

Overcapacity in shipbuilding, tightening competition, lack of qualified workforce, sulphur directive, development of Russian ports

Maritime companies in Central Baltic region share similar challenges

Maritime clusters in Estonia, Finland and Latvia are facing similar challenges. Tighter cooperation could make the small actors of the region stronger in competition against other maritime clusters in the world, concludes the newly published research report published within the SmartComp project. The research is based on case company interviews conducted simultaneously in the three countries.

The maritime clusters of Estonia, Finland and Latvia are structured rather differently. In Estonia and Latvia, maritime logistics play an important role and networks are gathered around ports, shipping companies, and cargo handling companies, having cooperative relationships also with the land transportation sector. The Finnish maritime cluster, on the other hand, is characterized by the well-developed networks of the shipbuilding industry, such as shipyards and their various subcontractors.

Although having somewhat different structures and competence areas, the maritime clusters in Estonia, Finland and Latvia seem to share similar challenges. “There is continuous need for R&D and product development in order to provide competitive offerings, while the general economic situation as well as the global overcapacity in shipbuilding put pressure on the maritime industry sector. The lack of qualified workforce was brought up particularly concerning the Estonian and Latvian clusters, and there is a need for increased maritime education also in Finland. Regarding shipping companies particularly, the sulphur directive is seen as the major challenge for competitiveness, and the development of the Port of Ust-Luga is also likely to influence the Russian transit traffic volumes currently flowing through the ports of Estonia, Finland and Latvia”, says Project Researcher **Eini Laaksonen** from the Pan-European Institute of the University of Turku, Finland.

Cooperation would increase competitiveness

Common challenges give an opportunity to increase the cooperation between maritime companies in the Central Baltic region. The interviews resulted in a number of suggestions concerning what kind of problematic issues should be tackled and what kind of concrete actions should now be taken. “There is a lot of potential for mutual cooperation in terms of joint R&D, repair and maintenance operations, ship conversions, educational cooperation, and EU-level lobbying. Because of the new environmental regulations, the clusters in the region must rapidly develop the related technical and infrastructural solutions. This can make the whole region a green forerunner. The presence of Russia’s developing maritime cluster in the neighbourhood is an opportunity, and including Russia into cooperation activities is of utmost importance”, Laaksonen concludes.

Regarding the business and cooperation networks between the maritime clusters, various connections do exist but the clusters today do not constitute a particular unity or an international cluster. “International political cooperation is needed in order to form a concrete policy and vision. Creating a multinational pool of complementary resources and expertise, both in terms of logistics and shipbuilding, could turn out to be a trigger for increased competitiveness for the region’s maritime clusters”, Laaksonen says.

The complete SmartComp Research Report on the current state and future prospects of the maritime clusters in the CBR can be downloaded free of charge at <http://www.cb-smartcomp.eu/index.php/materials>

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Further information about the project:

- The SmartComp project supports the networking between the Central Baltic Region maritime clusters and thus aims at improve the competitiveness of the maritime clusters
- During the year 2013, the project research team will publish three reports. Reports concern both sectoral and company level, and furthermore the Central Baltic Region will be compared to other successful maritime clusters globally.
- The project is coordinated by the Union of the Baltic Cities, Commission on Environment. The research team is led by the Pan-European Institute of the University of Turku. The project is partly funded by the Central Baltic Interreg IV A Programme 2007-2013.
- The project culminates in an international SmartComp Forum in November 2013 in Turku, Finland.



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