



## **CO-OPERATE**

### **Companies OPERating in a Responsible Area and with Transparent Ethics**

#### **Beneficiary**

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#### **Project description**

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The project aims at **promoting and diffusing the concepts, practices and tools of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)** in SMEs operating in clusters, by relying on the role of “intermediary” institutions (trade unions, local development associations, business consortia, etc.) as fundamental actors in developing business strategies by using strong information channels and knowledge sharing networks.

#### **Project objectives**

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- Ø Supporting the **diffusion and implementation** of CSR oriented practices and tools by SMEs;
- Ø Emphasising the CSR-oriented business strategies as a **relevant competitive opportunity** for SMEs;
- Ø Enhancing and better **defining the role of the so-called “intermediary” institutions**, and especially of those operating within industrial clusters, **for the development and diffusion of CSR** among SMEs;
- Ø Underlying the **importance of the local dimension** for the acceptance and success among SMEs of the CSR-related issues, strongly linked to the social and institutional aspect of economic development;
- Ø Promoting and sustaining the **role of informal networks** as usable and trustable **channels for the information and the exchange of experiences** on CSR among SMEs, especially if operating in an industrial cluster;
- Ø **Demonstrating the possibility of creating innovative formalised networks** that are capable of reproducing and strengthening the advantages and the benefits of the informal traditional ones, if diffused and shared at the cluster level.

## **Description of the work**

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- 1) **Best practices and effective tools** for the management and competitive valorisation of CSR by excellent companies will be identified (with particular attention to SMEs and to companies operating in industrial clusters). The identified practices and tools will be elaborated and tailored to SME needs.
- 2) SSSUP will then support the **creation of working groups in charge of designing and implementing, for each cluster, territorial approach to CSR** principles, also considering and analysing the existent CSR experiences within the cluster and outside it.
- 3) In each cluster, an analysis for identifying the internal relationships among different stakeholders represented in the working group will be developed in order to define effective participation tools for each cluster. SSSUP will then develop, with each working group, a draft of **Cluster Policy for Social Responsibility** (and, on this base, a **Corporate Policy for Social Responsibility** for each sample organization) and a **Cluster Sustainability Report** containing social, environmental and economic indicators useful as a benchmark to evaluate the performances of organizations operating in the selected clusters.
- 4) A set of **territorially shared tools for simplifying the CSR path to SMEs** operating in the cluster will be created: managerial and operational guidelines inspired to SA8000 and AA1000 models, cluster list of qualified suppliers, etc. The potential effectiveness for SMEs of the proposed practices and tools will be **tested “in-field”**, by involving some pilot-SMEs operating in industrial clusters in an experimental application with SSSUP support in terms of training and audit initiatives.
- 5) The designed and tested “shared resources” and tools will be **disseminated** to all the SMEs operating in the clusters involved in the project, using the “intermediary” organisation involved in the project and the channels that have been previously implemented during the project, by relying both on the existing informal channels (typical of the industrial clusters) and on some innovative solutions (internet web site, on-line forum, focus groups with relevant stakeholder, etc.).

## **Project partners**

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§ Agenzia per lo Sviluppo Empolese Valdelsa, Empoli, Italy

## **Target groups**

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### **Target area:**

Italy

### **Direct beneficiaries:**

The principal target group of the project is represented by the very large number of SMEs that, if appropriately activated and supported, could rely on an informal network of “actors and factors” in order to manage, improve and communicate the aspects of their activities relating to CSR. This target group is composed of the SMEs operating in industrial clusters. In the present project, a relevant number of industrial clusters that are located in the Tuscany Region will directly participate in the foreseen activities by means of their “intermediary” institutions, being able to involve hundreds of SMEs included in their territorial area.

SMEs will be involved in the project are 3 for every cluster. At this planning stage, the clusters involved in the project, both formally and informally, are 3 (so the number of involved SMEs is minimum 9).

**Indirect beneficiaries:**

Indirect beneficiaries that will be involved in some project steps can be public authorities, banks, suppliers, consumer associations, NGOs.

**Read more / Useful links**

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**Internet site:**

**Project administration**

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**Total Eligible Costs:** 188,903.00€  
**EC Contribution:** 141,677.00€  
**Year of Finance:** 2006  
**Duration:** 24 months