.

Motion: Working on the idea of introducing a pilot 'Challenge Based Learning'-activity next academic year with student-teams from each participating CLUSTER partner. The teams would first work locally on a challenge and bring them/their ideas together afterwards.
The working group is trying to find a sustainability-centered challenge that is interesting for all the partners. For example a challenge coming from a municipality.
Additionally, there is a lot of experience in other WG so involving them would be beneficial.

5.8. GAST, Mirko Varano (KTH)

The presentation on the past, current and future activities of GAST is delivered by Mirko Varano. All the links are available in the presentation. (See presentation on the CLUSTER Intranet)

REDEEM focusses on joint programs based on a survey answered by both students and universities. On the website there is a 'survey app' that is freely available to everyone. This is a very useful app and should be promoted. A proposal for REDEEM 3 has been submitted where the focus will be on Joint Bachelor and Doctoral Programs including EU and non-EU parties. So it could also be interesting for our Associated Partners.

E4T was about entrepreneurship education and linking the entrepreneurship ecosystems. All information on this completed project is on the website. The actions were 'linking entrepreneurship ecosystems' and 'set of exchange programs to take entrepreneurship courses' for which Mirko can send the information to interested parties. The website shows that everything is up-to-date and ready to be reactivated if wanted. There are rumors about the 'E4T 2' where the first one focused on looking inside our ecosystem, now it would be the intention to look outside and to consult on the exchange program because the first one was just a pilot.

InComm focusses on how to integrate international communities (MA & PhD) on campus. Institutions can replicate and use the survey. All the tools developed by InComm are available on the website including creating a customer journey. It is a very hands-on and useful tool. The new "InComm 2" proposal is ready to be submitted and will focus on integrating other levels such as visiting professors.

JED or 'Joint European Degree' has 7 CLUSTER partners involved in the proposal and will be coordinated by KU Leuven under UNA Europa.

Motion: GAST group is a support group but also has their own projects. They are not approached as much as they would like, so they want to create a formalized process that aligns with the approach of the different groups.
Projects always have more or less the same universities as coordinator, more partners need to take initiative.
GAST will have a hands-on session in Helsinki where they can further work on the ideas. WG will be contacted beforehand so they can start thinking about it and join the meeting.

The members of the General Assembly have no remarks or objections to either the presentation or the motion.

6. CLUSTER Student Organisation, Simon Beelen (KU Leuven)

The update on the CLUSTER Student Organisation is presented by Simon Beelen (CSO chairperson). Simon gives a small introduction followed by the process on restarting the CSO.

The current challenge is finding successors for the next academic year and keep students active. The problem is that a lot of students do not know CLUSTER and not everyone is active or has experience as a student representative. It is difficult to stay active when the meetings occur once every 3 to 6 months.

Suggested long-term solutions: see presentation.

Suggested short-term solutions: see presentation.

Discussion: A topic that frequently comes to discussion in institutions concerns the role students play in alliances such as CLUSTER. The chairperson has an optimistic view on this if CLUSTER becomes more known to the students. Experience shows that a lot of students, at least at KU Leuven, are interested in having a representative role. However the CSO should remain an advisory board for projects concerning students.

Simon will send the current list of student representatives in the CSO to Jules Vanpée. The list will be shared amongst the members by placing it on the CLUSTER intranet.

The General Assembly agrees with the presented solutions.

7. Presentation – Soft Robotics BiP, Benjamin Gorissen (KU Leuven)

Benjamin Gorissen gives a presentation on the 'Blended Intensive Project' concerning Soft Robotics.

The project that finished 2 weeks ago included both Benjamin (KU Leuven) and David Mélançon (PolyMtl). After the presentation they wish to hear the opinion of the General Assembly whether this BIP can be organized within CLUSTER.

The course, organized within the ATHENS network, was about "becoming a soft robotics expert in one week" and included experts from all around the world. The course was designed in Blended-form and contained an experimental assignment. The "do it yourself"-kit was sent to all participants.

An important aspect of the experimental assignment was the communication between the students via the use of an online forum. The results were influenced by the fact students were going in discussion and shared good practices. The course evaluation in the end was also a positive one.

Benjamin did some research to see if it is possible to organize this within the CLUSTER network. Several CLUSTER partners have some experience in Soft Robotics. Benjamin wants to attract MA-thesis students who are related to the field, so universities with robotics research groups were looked at as well. This is all the partners, so there is a foundation of people who might be interesting to have a course with. Both Benjamin and David are keen to try it with CLUSTER.

Discussion: TU/e mentions several of their researchers who might be interested in joining. They express an intention to join and/or support this initiative.

Elaboration on the feedback of "non experts": Benjamin observed very astute observations and the answers were very relevant.

David points to the impressive excitement he observed from students and their willingness to have longer discussions outside of the planned hours.

The members of the General Assembly have no further remarks and show a positive feedback on the proposal.

8. AOB & Closing

CSC-agreement: In the current situation there are some question regarding the collaboration with China. Specifically issues relating to research and agreements with the China Scholarship Council (CSC). Some EU governments have informed their universities that there will be restrictions and stronger background screenings for Chinees researchers and exchange students. This causes uncertainty and influences certain decisions. The question raised to the members of the General Assembly is: “How do you/does your institution deal with the situation?”

Decision: The majority of the General Assembly agree that many institutions are still in the process of setting up a flowchart, so the presidency will give everyone some time to complete it. The presidency will then send out an email suggesting members to provide the flowchart on how they will deal with the situation. This includes, if possible, a document with rules the government has asked them to follow. Because the information is of a delicate nature, the flowchart does not need to go into detail. Rather, it should clearly illustrate the official steps/the flow the institution follows.

The presidency will collect, consolidate and share this knowledge amongst the CLUSTER institutions requesting feedback on the provided material.

Regarding the Mutual Recognition of Titles, the General Assembly has unanimously **decided to rescind the agreement**. The current presidency will remove it from the website and adjust the documentation on the CLUSTER Intranet

CLUSTER Secretary-General Jos Vander Sloten thanks everyone for their presence and closes the General Assembly at 1 p.m.

Save the date:

- Entrepreneurship Symposium, 14-15 April 2023 – hosted by KU Leuven
- Steering Committee II, 7-8 September 2023 – hosted by Aalto University
- Steering Committee I and General Assembly, 09-12 April 2024 – hosted by KU Leuven