Report on the results of the

Cluster Management Excellence Re-Assessment

Green Tech Valley Cluster GmbH

Date of assessment: December 14th-15th, 2023

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Introduction

The **European Cluster Excellence Initiative (ECEI)**, initiated by the European Commission, DG Enterprise and Industry, aims for the development of methodologies and tools in order to support dedicated organisations to improve their capabilities in the management of networks and clusters.

From 2009-2012 a consortium of 13 project partners from 9 countries – all well experienced in the field of cluster management and cluster support – created a uniform set of cluster management quality indicators and developed a quality label for professional cluster management with the aim to have this methodology and proof of evidence broadly recognised and accepted. Additional efforts were spent, supported by various other sources, to enrich this unique quality label into an entire framework of cluster management excellence labels in GOLD, SILVER, and BRONZE. This overall approach, an independent, voluntary proof of cluster management excellence, today is recognised and accepted all over Europe, and even beyond. It not only aims for the distinction between "good" and "bad", but for motivating cluster managers to take part in an improvement process, to become better by comparing with others and to learn from the best. Thus, the elements of "mutual learning" and "mutual benchmarking" play an important role.

The **European Secretariat for Cluster Analysis (ESCA, www.cluster-analysis.org)** was initiated and mandated by the ECEI to organise the assessment process and to award successful cluster organisations with the "Cluster Management Excellence Label GOLD – Proven for Cluster Excellence" (GOLD Label) and the other labels in SILVER and BRONZE. A network of around 200 specifically trained cluster experts from more than 30 countries supports these activities. ESCA is hosted by VDI/VDE Innovation + Technik GmbH (VDI/VDE-IT).

2017-2019 again efforts were spent supported by the European Commission, DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, to redesign the labelling processes and to elevate the entire methodology to a higher level by initiating a new European organisation taking over governance of the labelling system.

Created in 2020, the **European Clusters Labelling Excellence Structure (EUCLES, www.eucles.be)** now works hand in hand with ESCA for progressively taking over the responsibility for the cluster management excellence labelling framework. EUCLES, an AISBL registered in Brussels, promotes a coordinated European approach to further develop the European cluster labelling scheme, bringing together members, representatives of regional and national cluster networks and offering a strong link with the European Commission. As a first major act of promoting cluster management excellence EUCLES, represented by its board, will grant the cluster management excellence labels. Step by step EUCLES will get involved in further activities.

This **report** presents the **assessment results** for the cluster organisation

Green Tech Valley Cluster GmbH

The assessment was conducted in **Graz (Austria)** on **December 14th-15th, 2023** by **Lucia Seel (Independent Consultant, Lucia Seel International Consulting/AUT)** as Lead Expert and **Helmut Kergel (Director, European Secretariat for Cluster Analysis, VDI/VDE Information + Technik GmbH/GER)** as Local Expert. The cluster management organisation was represented by **Bernhard Puttinger (Cluster Manager)** and **Bernadette Nestl (Managing Assistant and Project Manager TopRunner Project)**.

Under its former name "Eco World Styria", the cluster organisation successfully underwent its first GOLD Label assessment process in 2012.

The label was renewed several times since then:

- January 2015 (renewal by ISO 9001 Pre-Audit)
- December 2017 (renewal by ECEI GOLD Label assessment process);
  name changed to Green Tech Cluster
- March 2021 (renewal by ISO 9001 Pre-Audit)
- December 2023 (current renewal by ECEI GOLD Label assessment process).

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Results of the Assessment

Two independent cluster experts assessed 31 quality indicators[1] of cluster management excellence by interviewing the cluster managers. The findings of the interview had to be substantiated by relevant documents to be provided by the cluster organisation. On this base, the experts determined the achieved level of excellence.

A recommendation to award the "Cluster Management Excellence Label GOLD – Proven for Cluster Excellence" is given if the cluster organisations gain a minimum of 80 % of an overall cluster management excellence score.

The cluster organisation Green Tech Valley Cluster GmbH has gained:

100 % of the cluster management excellence score

and therefore, the recommendation for awarding the "Cluster Management Excellence Label GOLD – Proven for Cluster Excellence" is given.

The table on the next page presents an overview of assessment results for the cluster organisation. Indicators marked "GREEN" reflect excellent performance, indicators marked "YELLOW" good performance with room for improvement, and indicators marked "RED" show indicators and areas where significant weaknesses in terms of management exist). For certain indicators marked in the table minimal criteria need to be fulfilled.

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[1] see https://www.cluster-analysis.org/gold-label-new/processes-of-application-assessment-and-award/Introduction%20to%20GOLD%20assessment.pdf

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Table: Overview of Assessment Results

Dimension	Indicator	Minimal criteria required	Result of assessment
Structure of the cluster	Committed Cluster Participation	x	
	Composition of the Cluster Participants	x	
	Number of Committed Cluster Participants in Total	x	
	Geographical Concentration of the Cluster Participants		
Typology, governance, cooperation	Maturity of the Cluster Management	x	
	Human Resources Available for the Cluster Management		
	Qualification of the Cluster Management Team	x	
	Life Long Learning Aspects for the Cluster Management Team		
	Stability and Continuity of Human Resources of the Cluster Management Team		
	Stability of Cluster Participation		
	Clarity of Roles – Involvement of Stakeholders in Decision Making Processes	x	
	Direct Personal Contacts Between the Cluster Management Team and the Cluster Participants	x	
	Degree of Cooperation within the Cluster	x	
	Integration of the Cluster Organisation in the Innovation System	x	
Financing	Prospects of the Financial Resources of the Cluster Organisation		
	Share of financial resources from private sources		
Strategy, objectives, services	Strategy Building Process	x	
	Documentation of the Cluster Strategy	x	
	Implementation Plan	x	
	Financial Controlling System	x	
	Review of the Cluster Strategy and Implementation Plan	x	
	Performance Monitoring of Cluster Management	x	
	Focus of the Cluster Strategy		
	Activities and Services of the Cluster Management	x	
	Performance of the Cluster Management	x	
	Working Groups		
	Communication of the Cluster Organisation		
	Cluster organisation's web presence	x	
Achievements, recognition	Recognition of the Cluster in Publications, Press, Media		
	Success Stories		
	Customer and Cluster Participants' Satisfaction Assessment		

Recommendations for Further Improvements of the Cluster Management

During the on-site assessment any shortcomings leading to results other than "GREEN" for any of the indicators could not be identified. In order to not only maintain but also to further improve the performance of the cluster management the recommendations presented below might be considered by the cluster organisation. The order of presentation does not indicate any order of significance.

- **Recommendation with regard to the indicator 2.2.2. "Qualification of the cluster management team" and to the indicator 2.2.3 "Lifelong Learning aspects for the cluster management team"**

  o *Findings of the assessment:*
    The cluster management team consists of 13 staff members (11.45 Full Time Equivalents/FTE). 3.56 FTE left the management team during the past 24 months but were replaced. The cluster manager is in place since the beginning of the cluster. This situation (very experienced personnel versus young/less-experienced personnel) affected the analysis of these indicators.

    The new persons hired reflect the challenges currently encountered by organisations of all kinds (companies as well as non-profit) on the HR market to attract and keep talent. In comparison to the companies, the non-profit organisations have limited competitive financial resources. This situation led to the hiring of new members of the team who are younger, having less work experience in the private sector (graduates), and/or with less skills compared to the previous leaving team members. Overall however, the indicator "Qualification of the cluster management team" is still slightly above the threshold for "GREEN".

    At the same time, it is to be acknowledged that the team, although young, succeeds to manage highly complex projects as demonstrated through the success stories.

    Regarding the approach for life-long learning, everything is well organised: There is a yearly training plan in place, as well as a corresponding budget. Life-long training activities take place and are well implemented into the daily routines. The cluster manager carries out two employee discussions per year (in December and in April) which also include the planning and monitoring of the capacity building measures for each team member.

  o *Recommendation:*
    In order to increase the pool of competences of the cluster management team, it is recommended to consider putting more emphasis on capacity building actions specifically in the area of cluster management/policy development for the entire team. This specific aspect

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("cluster management/cluster policy") could be more emphasised as well on an individual basis during the bi-annual employee discussions with the cluster manager. In this regard, national available offers should be considered (e.g., from the Austrian National Cluster Platform) or international ones (the European Cluster Booster Academy implemented by the European Cluster Collaboration Platform), or other opportunities for knowledge adoption through participation in projects that include elements of capacity building. It is also possible to use tailor-made offers of specialised experts that can be benefitting the whole or parts of the team and these can be organised solely for the Green Tech Valley Cluster or jointly with other clusters from the region for economies of scale. It would be also useful to plan trainings related to the core priority areas of the strategy for the facilitation of its implementation.

- **Recommendation with regard to indicator 2.4. "Clarity of Roles – Involvement of Stakeholders in Decision Making Processes"**

  o *Findings of the assessment:*
  The Green Tech Valley Cluster has as legal form, the limited company; shareholders are relevant public administration organisations and a few selected industrial organisations, a set-up historically grown. The cluster and the committed participants operate based on bylaws. A general manager is appointed, a management board consisting of 11 persons (the shareholders plus three company representatives) is in place, as well as a broader strategy team consisting of the management board, representatives of companies and research institutes comprising of around 40 people. There is no classic "General Meeting" of all cluster participants foreseen, but only one dedicated yearly large networking event (cluster reception) where all cluster members are invited to participate. The adopted cluster strategy is sent out to each committed cluster participant.

  o *Recommendation:*
  In order to allow cluster members to be better "reached" with/by the strategy and to encourage them to pro-actively participate in its discussion, it is recommended to re-design the format of the yearly event in a way to enable such a dialogue: for example, two hours before the beginning of the event can be dedicated to the presentation of the strategy and its yearly reviewed versions to the present members and engage them in a discussion as well as collect their feedback for the upcoming implementation.

  Another recommendation relates to think about setting up an international advisory or scientific board: given the many personalities with whom the cluster team is in regular contact within the cluster initiative or the ecosystem (in Austria but also internationally), it may be useful to get international views on the strategic development through such a board.

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- **Recommendation with regard to indicator 4.1.5. "Review of the Cluster Strategy and Implementation Plan"**

    o *Findings of the assessment:*
    The strategy is yearly reviewed, and an implementation plan is derived accordingly. The process is documented with minutes of the strategy team meetings. A well-prepared yearly report is made every year including a pre-view for the next year which is published also on the website.

    o *Recommendation:*
    For more clarity in the process, it is recommended to create distinct documents with the updated yearly strategy and name and date accordingly the document "Strategy 2020-2025 updated in year xxxx" and also adjust/update the date on the document. This document, highlighting the changes from the overall strategy should be introduced to the members in a 2-hours dedicated session prior to the yearly networking event for all members.

- **Recommendation with regard to indicator 4.6.1. "Communication of the Cluster Organisation"**

    o *Findings of the assessment:*
    After the last ECEI GOLD Label re-assessment in 2017, the cluster underwent a change in its name: from the Green Tech Cluster Styria to the Green Tech Valley (Cluster). While the Green Tech Valley stands for the broader ecosystem (regional agglomeration of actors and stakeholders relevant for the sector), the Green Tech Valley Cluster stands for the cluster management organisation. It was a strategic decision taken to support the international positioning of the broader region of south Austria as a top hotspot for the green technologies.

    While it is generally understandable that there should be a distinction between the broader ecosystem (cluster) and the cluster initiative with its cluster organisation, the way this differentiation is practically implemented may create confusion. This is the case on the website, where a new visitor may get confused when trying to gather information about the cluster. Also in the presentations made by the cluster, the information is the same for the valley and for the cluster (e.g. in the cluster presentation there are 300 members with 26.500 employees and 7,6 billion Euro turnover, while on the website for the valley the figures for employees and turnover are the same, but it is understandable that this applies for the whole ecosystem, which is larger than the 300 cluster companies. Similarly, in the yearly report sometimes the cluster is mentioned, sometimes the valley, which creates confusion.

o *Recommendation:*

The recommendation is to explore with the board and as well with the members if there is any specific need to keep the term "cluster" in use, or to focus only on the word "valley" in the future, which is used in many clusters names and is well accepted to suggest a cluster initiative or an ecosystem. This clarity can be helpful to streamline the communication activities. One possibility is to raise this question in one of the next surveys addressed to the members.

- **Recommendation with regard to indicator 4.6.2. "Cluster Organisation's Web Presence"**

  o *Findings of the assessment:*

  The cluster uses social media channels, out of which the LinkedIn account stands out for excellent use: with more than 8500 followers and with a dynamic presence (content shared frequently and well managed).

  The website reflects the excellent standard of the cluster organisation: it is sophisticated, extensive, and yet user-friendly in the navigation, it contains all the relevant areas, it is designed attractively. The members are smartly clustered and well presented, including their size (S, M, L). The latest yearly reports for the years 2021-2023 can be downloaded. The English translation is extensive, well done and corresponds to the German version to a large extent. However, there are minor inconsistencies identified between the two versions, such as the size of the team. It is also visible that the upload of the news in the English version, although abundant and well made, are uploaded in tranches, every three months. The navigation (transition) between the "valley" and the "cluster" is smartly solved, however, for some visitors, it may remain confusing.

  o *Recommendation:*

  While the large number of information items (such as news) available in English is to be acknowledged, the fact that they are uploaded in mass (tranches) approximately every three months, carries the risk that visitors may get the feeling that the site is not updated, depending on the moment of their visit. The recommendation is to upload the news in English more frequently (at least monthly), as well as to check and eliminate the minor inconsistencies.

  It is also recommended to double-check and align the information on the website with that on the cluster's "General PowerPoint presentation" quarterly.

- **Recommendation with regard to indicator 5.1. "Recognition of the Cluster in Publications, Press, Media"**

  - *Findings of the assessment:*
  With almost 200 regional and national citations and more than 50 international ones, including the public and specialised mass-media, randomly checked, the press-book of the Green Tech Valley Cluster is without doubt very impressive. The cluster has a profile on the European Cluster Collaboration Platform, but this is not updated (team, number of members, there are no news published and the last event is from 2022).

  - *Recommendation:*
  To strengthen even more the presence of the cluster in the European cluster community it is recommended to make better use of the profile on the European Cluster Collaboration Platform, by updating it and by uploading relevant news. To create synergies in the communication efforts, when a cluster news is translated and uploaded on the own website in English, the most relevant news for the international cluster community can be selected and uploaded at the same time also on the ECCP.

  In addition, some of the good practices of the cluster (some of which are lying at the basis of the success stories) can be submitted to the ECCP team for publication in the section "Green Transition" with good practice examples and tools. It is also recommended to explore presenting in this section also information about the cluster members and thus increase their international visibility.
  By having an updated profile, the cluster team can also work with the Trend Universe offered by ECCP and explore synergies with its own work with trends.

  Another recommendation to strengthen the international positioning of the cluster as the #1 Hotspot for Climate & Circular Solutions is to apply for the competition for the European Cluster Manager of the Year 2024, election to be held during the upcoming European Cluster conference scheduled in May 2024.

- **Recommendation with regard to indicator 5.2. "Success Stories"**

  Before the success stories were presented by the cluster organisation, the experts highlighted the key factors to be taken into consideration when selecting a success story:
  - Complexity
  - Impact on participants and industry
  - Contribution to strategic challenges
  - Contribution to sustainability of cluster development

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o   *Findings of the assessment:*

Success story 1: Green Hydrogen - Research & value creation effectively established in the new field of activities.

Since 2020, Green Tech Valley has focussed on the strategic area of green hydrogen technologies and aims to strengthen research, build infrastructure, and create local jobs. Starting with a small number of companies and research institutions focussing primarily on mobile applications, the cluster has been able to initiate three regional R&D calls with a budget of 10 million euros, to identify and highlight opportunities with the help of trend radars, to attract entrepreneurs to the field with workshops, and to develop cooperation projects through the H2 Round Table. Thanks to all these actions, the new K1 centre HyCentA with a focus on green hydrogen was co-initiated and partners such as Andritz were acquired. The cluster also contributed in many ways to impressive results such as the 50 % increase in H2 researchers at the region, the expansion of AVL in the non-mobile H2 sector and the successful market entry of ANDRITZ with the 100 MW electrolyser product just recently being sold to Salzgitter-Steel in Germany. At ANDRITZ alone, the new team of 40 people will grow to several hundred employees within two years. Work is currently underway on an EU Hydrogen Valley application for 2024, which envisages investments of several hundred million euros.

Success story 2:   Innovations for the digitalised circular economy

The Green Tech Valley Cluster supports tech companies in their growth according to the motto "No material flow without data flow". Since 2020, research has been bundled, leading companies and relevant non-industry partners have been brought together, and the research infrastructure has been strengthened. The initiative started with the Green Tech Radars and developed the Data Service Cards to promote data-based business models. Important projects include "Rewaste F" and the ART ANDRITZ Recycling Technology Centre (https://www.andritz.com/products-en/group/recycling/art-center). Among successes can be counted the newly founded joint venture "EcoSense", the world's first open data standard MTP for recycling and the participation of Siemens AG with plans for a global competence centre for plastics recycling. The start-up Metaloop won a 16 million Euro investment, and the company Saubermacher expanded its market position with a new waste scanner and a digital app.

Success story 3: Green transformation - supported by Green Tech Valley

The strong, green transformation of the economy began with the EU Green Deal. Green Tech Valley aims to reach a central positioning in supporting the customers (companies from all sectors) of existing members (green tech companies). Since 2020, the cluster has initiated measures such as the Green Tech Radars and Green Transformation Cards, which support companies in implementing green measures and are already being used successfully by 5,000

companies in 20 countries. The GRETA Green Tech Academy Austria and new MBA programmes are expanding their educational (training) programmes in the field of green transformation, while technology days bringing together 180 major industrial sites as users (MAGNA, VOEST, etc.) with green tech providers have pushed concrete technology implementation and led to more sales. Among other activities, a real-world laboratory for Net-Zero-Industry was created as the cluster's initiative and the NEFI+ innovation laboratory was strengthened. Further impact can be seen in investments in green steel and decarbonisation in the region as well as in the recognition of Graz as an EU Green Capital Finalist 2023. In addition, the cluster will be presented at the EU Just Transition Platform 2024 as one of six good practices to date.

Overall, the results reached is 35 out of 36 credits. The success stories showcase each their complexity, impact on participants and industry, contribution to strategic alliances and contribution to the sustainability of the cluster development.

o *Recommendation:*
Given the outstanding results and impact of the activities carried out behind the success stories, it is recommended to promote them more intensively in the European cluster ecosystem, for example as good practices in the database of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform or via its profile on this platform, where articles/news/documents can be uploaded or through any other relevant European initiatives. In such a way, they can be picked-up as reference and inspiration for the European Commission or other European stakeholders.

- **Recommendation with regard to indicator 5.3. "Customer and Cluster Participants' Satisfaction Assessment**

o *Findings of the assessment:*
A survey is done annually. It comprises various questions to update the information about the members, including company turnover figures, but also questioning the satisfaction with the cluster services. However, the number of questions related to the performance of the cluster management team is rather low. This reduction took place after in the past it was measured that the number of respondents was becoming lower and lower. In order to increase the number of answering members, it was decided to reduce the number of questions. The last survey was filled out by 46 committed cluster participants in average reaching the school-grade 1.5 (1 being the best grade, 5 the worst).

Other surveys about the satisfaction of the cluster services are done after (bigger) events.

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In addition, the satisfaction with the cluster management's performance is evaluated during the annual "Summer Talks" that are one-to-one meetings with cluster members and documented in the CRM system. The satisfaction degree and feedback for the cluster's operations are part of the questionnaire at the bilateral Summer Talk.

o *Recommendation:*
   While it is clear that a larger number of respondents is needed to gather relevant information and feedback, it is also important to capture the right information empowering the team to react and adjust if and when necessary. It is therefore recommended to enlarge the survey with questions that enable the members to express how well they feel treated in the cluster, if there is a community feeling that enhances cooperation. It is about giving the members the opportunity to express their needs and wishes from the cluster management that should be a basis for further consideration by the strategy team and reflected upon during the bilateral Summer Talks.

   It is recommended to think of new formats of how such information can be captured, without endangering the number of respondents. An experiment could be the testing the "patience limits" of the cluster members, by sending 30 members a survey with 15 questions, another lot of 30 members receive 20 questions and so on. Then analyse the percentage of responses and based on this result to apply the number of questions identified as ideal to all members in the next year.

Overall Assessment

Founded in 2005 the Green Tech Valley Cluster is backed by the regional innovation and smart specialisation strategy defining green tech as one of its regional core economic domains. The cluster is governed by a public-private partnership, consisting – on the public side – of the Styrian Economic Development Agency SFG, the Regional Government of Styria, the City of Graz, the Regional Government of Carinthia, The Ministry of Climate Action and Energy, and – on the private side – of four companies. In 2023 the management opened a regional management office in the Carinthia region being a successful example of a cross-regional (meta) cluster. The Green Tech Valley Cluster gathers more than 300 cluster members from different areas of the energy and environmental technologies with a focus on Green Building, Efficiency, Mobility, Heat, Power, Circular Economy and Science.

Overall, the cluster management is very well positioned to support the cluster participants with a special focus on initiating innovation projects, internationalisation activities and strengthening the positioning of the region as the first technology hotspot for climate and circular solutions in the south of Austria, hosting 15 out of 18 green competence centres in Austria. Already in its second European Cluster Management Excellence Gold Label assessment in 2017 the cluster management organisation reached a 100 % score result, and it is remarkable that the cluster management was able to maintain its excellence level despite considerable changes and challenges induced by the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, inflation, etc. The spirit of continuous improvement is embedded in the "cluster RNA" which lies at the heart of the relationship capital managed with a system of points with the help of a sophisticated, but effective CRM designed by the cluster management itself and technically implemented with an external provider. The cluster RNA stands for: R -Relevance, N – Nähe (Closeness) to the cluster and A – Activity.

Some good practices identified during the assessment could well serve as inspiration for other cluster management organisations:

- With the help of the CRM system, there are several persons per cluster member profiled (personas) and engaged in the cluster activities according to their role and interests, in "specialised circles", similar to working groups: the CEOs are part of the "CEO Circle", the innovation managers are engaged in the innovators' club, there is one group for the founders (start-ups) and one for the marketing and sales representatives. A "circle" is in development for the HR managers of the member companies. This enables a much more effective dialogue and enhances the cooperation potential by bringing people with similar responsibilities and interests around the table.
- With the help of the CRM system and following the RNA concept, the management team has a clear and effective segmentation of its members, including their potentials for the cluster. The team has developed a special activity index applied to all members.

- There is a very good organisational structure for the planning and monitoring of activities with MS Teams, using a traffic light system. The monitoring of the key indicators derived from the strategy into the implementation plan can be done on a daily basis, thanks to the data-based design.

- Creativity: the cluster management proved its ability to "think out of the box" when developing together with the GRETA Green Tech Academy Austria and with the denkstatt group (see https://denkstatt.eu/) the game-based transformation cards. This approach received high appreciation and these business model cards are made available via an interactive online tool, free of charge, to all interested actors willing to work on their green transformation (companies, consultants, clusters).

- The cluster management consequently strives to reach the strategic goal to become the #1 hotspot for climate and circular solutions in Austria by setting targeted actions for cooperation at policy level to make this happen. While in 2023 cooperation was initiated between the regions of Styria and Carinthia, in 2024 the region of Burgenland is planned to follow, making the Green Tech Valley Cluster an inspirational example of three regions cooperating to support the cluster activities.

Recommendation Regarding the Award and the Terms of Validity of the "Cluster Management Excellence Label GOLD – Proven for Cluster Excellence"

As the result of the on-site assessment the experts recommend the award of the "Cluster Management Excellence Label GOLD – Proven for Cluster Excellence".

The new **"Cluster Management Excellence Label GOLD – Proven for Cluster Excellence"** shall therefore be valid until:

December 31st, 2026

At that date, the label expires, unless a further extension of validity in written form was approved by EUCLES, or any other organisation at that stage being responsible for the overall cluster management excellence labelling scheme.

Until the date mentioned above, the cluster organisation is allowed to use the "Cluster Management Excellence Label GOLD – Proven for Cluster Excellence" for communication and marketing purposes. This right terminates at the date of expiry.

Extension of the Term of Validity of the "Cluster Management Excellence Label GOLD – Proven for Cluster Excellence"

The term of validity of this label can be extended for three more years by undergoing one of the currently available processes described below. This re-labelling process must be completed latest one year after expiry of the label.

1. It is possible to extend the "Cluster Management Excellence Label GOLD – Proven for Cluster Excellence" for three further years by a re-assessment of all 31 indicators within a standard ECEI process, as being done in the current case. It is expected that the re-assessment with two experts can be conducted within one full-day assessment. All procedures are similar to the original GOLD Label assessment.

2. Undergoing a successful recognition and reward process of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) can serve as valid extension procedure for the "Cluster Management Excellence Label GOLD – Proven for Cluster Excellence". The certification for one of the "Levels of Recognition" of EFQM, awarded during the validity of the "Cluster Management Excellence Label GOLD – Proven for Cluster Excellence" or latest within one year after expiration, presented to EUCLES – or any other organisation at that stage being responsible for the overall cluster management excellence labelling scheme – without any

further check serves for being awarded the extension of the label by three additional years. For a next label extension however, again the original assessment process according to ECEI (see no. 1) has to be applied.

3. The certification ISO 9001, awarded during the validity of the "Cluster Management Excellence Label GOLD – Proven for Cluster Excellence" or latest within one year after expiration, presented to EUCLES – or any other organisation at that stage being responsible for the overall cluster management excellence labelling scheme – without any further check serves for being awarded the extension of the label by three additional years. For a next label extension however, again the original assessment process according to ECEI (see no. 1) has to be applied.

4. Undergoing a pre-audit process for identifiying the readiness of the organisation for being awarded with ISO 9001 (externally conducted by an ISO 9001 auditor and leading to a positive judgement regarding the readiness), additional to being awarded with the "Cluster Management Excellence Label GOLD – Proven for Cluster Excellence", upon positive judgement of the pre-audit report serves for a three-year extension of the label. For a next label extension however, again the original assessment process according to ECEI (see no. 1) has to be applied.

5. Finally, any further internationally recognized certificate for justifying management excellence, presented to EUCLES – or any other organisation at that stage being responsible for the overall cluster management excellence labelling scheme – after being achieved during the validity period (or latest one year after expiry) of the "Cluster Management Excellence Label GOLD – Proven for Cluster Excellence" can serve as valid proof for extending the validity of the label for three years. However, the acceptance of a certificate from an organisation other than EFQM, organisations being authorised for awarding the ISO label, or ECEI will require an advance approval. Thus, EUCLES – or any other organisation at that stage being responsible for the overall cluster management excellence labelling scheme – therefore should be contacted well in advance if such option is considered. For a next label extension however, again the original assessment process according to ECEI (see no. 1) has to be applied.

If the opportunity for extending the validity of a "Cluster Management Excellence Label GOLD – Proven for Cluster Excellence" is missed, an entire new GOLD Label process needs to be conducted, including a two full-day assessment of two experts, leading to a new validity of two years upon award for the label.

Confirmation of Assessment

The assessment of **Green Tech Valley Cluster GmbH** took place on December 14th-15th, 2023 and was conducted in due order:

Lucia Seel
GOLD Expert
European Secretariat for Cluster Analysis
Independent consultant
Linz, December 30th, 2023

i. A. Helmut Kergel
Director
European Secretariat for Cluster Analysis
VDI/VDE Information + Technik GmbH
Berlin, January 02nd, 2024

The assessment process and results were approved by

i. A. Dr. Oliver Ziegler
Head of Government Relations and Senior Project Manager
European Secretariat for Cluster Analysis
VDI/VDE Innovation + Technik GmbH
Berlin, January 05th, 2024

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