

5th EPSI conference: an exciting forum to promote the EU4SportsClusters Alliance project

On June 6th and 7th 2016, the European Platform for Sports Innovation (EPSI), the Dutch Sports & Technology Cluster and Flanders' Bike Valley, hosted the 5th European Platform for Sport Innovation Conference: *"Crossing borders: innovation for economic and social impact"*. The conference was organised with the support of the Dutch Government, as part of the Dutch EU presidency 2016 and in partnership with Enterprise Europe Network, Easy-Imp, EU4SportsClusters Alliance, European Strategic Cluster Partnership and Sport Innovator. Furthermore it was supported by the Province of Noord-Brabant (NL), the city of Eindhoven (NL) and the province of Limburg (BE).

The two-day event, which was held on the first day at cluster Sports & Technology in Eindhoven (The Netherlands) and on the second day at Flanders' Bike Valley in Paal-Beringen (Belgium), was centred on exploring innovation, opportunities and the identification of challenges within the sport industry. In addition to that, it provided a platform for the exchange of knowledge and best practices between stakeholders.

On the second day, Alex Rivera, cluster manager from INDESCAT and coordinator of EU4SportsClusters Alliance project, delivered a comprehensive presentation of the project. EU4SportsClusters Alliance is a project co-financed by the European Commission under the COSME call 'Cluster Go International and it runs for two years (January 2016 - December 2017). It is the evolution and growth of a sport partnership fostered in 2013 and is now made up of five European partners, namely INDESCAT from Catalonia, Spain; Sports & Technology, The Netherlands; EPSI (European Platform for Sports Innovation), Belgium; Cluster Montagne, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, France; and Flanders' Bike Valley, Belgium.



He clearly explained the main objectives of the project, among which one of the most important is the internationalisation of European firms. The project, in fact, aims at helping SMEs to open up to international markets, thus increasing the opportunities for them to improve their performance, reinforce their turnover and employment growth.

Another major goal of the Alliance is the launch of Joint Internationalisation Groups, made of three to five manufacturers or services. These groups include the EU as a destination, the triathlon Tech platform, winter sport events, smart sport parks in public spaces, sport facilities sustainable in use.

It was also made clear that the Alliance will initially be focusing on two main markets, namely China and Iran, for a number of strategic reasons. Both countries have in fact a considerable market potential. On the one side, Iran is the second largest economy in the Middle East and has increasingly invested in sport infrastructures and in the tourism industry. On the other hand, China is the second largest economy in the world and has showed a greater interest in the fitness industry and in winter sports, as the organisation of 2022 winter Olympic Games in Beijing demonstrates.

The audience positively responded to the presentation, making relevant questions and showing some interest in possibly getting involved in the project.

Finally, thanks to his participation in international sports matchmaking event 'SportTechMatch', Mr Rivera had the chance to discuss the details of the project and the possibility of cooperation with some clusters and sport organisations participating in the EPSI conference.



Overall the 5th EPSI conference was a great success and a unique opportunity for the EU4SportsClusters Alliance to present its objectives and build fruitful collaborations.