

Operational Manual of The ATT e-Cluster

YOUR IDEAS LTD – COORDINATOR

Project Title:	DEVELOPMENT OF ATTICA THEMATIC TOURISM FACILITATOR
Acronym:	THEMATOUR
Deliverable number:	WORK MODULE 1: STAKEHOLDER CLUSTER DESIGN DELIVERABLE: TECHNICAL REPORT OF CHARACTERISTICS OF STAKEHOLDER CHARACTERISTICS AND OPERATION OF THE CLUSTER
Programme:	OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME ATTICA 2014-2020
Thematic area:	1. CULTURE-TOURISM-CULTURAL/CREATIVE INDUSTRIES
Area of intervention:	1.1. DEVELOPMENT OF INNOVATIVE PRODUCTS AND SERVICES, INCLUDING AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCTS AND SERVICES, WITH A FOCUS ON STRENGTHENING AND SUPPORTING BUSINESSES, PROFESSIONALS AND INSTITUTIONS ACTIVE IN THE FIELDS OF CULTURE, TOURISM AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES.
Priority interventions:	1.1.3. DEVELOPMENT AND USE OF INNOVATIVE TOOLS, PRODUCTS, SERVICES AND PROCESSES, TO SUPPORT DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT TOOLS, PRODUCTS AND SERVICES TO SUPPORT SPECIFIC FORMS OF TOURISM (E.G. CRUISE, RELIGIOUS, DIVING AND MARINE TOURISM, RURAL TOURISM, SCIENTIFIC TOURISM, URBAN TOURISM, GASTRONOMIC TOURISM, GOURMET TOURISM, SPORTS TOURISM).
Corporate Structure:	1. COORDINATOR- YOUR IDEAS SYSTEMS BUSINESS KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT LTD 2. RESEARCH CENTRE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PIRAEUS

Work Module 1:
Stakeholder cluster design

Deliverable:
**Technical Report on stakeholder
characteristics and cluster operation**

Contracting Authority:



Date of submission: ---

Το παραδοτέο εκπονήθηκε και υποβλήθηκε στη Γενική Γραμματεία Έρευνας και
Καινοτομίας (ΓΓΕΚ) από την εταιρεία:

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Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση



ΠΕΡΙΦΕΡΕΙΑΚΟ
ΕΠΙΧΕΙΡΗΣΙΑΚΟ
ΠΡΟΓΡΑΜΜΑ
ΑΤΤΙΚΗΣ

Με τη συγχρηματοδότηση της Ελλάδας και της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ
ΠΕΡΙΦΕΡΕΙΑ ΑΤΤΙΚΗΣ



1 Introduction to Business Clusters

In today's swiftly evolving landscape, technological advancements are empowering nimble, small-scale business structures. Yet, the advantage of size, coupled with strategic development policies, remains pivotal in mitigating competitive pressures. This modern era witnesses the emergence of a decentralized capital accumulation regime, elevating formations entrenched in specific geographic locales. As a result, establishing dynamic partnerships among businesses becomes imperative, fostering regional interconnectedness. In contemporary industrial policy, the significance of business networking and clustering amplifies, fostering economies of scale and spectrum. This synergy not only benefits local communities but also bolsters external economies, enhancing market competitiveness.

Recent instances in developed economies showcase accelerated economic growth propelled by interlinked businesses, engaging in informal participations that jointly navigate productive risks. The collaborative environment cultivates continuous information exchange and specialized job offerings. The ripple effects of networking extend beyond businesses, bridging research institutions and local social actors.

The expanding footprint of tourism and its diversified global manifestations offer opportunities for countries, regions, and communities to pursue developmental strides. A cluster epitomizes an advanced form of a business network, entrenched in robust commercial objectives aimed at bolstering sales and profits. It fosters an environment conducive to information and technology exchange, encouraging diverse modes of coordination and collaboration within its confines. Clustering serves as a catalyst enabling participants to harness synergies and capitalize on complementary outputs, ushering in multifaceted benefits. Crucially, clusters play a pivotal role in regional development, augmenting competitiveness, productivity, and the critical mass of local businesses.

Cooperation within tourism-focused clusters unleashes the potential for collective efficiencies, fostering the growth of external companies through entrepreneurial collaboration, specialized productive work, collective infrastructure, and service specialization. Moreover, it empowers collective negotiation with input suppliers, while also fostering innovation in models, production processes, and organizational structures. Collaboration within these networks facilitates the exchange of technical and market information, consortiums for procurement and sales, and joint marketing campaigns, outperforming the isolated actions of individual companies.

The strategic essence of clusters accentuates the utilization of indigenous sources of competitive advantage. Prerequisites for cluster formation encompass structural economic transformations and internal motives compelling economic actors to engage in strategic cluster cooperation.

Identifying the development of a cluster hinges upon understanding relationships among participants, the geographic context, structural aspects, and other defining characteristics. This assessment delineates the strength of interactions, competitive advantages, leadership dynamics, and the economic rationale governing potential cooperative organizations within a cluster's framework.

1.1 Definition of Business Clusters

Beyond the conventional individualistic approach to partnerships prevalent in traditional business forms, the emergence of business clusters signifies a distinct social structure wherein various companies interconnect by leveraging specific resources, knowledge, and shared business endeavors. These clusters foster a network where companies intertwine their strengths, paving the way for mutual growth and innovation.

Studies underscore the potential for small companies tightly woven into interconnected clusters to outshine counterparts of similar sizes. This synergy not only fosters innovation but propels their continuous evolution.

In the contemporary landscape of competition, the pivotal axis isn't merely access to inputs or the sheer scale of individual enterprises; rather, it hinges on productivity. The competitive edge lies in how companies operate, innovate, and deliver, regardless of their industry. Whether in shoes, agriculture, semiconductors, or any sector, productivity hinges on employing sophisticated methodologies, leveraging advanced technologies, and offering unique and high-value products and services. Notably, the deployment of advanced technology and knowledge-intensive strategies transcends industry boundaries, permeating all sectors.

However, the level of sophistication in which companies compete within a specific locale profoundly correlates with the quality of the local business environment. For instance, the presence of a high-quality transportation infrastructure is imperative for companies to employ advanced logistical techniques effectively. Similarly, a competitive edge in sophisticated service provision hinges on a well-educated workforce. Moreover, efficient business operations are contingent upon streamlined regulatory processes and a judicial system adept at swiftly and fairly resolving disputes. While certain elements of the business environment, such as the legal system or corporate tax rates, impact all industries universally, in advanced economies, the crux of competitiveness often resides in cluster-specific factors. These factors serve as the bedrock for microeconomic competition, significantly influencing the success and vitality of businesses within these clusters.

Therefore, the imperative for fostering closer collaborations, gradually evolving into what we term as "business clusters," serves as a potent mechanism for companies to not only surmount the challenges but also for nurturing their continued growth and integrating technological advancements.

At its essence, clustering revolves around the interaction among businesses of similar types, fostering a milieu of healthy competition, robust networking, and collaborative endeavors. The cluster theory accentuates the significance of networks and relationships within the collective framework of a cluster, rather than focusing solely on individual firms. This approach seamlessly aligns with models of innovation and competitiveness, constituting a 'philosophy' anchored in the fundamental principles of integration (of activities) and collaboration (among members) for mutual advancement. The benefits of clustering unfold across three tiers: individual firm level, sector/regional level, and the broader economic spectrum. Within a cluster, each member stands to gain akin to enjoying a greater scale or synergistic union with others, all the while retaining its inherent flexibility.

In line with Porter's perspective, clusters embody geographic concentrations wherein interconnected firms, suppliers, service providers, related entities, and affiliated organizations (e.g., universities, trade groups, etc.) converge within specific fields or geographical zones. This amalgamation fosters an environment ripe for synergy, innovation, and collective growth, amplifying the potential for shared success among the involved entities.

“Clusters promote both competition and cooperation. Rivals compete intensely to win and retain customers. Without vigorous competition, a cluster will fail. Yet there is also cooperation, much of it vertical, involving companies in related industries and local institutions. Competition can coexist with cooperation because they occur on different dimensions and among different players.”

Michael Porter (1998)

Entire product or service providers; suppliers of specialized inputs, components, machinery, and services; financial institutions; and businesses in related industries are considered cluster members, or more accurately, "constituents" (since membership is not required to participate). In addition, businesses in downstream industries—that is, channels or customers—as well as manufacturers of complementary goods, providers of specialized infrastructure, the government, and other organizations that offer specialized education, training, information, research, and technical support—like universities, think tanks, and providers of vocational training—as well as organizations that set standards are frequently included in clusters. Governmental organizations may be regarded as belonging to a cluster if they have a major impact on it. Trade associations and other collective private sector organizations that assist cluster members are also a common feature of many clusters.

Geographical concentrations of related businesses, suppliers, service providers, related businesses, and related organizations in a range of industries or fields are known as clusters. These clusters and regions work together and compete with one another to form a symbiotic ecosystem. Examples of clusters are Silicon Valley, Hollywood, China's Special Economic Zones (SEZs), and Europe's Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Zones. Additionally, they are primarily made up of businesses that operate in various industries within the production process, such as the same supply chain (vertical clusters) or in the same industry (horizontal clusters).

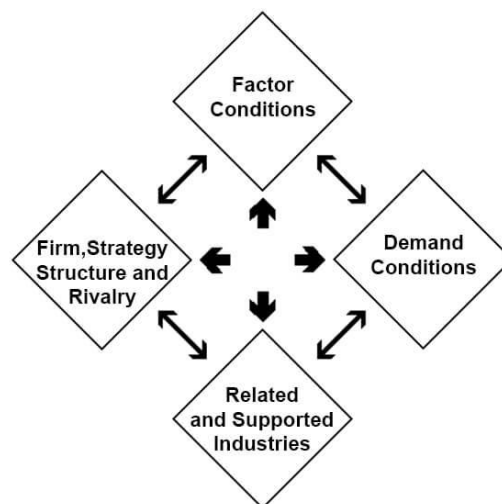
Since close proximity allows for improved company-to-company communication, transition, and interaction, clusters are typically centered in particular geographic areas. A cluster may be formed to cover a wider geographic area, though, if business transactions are unaffected by distance. Nonetheless, clusters rely heavily on their constituents, which may consist of distinct statutory or non-statutory organizations. A cluster's primary goals are to increase

members' capacity and to support the external environment by raising funds and other business-related competencies.

Rosenfeld states that effective business transactions, lively discussion, and a variety of communication strategies are essential for any cluster's ability to function effectively, regardless of size. Furthermore, through the generation of new knowledge and the exchange of existing knowledge among their members, clusters are seen as the engines of innovation.

In the context of a collaboration scheme like this, working with innovators gives businesses a competitive edge because these players can offer specialized knowledge, trained staff, funding, and access to R&D procedures for new product development. According to Porter, businesses can create a competitive advantage by facilitating the four forces—referred to as the "Porter's Diamond"—as seen in the following figure:

Picture 1: Porter's Diamond Model



Source: Porter's diamond model, 1998

The diamond functions as a cluster upgrading and growth engine. In order to improve factor specialization and upgrading as well as increased demand sophistication, a cluster will interact with labor markets and universities if the proper conditions are met (rivalry, cooperation, openness to international markets, lead customers, etc.). As all four drivers start interacting, a larger cluster will form as a result of upstream and downstream linkages. Therefore, for the following reasons, clusters play a significant role in a region's economic growth:

Clusters:

- Provide a region with wealth, exports, jobs, and information
- Act as hubs for the formation of new firms, innovation, entrepreneurship, and skill upgrades
- Are essential for establishing connections and competitive advantage
- Provide the foundation for new products, markets, and technologies
- Around the world, clusters are boosting regional growth through increased livelihoods and employment, which raises the standard of living.

1.1.2 Birth of a cluster

There are explanations for why a cluster appears in a specific area. Advantages of natural factors, such as a specific climate, soil, ore deposit, forest resource, transit route, or port, are mentioned in an explanation. For instance, the geography of production factors (along with market location and transportation costs) readily explains the location of wine clusters and forest/pulp and paper clusters. In today's economy, universities frequently serve as the "brain trust" that fosters the growth of new clusters.

The early creation of a cluster-specific Leadership Group is a crucial first step in the implementation of any clustering initiative. The facilitator takes the lead in getting this group started. It might be very informal at first, but it will change and become more formalized over time. The facilitator must find a group of senior stakeholders who together address a cluster's wider aspects and persuade them of the benefits of joining it. Getting the important players involved in the early stages is not always simple. They might be observing this particular initiative with skepticism, waiting to see if it succeeds or fails. Senior citizens must believe that their time and efforts will be rewarded.

It is frequently necessary to provide early benefits to the stakeholders in order to keep this attention. Senior participants' readiness to show up for the following meeting is a quick and easy way to gauge the success of a clustering initiative; delegation or "no-shows" are red flags.

1.2 Typology of Business Clusters

By composition

After the idea of interorganizational networks was developed in Germany and clusters were put into practice in the UK, many people believe there are four ways to identify a cluster:

- Geographic cluster: as previously mentioned, it is based on a geographical concentration of interconnected businesses, suppliers, and institutions within a particular region or area
- Sectoral clusters: a collection of companies operating within a single commercial sector, such as photonics and marine.
- Horizontal cluster (business-to-business linkages at the level of resource sharing, such as knowledge management)
- A vertical cluster, such as a cluster of supply chains

By type of comparative advantage

Based on various types of knowledge, there are recognized types of business clusters:

- **High-tech clusters**

These high-tech clusters are well-suited to the knowledge economy and usually center around esteemed research institutions and universities such as Silicon Valley, East London Tech City,

or Paris-Saclay. The High-Tech Campus Eindhoven in the Dutch city of Eindhoven is a prime example of a well-known high-tech cluster without a university.

- **Historic know-how-based clusters**

These are founded on more established economic pursuits that have sustained their technological advantage over decades, and in some cases, over several centuries. They are frequently sector-specific. London's role as a financial hub is one example.

- **Factor endowment clusters**

Their creation stems from a potential comparative advantage associated with a particular geographic location. For instance, mountainous, sunny areas are ideal for growing quality grapes, which is why wine production is concentrated in these areas. This is comparable to regions of France like Champagne and Burgundy, Lombardy, Spain, Chile, and California.

- **Low-cost manufacturing clusters**

Usually in specific industries like textiles, electronics, or car manufacturing, these clusters have developed in developing nations. Examples are the electronics clusters in Argentina (Córdoba) and Mexico (Guadalajara, for example). Developed nations are usually the target market for cluster firms. The availability of inexpensive labor and geographic closeness to clients (e.g., Mexico for U.S. clients, Eastern Europe for Western European clients) are two factors that contribute to the emergence of clusters.

- **Knowledge services clusters**

Similar to clusters for low-cost manufacturing, these clusters have mostly developed in developing nations. The availability of less expensive skills and knowledge to meet the growing demand for increasingly commoditized (i.e., standardized, less firm-specific) knowledge services, such as software development, engineering support, and analytical services, has been their defining feature. Shanghai, China; Bangalore, India; and Recife, Brazil are a few examples. In these clusters, multinational corporations have been instrumental in "customizing" business conditions. Creating cooperative relationships with nearby universities to ensure a supply of skilled, yet reasonably priced, engineers is one way to do this.

1.3 The e-clusters

An electronic cluster also known as e-cluster, functions as a virtual space where its members from diverse locations can connect, exchange information, collaborate on projects, and engage in joint initiatives without the need for physical proximity.

Talks between the pertinent parties should be the first step in an e-cluster's preparation. Raising everyone's awareness of this requires interactions, gatherings, electronic communication, etc. The appropriate first step in the preparation phase would be to implement a joint event. Establishing a collective consciousness and identity for an e-cluster is the aim of the first joint event.

Furthermore, a variety of components are required for an e-cluster to develop and flourish, such as demand sophistication, factor upgrading and specialization, developing cooperative and competitive strategies, institutional settings that support innovation, political initiatives, and so forth.

1.4 Organization: structure and systems

Choosing and implementing a formal cluster management structure is crucial, regardless of the form it ultimately takes. The following issues must be decided upon and agreed upon:

- ⇒ cluster governance structures' structure and makeup
- ⇒ Roles and responsibilities in a cluster management: who is in charge of what
- ⇒ cluster management modus operandi: how an e-cluster management structure will deal with cluster members on a daily basis.

Over time, cluster management organizations have been undervalued because Porter's cluster approach overlooked this success factor for various reasons. Today, the creation and growth of cluster management organizations is a major focus of many European cluster programs. In the last few years, there has been ample proof that excellent cluster management is essential to a clusters' successful growth.

Additionally, three crucial factors—the framework conditions, a cluster actor, and a cluster management organization—determine cluster excellence. Its primary responsibility is to forge and maintain a powerful, intentional dynamic among cluster participants and stakeholders.

The following components are essential for cluster management excellence:

- ✓ Strategy for development and its execution
- ✓ Cluster management and structure
- ✓ Sustainable resources - cluster funding and staffing

A cluster's purpose, strategic goals, the 'mix' of services and products offered, market size, competitive environment, shareholder interests, program development, and the need to foster a collaborative and adaptable culture in a region all play a direct influence in a cluster's organizational structure design.

A cluster's organizational structure needs to be adaptable, with few tiers of administration that permit:

- Direct and ongoing communication among executives
- The necessary information flow control
- Control of the activities

The following "classic" structure with its basic yet unique elements are advised:

1. General Assembly Committee on Membership
2. The Board of Directors
3. Thematic / Working Groups

1.4.1 Change Management

Often, behavioral changes alone—that is, changes in attitude—are adequate for adaptation. Organizational characteristics such as operation and structure are closely related and frequently work together, or at least, their interaction is undeniable. Because the nature of change and its process are the same, it is inappropriate to distinguish between changes that impact structure and function. The traditional management approach assumes that managers will be involved in organizational change since it can be seen as "directed change."

Bakacsi (2001) asserts that change is a manageable process that can be anticipated. It can be difficult to identify a guided organizational change when it is not initiated by management.

A cluster's or organization's lifespan can affect a wide range of variables, including human resources, operational profile, organizational structure, strategy, hierarchy, and other elements.

2. The ATT e-Cluster's Developmental phases

2.1 Definition of the ATT e-Cluster

The Attica Thematic Tourism (ATT) e-Cluster was created to enhance collaboration among tourism-related entities based in the Region of Attica. The ATT e-Cluster focuses on thematic tourism, which involves offering specialized or niche travel experiences that cater to specific interests or themes such as cultural tourism, religious tourism, gastronomy, ecotourism, etc.

The core focus of the ATT e-Cluster is to bolster, coordinate, and market tourism-oriented enterprises registered within the geographic confines of Attica.

The foundation of the ATT e-Cluster lies in the geographic cluster model, aiming to optimize, organize, and elevate businesses in the Region of Attica associated with touristic activities.

However, the ATT e-Cluster belongs also to the Knowledge services clusters type. It aims to focus on industries that rely heavily on intellectual capital, expertise, and specialized knowledge to deliver services.

2.2 Preparation of establishment of the ATT e-Cluster

Develop goals and strategies

The initiation of the ATT e-Cluster signifies a crucial step in fostering collaboration among diverse providers and advancing the Region of Attica's tourism landscape. This strategic collaboration aims to amalgamate varied stakeholders, fostering an environment primed to uplift and innovate the Region of Attica's thematic tourism offerings.

Strategic Objectives:

1. Enhancing Competitiveness and Uniqueness:

The primary aspiration of the ATT e-Cluster lies in elevating the competitive edge of its constituent members. The focal point revolves around fostering a culture of excellence, not merely to meet but to surpass industry standards. Through strategic collaborations and collective ingenuity, the aim is to create distinctive thematic tourism offerings that stand out in a global context.

2. Catalyzing Innovation and Entrepreneurship:

Innovation is the cornerstone upon which the ATT e-Cluster is built. The ATT e-Cluster serves as a nurturing ground for innovation, cultivating an environment that encourages trailblazing ideas and entrepreneurial ventures across a spectrum of thematic sectors. By fostering an ecosystem that values and supports innovation, the ATT e-Cluster aims to foster groundbreaking initiatives and propel the Region of Attica forward as a hub for inventive tourism experiences.

3. Fostering Collaborative Networks and Knowledge Exchange:

The ATT e-Cluster emphasizes the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and best practices among its members. It aims to foster a collaborative network, facilitating robust interactions and partnerships. This collaborative ethos is integral, ensuring that insights, innovations, and expertise flow freely, elevating the collective potential and furthering the growth of each participant.

4. Curating Authentic and Diverse Experiences:

Essential to the ATT e-Cluster's vision is the curation of authentic, diverse, and immersive thematic experiences. Embracing the Region of Attica's rich cultural tapestry, heritage, and natural splendor, ATT e-Cluster's endeavors to showcase a kaleidoscope of experiences that resonate with visitors, offering them an unparalleled journey.

Anticipated Outcomes:

1. Elevated Visitor Experience and Engagement:

The primary focus remains on enriching visitor experiences by curating diverse and immersive thematic offerings. This initiative aims to captivate and engage visitors, leaving an indelible impression that encourages return visits and positive word-of-mouth recommendations.

2. Economic Advancement and Sustainability:

Beyond the immediate sphere of tourism, the ATT e-Cluster aims to contribute significantly to the economic growth of Attica. By fostering a vibrant tourism sector, it aspires to create a ripple effect that stimulates economic activities and sustains growth across related industries and local communities.

3. Innovative Ecosystem and Entrepreneurial Culture:

The establishment of the ATT e-Cluster aims to cultivate an innovative ecosystem and nurture a culture of entrepreneurship. By supporting startups and fostering a spirit of innovation, the ATT e-Cluster envisions fostering a dynamic environment conducive to groundbreaking initiatives and sustainable growth.

4. Preservation and Promotion of Cultural Heritage:

At the core of its endeavors lies the commitment to preserving and promoting the Region of Attica's cultural heritage. The ATT e-Cluster seeks to showcase the Region of Attica cultural richness, ensuring that thematic tourism offerings align with authenticity while showcasing its unique cultural identity.

This strategic roadmap signifies a transformative phase for thematic tourism in the Region of Attica, symbolizing a collective endeavor to redefine and elevate its tourism landscape. The goal of the upcoming ATT e-Cluster is to establish the Region of Attica as a leader in the field of thematic tourism experiences by fostering innovation and excellence, stimulating sustainable growth, and enhancing cultural enrichment.

2.3 Growth of the ATT e-Cluster

A developing e-cluster made up of numerous small businesses that collaborate and compete to make the area more appealing is common. If an e-cluster is to grow, it is frequently necessary for the more general social capital in the area to increase with cluster-specific networks.

Regarding the ATT e-Cluster, it was established to encourage the sharing of best practices and provide access to R&D initiatives and innovations for the benefit of local businesses seeking to improve their competitiveness and capitalize on human capital.

In order to achieve this, the ATT e-Cluster's members will encompass every link in the thematic tourism value chain, including travel agencies, excursion companies, hotels and restaurants, transportation, individual guides, wedding planners, educational, sports and wellness centers and more. Specifically speaking, the following sub-steps can be used to standardize the process suitable for the creation and growth of the ATT e-Cluster:

Step 1: Consolidating potential ATT e-Cluster members' confidence by creating a common understanding and set of goals.

First things first: identifying the participating companies and prepare the ground. To achieve this, it is required to outline the benefits that companies will receive from joining the ATT e-Cluster. A member's ability to communicate, exchange ideas, work well together, and undertake projects together all depend on the other members' ability to build confidence in one another. It is vital to carry out particular actions that stimulate information sharing and the growth of an advanced knowledge network in order to build confidence. The difficulty of this task alone stems from the need to address issues like how much information should be shared with network members, given that they are both associates and competitors of the network. It's crucial to keep up the confidence in this initial step so it's important to refrain from using members' ideas for personal gain if they could harm other members.

Step 2: Development of strategic e-cluster links

Formalizing linkages, also known as standard collaboration links, or identifying and creating strategic links, is the next stage in the ATT e-Cluster development process. This step can basically be accomplished by identifying (competence auditing) the Region of Attica's competitive advantage, the members of the ATT e-Cluster's skills, and the weaknesses. This system can assist in resolving issues as they emerge and assist prospective partners in more swiftly and efficiently identifying possible collaborations in fields like the creation of new thematic tourism activities.

Step 3: Create a plan and a vision

Developing a shared vision, goal, and plan is the aim. Both the current state of affairs and the demands of the market going forward must be taken into consideration. In the early stages of the ATT e-Cluster's development, the vision may be quite broad; however, as the ATT e-Cluster gains a better understanding of its competitive advantage, the vision may gradually narrow and become more targeted.

Step 4: e-Cluster implementation

The next stage after developing the ATT e-Cluster's strategy and vision is implementation. To this aim, an initiative action plan created by the ATT e-Cluster members must be created. There are essentially two categories into which these actions fall: 1) Measures taken to enhance the ATT e-Cluster's dynamics 2) Measures intended to enhance the ATT e-Cluster's operating environment outside of it.

With the signature of the applicable founding statute, the cooperation, the framework of the Agreement between the members of the network regarding its purposes, the rules of operation, the specifications-criteria for joining the network, the grid of actions, etc., are sealed.

2.4 Organization of the ATT e-Cluster

The ATT e-Cluster's organizational structure should be flexible, have few levels of management and should enable direct and continuous communication among executives, while ensuring necessary control over information flow and activities.

2.4.1 The General Assembly of members

All members make up the General Assembly. The General Assembly plays an active role in matters related to the establishment and administration of the ATT e-Cluster, including the alteration of the organization goals, the involvement of the organization in other clusters, and the plan year (action plan). The General Assembly, convened annually by the Executive Board for regular meetings, focuses on discussions related to organizational matters beyond the scope of day-to-day management functions.

Additionally, the General Assembly is called extraordinary sessions whenever at least one-third of the partners request it in writing, with a justification provided, and within one month of the request being submitted to the Executive Board.

2.4.2 The Executive Board

The Executive Board is the highest authority within the organization, and it comprises three individuals selected by Your Ideas Ltd. They are vested with the responsibility and authority to execute all managerial and administrative actions concerning the organization's operations and assets, aligned with its objectives and activities. Acting as representatives of the organization, they are legally bound by their signature using the corporate name in engagements with third parties, be they individuals or entities, domestic or foreign, under various legal jurisdictions, including national and international courts, financial institutions, and organizations.

3 ATT e-Cluster operation stage

3.1 Developing and offering ATT e-Cluster's services

Participants within the ATT e-Cluster, despite operating as individual entities, align toward a common purpose. Their diverse sizes and dynamics offer multifaceted support, each contributing uniquely based on their capacities. Encouragingly, the most proactive and dynamic businesses should lead, stepping forward to actively endorse and practically support this venture, harnessing their business culture, media influence, and human resources. Access to public support (regional/national programs, innovation vouchers, etc.)

The suite of services offered by the ATT e-Cluster encompasses:

- **Access to Public Support:** Facilitating access to regional or national programs, innovation vouchers, and similar resources that can bolster the ATT e-Cluster participants' endeavors.
- **Facilitation of Collaboration:** Creating an environment that nurtures collaboration among members, fostering synergies and cooperative efforts.

- **Trend-Scouting for Innovative Projects:** Identifying and sharing trends and ideas for innovative projects/products, inspiring participants towards novel and progressive initiatives.
- **Support for Knowledge Transfer:** Facilitating the exchange and dissemination of knowledge among the ATT e-Cluster members, enabling the flow of valuable insights and expertise.
- **Innovation Management and Support:** Offering guidance and support throughout innovation processes, both internally and externally, to drive transformative ideas within the ATT e-Cluster.
- **Joint Educational Activities:** Promoting events such as conferences, study tours, workshops, and fairs to encourage shared learning experiences among the ATT e-Cluster members.

In this context, the following strategy suggestions could lead to the further development of the ATT e-Cluster:

1. **Target Market Orientation:** Encouraging participating firms to align their focus with key target markets, leveraging the ATT e-Cluster's proximity to these significant markets for increased effectiveness.
2. **Cultivating a Collaborative Business Culture:** Fostering a cohesive and trusting business culture among participants, strengthening relationships to foster collaborative efforts.
3. **Promoting Original Initiatives:** Encouraging the inception of innovative action plans and strategies within the ATT e-Cluster, recognizing that these initiatives are fundamental to the success of collaborative actions.
4. **Setting Clear Goals and Innovative Action Methods:** Formulating distinct and achievable goals while employing innovative collective action methods to drive the process effectively.

These strategies aim to consolidate the ATT e-Cluster's offerings, empower collaboration, and infuse innovation into its core, propelling it toward sustained growth and success.

Key Recommendations for the ATT e-Cluster development

Comprehensive Destination Audit:

Conduct a thorough audit of tangible and intangible assets to inspire the creation of authentic and rich tourism experiences.

Addressing Stakeholder 'Buy-In' Barriers:

Overcome obstacles to stakeholder engagement, fostering a collaborative environment for generating new and innovative tourism ideas.

Engagement of Key Community Leaders:

Involve influential community figures to infuse local authenticity into tourism offerings, appealing to travelers seeking unique thematic experiences.

Facilitating Stakeholder Collaboration through Public Meetings:

Organize inclusive forums to encourage dialogue among stakeholders, potentially leading to the identification of niche interests and the creation of tailored tourism products.

Establishment of Effective Communication Channels and Policy Tools:

Develop streamlined communication channels and policies to expedite decision-making and the introduction of new tourism offerings.

Database Management for Stakeholder Inclusion:

Maintain a comprehensive stakeholder database for inclusive engagement, ensuring diverse perspectives contribute to product ideation.

Encourage Innovative Product Development Initiatives:

Establish a dedicated platform or initiative that fosters a culture of innovation through activities like brainstorming sessions or innovation challenges. This initiative aims to inspire the conceptualization of unique tourism products aligned with emerging market preferences.

3.2 Managing ATT e-Cluster Projects and Processes

The ATT e-Cluster's management team is composed of the Executive Board. The ATT e-Cluster needs administration to set policies, create a vision and strategy, supervise the implementation of the action plan, and safeguard the interests of the business partners that comprise the ATT e-Cluster. This is necessary not only in the early phases of the ATT e-Cluster's development but also during its continuous operations.

Key Recommendations for the ATT e-Cluster Operation

-  Keep your action plan brief and focused on a single task.
-  Hold regular meetings.
-  Communicate often.
-  Create thematic groups based on the skills and experiences of the members.
-  Establish and fulfill specific training needs in the areas of marketing (benchmarking, research, marketing planning, and promotions) and digital marketing (website development, social media, and geocoding). Creation of Tourism Products (such as scoping, project management, etc.).
-  Opportunities for upskilling and pragmatism are crucial for training and mentorship programs.
-  Members of the ATT e-Cluster should let people in the community know about their plans and activities in order to increase local support and avoid conflict with other possible or existing groups in the area.
-  Compare the area with similar features found in other, more developed areas.
-  Inform stakeholders on a regular basis about the progress of the ATT e-Cluster activities and the overall strategy.

3.3 Attracting and Binding Partners

The ATT e-Cluster's primary goal is to maximize high-quality participation in order to create a vibrant, cooperative group whose members will accept and support a shared plan for promoting thematical tourism in Greece.

In order to prevent them from serving as a barrier or disincentive for stakeholders to integrate into the ATT e-Cluster, a framework of loose requirements is intended to be established. As a result, a limited set of straightforward eligibility requirements is implemented, allowing even the smallest and presumably "weaker" businesses to take part in this initiative, profit from it, and, to the greatest extent feasible, support the ATT e-Cluster's vision and goals.

Companies of all sizes are eligible to join the ATT e-Cluster. However, in order to do so, a business must operate legally then and adhere to the ATT e-Cluster Statutes, which serve as essential guidelines for Greek entities and businesses seeking membership in the ATT e-Cluster.

It is imperative to guarantee that the corporate identity of the ATT e-Cluster is upheld in all aspects of its public relations. Here are a few instances:

- Digital media and presentation materials for the ATT cluster
- Correspondence forms (letters, faxes, and emails)
- Conference speeches and technical journal articles
- The way that written materials are organized
- The way that ATT e-Cluster members and staff interact with outsiders

In addition, a minimal set of straightforward requirements for participation is set in order to allow even the smaller and ostensibly "weaker" businesses to take advantage of this opportunity, profit from it, and, to the greatest extent feasible, support the objectives and vision of the ATT e-Cluster.

A badge is given to participants who satisfy the required criteria, certifying and indicating their participation in the ATT e-Cluster. In this manner, it is simple to identify which ATT e-Cluster member is providing which goods and services. The primary goal is to turn the badge into an effective marketing tool that will help the ATT e-Cluster and its participants get more exposure.

The sectors (groups of businesses) that are essential to the ATT e-Cluster's smooth operation and the successful implementation of the interrelationships required to form a high-quality final tourism product should be included in the ATT e-Cluster's structure.

Members of the ATT e-Cluster may include:

- a) Businesses in the project areas that derive at least 50% of their revenue from the tourism sector
- b) Government agencies
- c) Associations and other relevant communities

d) Universities

In particular, members of the ATT e-Cluster may be service providers from the following categories:

1. Cultural Tourism Providers:

- Local Heritage Centers: Institutions preserving and showcasing local history and traditions.
- Community-led Cultural Tours: Guided tours led by residents sharing cultural insights.
- Historians and Historical Reenactment Groups: Organizations recreating historical events for educational purposes.
- Cultural Festivals Organizers: Groups arranging festivals celebrating local heritage, music, and food.
- Cultural Exchange Programs: Initiatives promoting cultural exchange between communities or countries.

2. Wedding Tourism Providers:

- Wedding Photography & Videography Services: Professionals capturing moments during ceremonies and celebrations.
- Wedding Venue Managers & Planners: Specialists organizing ceremonies in unique locations.
- Destination Wedding Resorts: Hotels and resorts catering specifically to destination weddings.
- Wedding Entertainment Providers: DJs, musicians, or performers for wedding events.
- Bridal Wear Designers & Boutiques: Designers offering specialized bridal attire and accessories.

3. Religious Tourism Providers:

- Pilgrimage Tour Guides: Experts leading tours to sacred sites and explaining religious significance.
- Religious Festivals & Ceremonies: Events open to visitors showcasing rituals and religious traditions.
- Shrine Keepers & Caretakers: Individuals managing and providing information at religious shrines or temples.

4. Health Tourism Providers:

- Wellness Retreat Centers: Facilities providing holistic treatments, relaxation programs, and wellness therapies.
- Health Clinics & Spas: Centers combining medical treatments with spa and wellness services.

- **Yoga & Meditation Centers:** Places offering yoga retreats, meditation sessions, and mindfulness programs.
- **Health Tourism Agencies:** Companies specializing in medical travel arrangements and consultations.
- **Holistic Wellness Coaches:** Individuals guiding personalized wellness programs and lifestyle changes.

5. Rural Tourism Providers:

- **Farm Stays & Agritourism:** Farms offering accommodations and agricultural experiences.
- **Rural Adventure Guides:** Local experts guiding outdoor activities in rural areas.
- **Rural Artisans & Craftspeople:** Artisans offering workshops and products showcasing local crafts.

6. Sports Tourism Providers:

- **Professionals:** Guides and instructors for Water activities, Adventure and Extreme Sports.
- **Sports Events Management Companies:** Organizers arranging sports tournaments and events.
- **Sports Training Camps:** Facilities offering specialized training programs for various sports.
- **Sports Fan Tours:** Tours and packages designed for fans to attend major sporting events.
- **Sports Academies & Schools:** Institutions providing coaching and development programs for athletes.
- **Sports Equipment Manufacturers:** Companies producing sports gear and equipment for athletes.

7. Educational Tourism Providers:

- **Companies specializing in organizing educational tours** for schools, universities, or specialized interest groups.
- **Museums offering educational programs, workshops, and guided tours** focused on history, science, art, or specific subjects.
- **Institutions providing language immersion programs, language classes, and cultural exchange opportunities.**

8. Urban Tourism Providers:

- **City Tour Operators:** Companies specializing in urban tours, showcasing the diverse facets of a city, including historical landmarks, cultural hotspots, iconic architecture, and local neighborhoods.

- Cultural Institutions: Museums, galleries, and cultural centers offering exhibitions, guided tours, and workshops on art, history, science, and specialized subjects, showcasing the city's cultural heritage.
- Language and Cultural Exchange Programs: Institutions providing language immersion courses, cultural exchange programs, and workshops offering tourists opportunities to engage with local traditions, languages, and customs.
- Virtual Platforms for Urban Exploration: Online platforms offering virtual city tours, interactive maps, and curated content providing tourists with insights into the city's attractions.

9. Tourism Service Providers:

Accommodation Providers:

- Hotels, boutique hotels, and accommodations catering to thematic experiences, committed to offering quality services aligned with the thematic tourism concept.
- Alternative lodging options emphasizing thematic experiences, such as themed guesthouses, rentals & camping sites.

Transportation Providers:

- Airports, ports, bus terminals, and train stations focused on ensuring safe, efficient, and reliable transportation services for thematic tourists.

Food Services:

- Restaurants, eateries, and culinary experiences emphasizing thematic gastronomy or local specialties, ensuring quality and safety standards in food offerings.
- Specialty food outlets offering thematic cuisines or experiences tied to the Region of Attica's cultural aspects.

Insurance Services:

- Specialized insurance providers offering tailored coverage for thematic tourism experiences, including policies for adventure activities, cultural tours, and niche travel experiences.

Tour Operators and Travel Agencies:

- Tour operators and travel agencies specializing in thematic experiences, ensuring safe and curated thematic tourism packages, emphasizing risk mitigation and safety measures.

Public Bodies and Associations:

- Regional and local public bodies involved in tourism promotion, regulation, and safety assurance within the thematic tourism context.
- Associations representing thematic tourism interests, contributing expertise and advocacy for safety and risk management.

Furthermore, without having to pay any capital or cast a vote at the General Assembly,

stakeholders, local development agencies, educational and research institutions pertaining to tourism are all eligible to join the ATT e-Cluster.

Everyone listed above is qualified to join the ATT e-Cluster as a member with full voting rights.

Membership expires upon:

- Death (or, in the case of a legal entity, loss of legal personality)
- Cancellation
- Exclusion. A member who flagrantly violates their membership obligations or engages in dishonest behavior may be removed from the ATT e-Cluster by the Executive Board. Any grounds for expulsion must be properly acknowledged in the related report and cannot be decided without a hearing for the parties involved.
- Voluntarily leaving. The Executive Board must be notified in writing of a voluntary resignation.

3.4 ATT e-Cluster and Innovation

It is well known that innovation is essential to business success in order to guarantee competitiveness, growth, and sustainability. In addition to the previously listed service providers, the ATTT e-Cluster accepts a wide range of stakeholders, from scientists and governments to business executives, marketing specialists, and consumers, which are included in the broad concept of innovation. Due to the diversity of individuals involved, different people have different perspectives on innovation, which results in different ways that people understand the concept.

In order for the ATT e-Cluster to play two roles, facilitating the exchange of innovation and know-how and acting as multipliers of dissemination, it is imperative that networking be developed with a broad range of organizations, including professional associations, Chambers of Commerce and Industry and other trade organizations, Regional Development Agencies, Universities, etc.

3.5 Successfully Informing and Networking ATT e-Cluster Partners

As clusters become more specialized, the knowledge and relationships among the businesses within the ATT e-Cluster, which are essential for growth, will not be limited to it. Despite their initial appearance as competitors, complementary competencies are often found upon closer inspection, opening the door to potential cluster-to-cluster (C2C) collaboration.

European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP)

The European Cluster Collaboration Platform (<https://www.clustercollaboration.eu>) offers networking opportunities and high-quality online information to clusters (organizations and

members) that seek to boost performance and competitiveness by promoting cross-border and international cooperation. This feature-rich online portal was created with the intention of fostering communication between cluster members from related or unrelated industries. Encouraging cooperation within and between cluster organizations and members—that is, businesses, research and development facilities, and other stakeholders—is the ultimate objective.

As a tool offered by DG Enterprise & Industry to help cluster organizations actively participate in the global cluster arena, this platform is funded by the Competitiveness and Innovation Program and integrated into the European Cluster Excellence Initiative. This can be accomplished in a number of ways, such as by showcasing their activities and members in a polished manner, engaging in lively online or in-person conversations with peers, or gaining access to organized cluster data and applying it to improve.

The ECCP platform strives for quality through the high caliber of information users provide in their profiles, contributions, postings, and level of usage, as well as through their feedback regarding how the platform could better meet their stated needs. This user-driven tool is the European Cluster Collaboration Platform. The findings of the largest survey conducted in Europe among cluster organizations and cluster policy makers served as the foundation for its development.

In-depth feedback from 420 cluster players about what they expected from an online portal of this kind was taken into account during the technical development. ECCP arranges agreements and collaborations with significant non-European markets, as well as industry cluster and small-business matchmaking trips to significant external markets. In order to aid in the internationalization of clusters and the member companies within them, ECCP also supports European Cluster Consortia and European Strategic Cluster Partnerships (ESCP).

The ATT e-Cluster intends to join the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP) to foster collaboration and networking within the European cluster community. It aims to leverage this platform for enhanced visibility and opportunities for partnerships in the thematic tourism sector.

Enterprise Europe Network

One important tool in the EU's plan to increase growth and employment is the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN). The EEN assists SMEs in taking advantage of business opportunities within and outside of the EU. It provides a number of free services, such as assistance with internationalization. A business that wants to grow internationally needs reliable and capable partners. EEN assists businesses in locating them. Companies can meet possible business partners in person at EEN matchmaking events, and the EEN business database has thousands of company profiles. EEN maintains one of the largest business cooperation databases in the world, adding hundreds of new companies profiles every week. EEN adds a cooperation offer or request from a company that contacts the Network to the database. After that, the client company will get on businesses that are looking to do cross-border business.

Matchmaking events are arranged by EEN all over Europe so that businesses can meet prospective partners face-to-face. EEN helps businesses prepare for meetings by scheduling them. International fairs are a common venue for matchmaking events, which helps keep travel and lodging expenses low. Whether a company under EEN's clientele discovers new business partners at an event or through the EEN database, EEN can offer advice and support to the client right through to closing the deal.

The ATT e-Cluster intends to utilize the EEN for its development.

4. Improving Organizational Dynamics of the ATT e-Cluster

4.1 Monitoring and Evaluation

When executed properly, at the appropriate time and location, monitoring and evaluation are two of the most critical components in guaranteeing the success of numerous units, projects, or programs.

Monitoring is the ongoing evaluation of a unit, project, or program in respect to the predetermined timeline for implementation. It is also a useful management tool that, when utilized appropriately, ought to offer ongoing feedback on how the project is being implemented/operated. It should also help identify potential obstacles and successes so that decisions can be made quickly. The processes involved in making sure the ATT e-Cluster runs smoothly are monitoring and control.

They are meant to spot potential problems, malfunctions, deviations from the ATT e-Cluster's operating conditions, and general non-compliance, and then take the appropriate corrective action. In this sense, control and monitoring are complementary and mutually reinforcing actions that allow one to verify whether the established plans are implemented logically in accordance with the intended process.

In this sense, monitoring refers to the coordinated efforts undertaken to examine, investigate, and collect information about the ATT e-Cluster, in order to determine its state in accordance with its requirements.

The ATT e-Cluster needs to be tracked in order to:

- evaluate how well stakeholders comprehend the ATT e-Cluster's progress
- reduce the likelihood that e-Cluster activities won't succeed
- encourage methodical, expert management and
- evaluate how well implementation is going.

The process of determining the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact of activities considering a project or program's performance is known as evaluation. It is a methodical and objective process that focuses on the analysis of the steps taken to achieve the stated objectives.

An e-cluster's evaluation is a review of a cluster's performance, security, management, and procedures in order to find areas for improvement and obtain a complete picture of its current state.

Purpose of the Evaluation

The following should be the ATT e-Cluster's main areas of evaluation:

- To assess the extent to which the ATT e-Cluster objectives have been met.
- To ascertain and recognize the issues related to action planning and execution.
- To produce data that enables cumulative learning, which eventually helps with better program design, enhanced administration, and more accurate impact assessment. "Lessons learned" is the key phrase in this scenario.
- To support the rewording of the ATT e-Cluster's goals, plans, and policies.

Types of evaluation

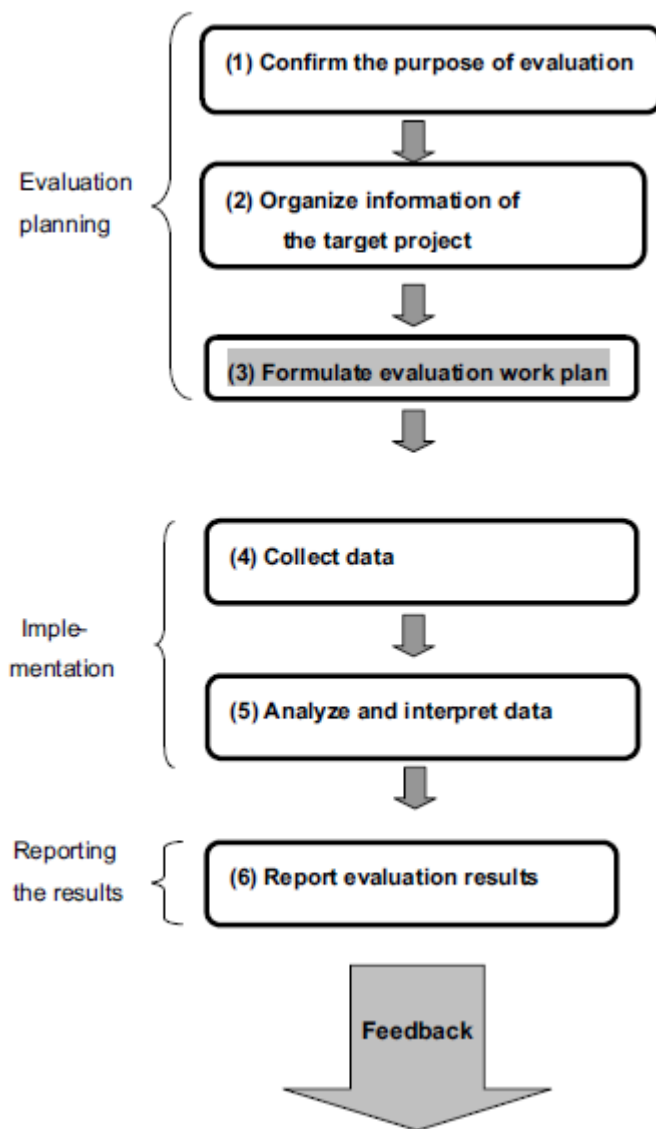
Interim evaluation: This needs to happen at some point in the ATT e-Cluster's existence, usually in the middle.

Terminal evaluation: At the conclusion of the action plan, this evaluates the progress made toward the accomplishment of the predetermined objectives and serves as a foundation for decisions about subsequent actions. Whether to end the ATT e-Cluster's functioning or consider moving on to a new phase depends on its conclusions and suggestions.

Ex-post evaluation: To gauge the effects of the ATT e-Cluster operations, this is carried out once enough years have passed since the completion of the Attica Thematic Tourism Facilitator project.

Steps of Evaluation Study

Choosing what to evaluate and how to conduct it in accordance with its goals is the process of creating an evaluation plan. The following is a description of the main steps in evaluation planning. Since these steps are connected to one another, they are frequently developed concurrently.



Formulating Assessment Questions

"What one wants to know through evaluation" is represented by evaluation questions. An example of an evaluation question and a typical question for the ATT e-Cluster evaluation is "whether the ATT e-Cluster is meaningful." The questions "Were effects on thematic tourism produced by the ATT e-Cluster activities?" and "Were resources of the ATT e-Cluster members efficiently used?" will be more targeted in order to confirm the ATT e-Cluster's worth.

To evaluate the ATT e-Cluster results, it is advised to use the DAC's Five Evaluation Criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability). The five criteria that are used to assess a target project from multiple angles and, in the process, identify the contributing and impeding factors, can be used to develop evaluation questions.

Perspectives of Five Evaluation Criteria

Criteria	Meaning	Examples of questions
Relevance	To examine the justifiability or necessity for the ATT e-Cluster	<i>Necessity</i> Does the ATT e-Cluster match the needs of its members? <i>Priority</i> Is the ATT e-Cluster consistent with country's development plans for thematic tourism? <i>Relevance as a Means</i> Are selected target groups considered appropriate?
Effectiveness	To examine the ATT e-Cluster effects	Is the ATT e-Cluster strategy specific enough?
Efficiency	To examine the efficiency of the ATT e-Cluster	Were inputs delivered in an appropriate timeframe? Were the size and the quality of inputs appropriate? What are the factors that inhibit or contribute to the efficiency of action plan implementation process?
Impact	To examine the ATT e-Cluster effects including the ripple effects in the long term	Has the overall goal been achieved? Is there any influence on policies for strengthening thematic tourism? Is there any influence on the organization, related regulations and legal system arrangement concerning thematic tourism? Is there any influence on technological innovation concerning thematic tourism?
Sustainability	To examine the sustainability of the ATT e-Cluster after the termination of Developing	Does the ATT e-Cluster have the capacity to carry out its activities? Does the decision-making process appropriately function?

	the Attica Thematic Tourism Facilitator	Is the ATT e-Cluster financially independent, or is the financial support continuously provided?
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4.2 Change Management concerning the ATT e-Cluster

Organizations will inevitably experience change in the upcoming ages. Organizations must constantly adapt to these changes due to the variability of the environment and the dynamic effects of the environment. It implies that organizations and clusters, which are essentially collections of organizations, should be receptive to outside influences and that the more quickly an organization responds, the more viable it is. Numerous tools and techniques for change management are well-known from the professional literature. However, few sources deal with clusters.

Thematic tourism is a complex industry impacted by numerous stakeholders and academic fields. Establishing an effective and efficient organizational framework to deal with this expanding global business is therefore quite a challenge.

The ATT e-Cluster is a special kind of organizational structure because, in a situation where flexibility, quick decision-making, and high-level buoyancy are required, is constructed from smaller organizations even if it evolves into a large cluster. As a collection of businesses and other industry participants, The ATT e-Cluster operates in a dynamic environment as well. The changes occur both inside and outside of it. The decline process may begin if the anticipated flexibility from the e-Cluster vanishes, and its members are unable to respond quickly and effectively to the changing environment. Thus, it is critical that the ATT e-Cluster's managers (Executive Board) understand change management tools and use them in their daily work.

4.3 Strategic Learning and Management in the ATT e-Cluster

The management of the ATT e-Cluster must come up with creative ways to capitalize on the expanding thematic tourism market if it is to achieve the strategic goal outlined in chapter 2.2. As a result, management should concentrate on tasks related to the following difficulties for enterprises based in the Region of Attica:

The development of effective public policies and initiatives to support thematic tourism

- Enhance the contribution of thematic tourism to promote Greek brands and tourist destinations.
- Identifying financing options and specific models for developing thematic tourism.
- Improve the standing of thematic tourism through recognized quality accreditation and certifications.

The ATT e-Cluster can help ensure the long-term sustainability of community by creating profitable enterprises that appropriately reflect culture and social structure while also being appropriate in terms of scale and scope. This can only be accomplished by providing

appropriate resources and supports, as well as by enhancing the abilities and skills of the cluster members.

4.4 The accompanying ATTF Platform

Regarding the ATT e-Cluster, which functions under the auspices of the **Attica Thematic Tourism Facilitator project**, the creation initiative has been undertaken through the partnership between Your Ideas Ltd and the University of Piraeus.

The Attica Thematic Tourism Facilitator (ATTF) Platform will be developed to simplify the process of discovering, planning, and booking travel experiences by offering a wide selection of activities and a user-friendly platform that streamlines and individualizes the booking process.

All the ATT e-Cluster members will be eligible to register as providers in the ATTF platform and offer their touristic services. The ATTF platform will be developed to promote the ATT e-Cluster.

On the Attica Thematic Tourism Facilitator platform, the providers will be able to go through the below process:

- Register
- Admit Regulations
- Login
- Get an Email Confirmation
- Edit Provider Profile
- Add/Remove/Update Services
- Update Service Availability and cost
- Manage Bookings/Payments
- Dashboard
- Evaluation
- Post issue

The simple Users (consumers), will be able to go through the below process:

- Register
- Admit Regulations
- Login
- Get an Email Confirmation
- Edit consumer's profile
- Search Region/Provider Category
- View Task Results
- View Provider's Info
- Select- Book a Package
- Manage Bookings/Payments
- Receive an Answer From each Provider
- Provider Evaluation
- Service Commenting
- Dashboard
- Post Issue