



Report on the results of the
Silver Label Assessment

Energy Saxony e. V.

Date of assessment: March 16th, 2022



Content

1	Introduction.....	3
2	Results of the Assessment	4
2.1	Gold Label Minimum Criteria	5
2.2	Areas Of Improvement: Results of the Validation	7
2.3	Overall Assessment – Result of the SILVER Label Assessment	10
3	Confirmation of Assessment	11

1 Introduction

The European Secretariat for Cluster Analysis (ESCA) has been mandated by the European Cluster Excellence Initiative (ECEI) to organise the assessment process and to award successful cluster organisations with the “Cluster Management Excellence Label SILVER – Dedicated to Cluster Excellence” Label of the European Cluster Excellence Initiative.

This report presents the SILVER Label assessment results for the cluster management organisation of

Energy Saxony e. V.

The assessment was conducted on March 16th, 2022 in Dresden by **Helmut Kergel (ESCA Director, VDI/VDE Innovation + Technik GmbH, Berlin)**. **Lukas Rohleder (Managing Director, Energy Saxony e. V.)** represented the cluster management organisation.

During 2009-2012, the European Cluster Excellence Initiative (ECEI), initiated by the European Commission, DG Enterprise and Industry, was aiming for the development of methodologies and tools in order to support cluster organisations to improve their capabilities in the management of networks and clusters. Within this context, 13 project partners from 9 countries – all well experienced in the field of cluster management and support – created a uniform set of cluster management quality indicators and developed a quality labelling system for professional cluster management with the aim to have this methodology and proof of evidence accepted and recognised all over Europe. The quality labelling system consists of three levels – BRONZE, SILVER and GOLD. While the BRONZE Label is not a quality label in the narrow sense, it just demonstrates that a cluster management is interested in improving its management performance, the GOLD Label is a quality label based on very high standards of cluster management practice.

Cluster management organisations that do not meet the GOLD standards yet, but are interested in demonstrating both to their cluster and potential partners that they are on the path towards cluster management excellence can subject themselves to a SILVER Label audit. This SILVER Label of the European Cluster Excellence Initiative is a quality label in its own right. The SILVER Label confirms the successful implementation of improvement processes that were initiated following a BRONZE Label based on a cluster benchmarking process. Organisations that are able to demonstrate such improvements in the course of an audit conducted by an assessor of the European Cluster Excellence Initiative will be awarded with the SILVER Label.

The SILVER Label assessment is based on three steps: i) cluster organisations subject themselves to a new benchmarking process (BRONZE Label process) and ii) indicate three areas with regard to the quality indicators of the European Cluster Excellence Initiative in which they have improved. The assessment is continued by iii) an on-site visit by an eligible ESCA-expert to validate the indicated areas of improvement. The criteria of the GOLD Label of the European Cluster Excellence Initiative relevant to the identified areas of improvement are used as a validation benchmark.

2 Results of the Assessment

The here discussed results of the SILVER Label assessment relate to the results of an ESCA cluster benchmarking for being awarded with a BRONZE Label on March 22nd, 2019 and a recent ESCA cluster benchmarking exercise being conducted in full self-assessment manner in August 2021. A description of achieved improvements during the period mid-2019 to mid-2021 was as well provided in August 2021.

Energy Saxony e. V. was founded as a non-for-profit association in 2013 following various activities of the “Industrielles Netzwerk Erneuerbare Energien Sachsen (EESA)” initiated as a local project in Saxony in 2008 and formalised as an own entity in 2009. From the beginning of these various activities the Dresden subsidiary of VDI/VDE Innovation + Technik GmbH was involved as a coordinator. With founding Energy Saxony e. V., a new and enlarged scope was settled and the full independence was reached. Cluster management however still was sub-contracted to the Dresden subsidiary of VDI/VDE Innovation + Technik GmbH. Cost considerations led to the spin-off of the cluster management team to become employed by the association in early 2020. Since then Energy Saxony acts fully autonomously. Overcoming the financial constraints that led to the spin-off and implementing a self-sustaining structure according to the financial figures today, can be seen as one major improvement for the cluster organisation aside the specific ECEI indicators to be assessed.

Energy Saxony is a business-oriented energy technology network aiming to promote the sustainable development and commercialisation of future cutting-edge technologies in the energy, mobility, and ICT sector. The association aims to enhance the innovation potential of Saxon companies and research institutes resulting in cooperative projects and practical applications for the benefit of society and to strengthen the Freestate of Saxony as a pioneering and competitive business location for the energy industry.

In the past years the cluster initiative was operated by a team of 2 full-time employed persons, supported as well by a student worker (0.125 FTE) and where necessary additional personnel was involved as well for specifically being in charge for larger funded projects. Just recently, a third person was hired for coordinating and stimulating the extension of the scope of the cluster towards “Circular Economy”.

The managing director Lukas Rohleder will leave the cluster organisation on March 31st, 2022 to take over a managing position in the Dresden Chamber of Commerce. The executive board of Energy Saxony spent extensive efforts for redefining the position of the managing director and for assessing candidates from a high number of applicants. A person with university backgrounds was finally selected, the contracts are signed and the new managing director will take over starting July 2022. It must be noted, that the ongoing activities within the cluster will not suffer much from the 3-months gap without a managing director, as the person responsible for all cluster services since the beginning, Christiane Demmler remains present and can handle all day-to-day business. A new managing director after nearly 10 years should not be judged negative, it should be seen as an

opportunity for introducing fresh ideas for additional cluster services and/or new topics to be tackled.

At the time of the assessment, Energy Saxony counted 80 *committed cluster participants* (in general = associated members of the association) from all relevant categories (industry, research & education, intermediates, marketing & communication, government & public administration). The GOLD Label indicator regarding the “Composition of the Committed Cluster Participants” is assessed “green”. The very large majority of the committed cluster participants (> 95 %) is located in Saxony and a few in neighboring administrative districts, all mostly within a radius of 150 km.

Energy Saxony as well covers a significant number of *non-committed* participants, too.¹ The ratio of around 85 non-committed participants to around 165 total participants is 52 percent and by this far exceeds the ECEI threshold² for cluster management excellence in this particular aspect. This shows the potential for further growth and moreover reflects the situation that other initiatives in Central Germany are active with corresponding/complementing focus, for example the Chemnitz-based association HZwo e. V., operating the Saxon innovation cluster for fuel cells and hydrogen. Energy Saxony is a consortium partner in this initiative and some of the members of HZwo e. V. for example, therefore are considered non-committed participants for Energy Saxony.

2.1 Gold Label Minimum Criteria

In a first step the Silver Label assessment entails a screening of certain GOLD Label indicators, where minimum criteria apply. In selected cases, proofs of evidence were checked, and/or the current benchmarking data provided in August 2021 was used and checked for plausibility.

These minimum requirements are described in the document “European Cluster Excellence Baseline – Minimum Requirements for Cluster Organisations” available at:

www.cluster-analysis.org/downloads/20111128_European_Cluster_Excellence_BASELINE_web.pdf.

Meeting these minimum requirements is not sufficient for cluster management excellence, but can be considered a first step towards the excellence level of “Cluster Management Excellence Label GOLD”. As eligibility criteria to be awarded with the “Cluster Management Excellence Label SILVER” the excellence level of all individual minimum requirements is required to be “green” or “yellow”.

¹ A non-committed cluster participant is a passive participant who shows interest in the cluster's activities going beyond the mere registration for a newsletter or similar (e.g. through regular participation in events), but does not contribute actively to any of the cluster's activities, nor has it signed a cooperation agreement.

² According to the respective ECEI excellence indicator (1.1.0), at least 80 % of the cluster participants should be committed participants.

Number of indicator	Name of indicator	Excellence level of the minimum requirements
1.1.0	Committed Cluster Participation	Large number of non-committed cluster participants
1.1.1	Composition of the Cluster Participants	
1.1.2	Number of Committed Cluster Participants in Total	
2.1	Maturity of the Cluster Management	
2.2.2	Qualification of the Cluster Management Team	
2.4	Clarity of Roles – Involvement of Stakeholders in the Decision Making Processes	
2.5	Direct Personal Contacts Between the Cluster Management Team and the Cluster Participants	Plausible according benchmarking data and discussion; no CRM system in use, but the implementation of such solution is currently evaluated
2.6	Degree of Cooperation within the Cluster	Plausible, increased working group activitiesIncrease compared to benchmarking data from 2019
2.7	Integration of the Cluster Organisation in the Innovation System	
4.1.1	Strategy Building Process	
4.1.2	Documentation of the Cluster Strategy	See improvement area
4.1.3	Implementation Plan	
4.1.4	Financial Controlling System	Ok., MS-Excel based planning and monitoring system demonstrated
4.1.5	Review of the Cluster Strategy and Implementation Plan	New strategy introduced in April 2021, but a formal regular strategy update process is not in place.
4.1.6	Performance Monitoring of Cluster Management	Performance indicators are implemented only in a fragmented manner, however quite detailed when it comes to financial aspects; they are part of the agenda of each board meeting. The focus of the board meetings however is the view to the upcoming 3-months period rather than reviewing the past period.
4.3	Activities and Services of the Cluster Management	
4.4	Performance of the Cluster Management	Plausible yellow, according to benchmarking data
4.6.2	Cluster Organisation's Web Presence	

2.2 Areas Of Improvement: Results of the Validation

- **Findings and recommendation with regard to the indicator “Documentation of the Cluster Strategy”**

Following the structural changes in the beginning of operating fully autonomously in early 2020, a new strategy process was launched. The focus was to clearly describe the purpose and the vision and mission of the association, to elaborate a unique and attractive position in Saxony, and to derive a portfolio of activities and services with good prospects to master the financial challenge of this new autonomy, without any organisational fall-back position.

The historical existing strategy, just illustrated in a PPT-presentation, was further elaborated – including the realignment due to the structural changes – into text document, issued in April 2021.

The proposed area of improvement is accepted.

However a few shortcomings are identified and should be addressed in the next upcoming revision of the strategy document:

Aims and objectives are described in a very qualitative manner, measurable strategic targets, and by this as well tangible expected outputs, outcomes, or effects are missing. As a consequence as well the existing very few performance indicators only target mainly financial aspects, the activities and results regarding the acquisition of funding for different types of projects, for example.

As part of the strategy document, it is recommended to introduce an indicator-based performance monitoring system for the work of the cluster management and to use this system on a frequent base (at least quarterly) to monitor progress and fulfilment of the planned activities. It is advised to include “action-related” and “results/output-related” indicators. Indicators should be easily assessable by the cluster organisation (without necessity to include inputs from participants or to conduct broad surveys) and easy to understand. It could be considered to use such a system as well as a basis for the regular reporting to the management board.

Secondly, as a self-sustainable organisation, the strategy of the cluster should also include a section regarding the business-planning of the cluster organisation. The idea is, that the activities and services being provided or which are available for the members, all rely on a well-functioning cluster management organisation. Thus, making aspects of developing this organisations part of the cluster strategy, maybe in form of a less technical, but more commercial business plan, is recommended. Such a business plan could include aspects as well of human resource development (quantity and quality) and life-long learning and a strategy and action plan for monitoring and reviewing the actual cluster strategy.

- **Findings and recommendation with regard to indicator “Activities and services of the cluster management”**

Besides the activities around the working groups (see chapter below) two new cluster services were launched during the past two years.

ENERGY SAXONY ThinkTank, a structured process for joint project initiation and implementation where production companies are supported in their transformation process on the way to the "Smart Green Factory" by a technology and subsidy consulting service organised as a think tank, actor networking, and centrally coordinated project implementation by experts from science and industry (launched in April 2021):

Energy Saxony regularly calls on industrial companies to submit their technical objectives and problems as well as requirements for desired technology changes in the form of a short presentation by the next deadline (next upcoming deadline March 31st, 2022) and carries out a thematic pre-sorting of the submitted contributions. Upon acceptance of a submitted challenge, the industry customer is admitted to Energy Saxony as official cluster member (membership application). The membership fee finances the organisation and coordination of the ThinkTank. Energy Saxony then organises a panel of experts (face-to-face or online event) in which the submitted tasks are presented. The group of participants, consisting of representatives from research and industry, jointly discusses solution approaches and uses the principle of swarm intelligence. Energy Saxony moderates the discourse and documents the results. After successful follow-up of the kick-off by Energy Saxony, the industrial customer receives a concept with technical solution proposals, price estimates and funding program proposals for financing support. Upon commissioning, the contract management with the involved actors is handled centrally by Energy Saxony, if desired. For the realisation of the joint project work, Energy Saxony provides digital tools and coordinates the cross-company cooperation within its working groups. In the case of large-scale projects, an overall project manager is commissioned if necessary. In addition, Energy Saxony supports the communication with potential funding bodies. With the implemented projects, real-labs and best practice examples are created, which are made public by Energy Saxony with media impact. By this the emerging projects gain visibility on a national and international level.

B2B ENERGY MatchMaking: This format for facilitating face-to-face meetings between members and non-members takes advantage of the new possibilities regarding the provision of facilities in different sizes at the new premises of Energy Saxony at the “Bioinnovation Centre Dresden”. The idea is to in particular foster business cooperation between users and technology and/or service providers.

The proposed area of improvement is accepted.

- **Findings and recommendation with regard to the indicator “Working Groups”**

Energy Saxony maintains working groups as a platform for networking and related experience exchange since many years. Participation in the working groups is only possible for committed cluster participants (= members of the association). Besides having further optimised the regular organisational procedures of the working groups (in particular registration procedures now supported by an online-tool), an additional quarterly meeting of the working group leaders was established for coordinating the overall strategic approach of the cluster and options for relevant project acquisitions.

The following working groups continued their activities:

- Energy Efficient Production
- Resources, Recycling & Energy
- Storage & Grid Services
- Heating and Cooling
- Energy Technology Components

Since 2019 two new working groups were established:

- Energy Solutions for Buildings (Kick-off August 25th, 2020)
- Hydrogen in Industry and Business (Kick-off July 13th, 2021)

Detailed public information is available via the website of Energy Saxony.

With this spectrum, the working group activities are an essential service area of the cluster and Energy Saxony cluster management successfully increased its activities in stimulating cooperation within the cluster, both, in terms of quantity and content. For the ECEI-indicator 2.6 “Cooperation within the Cluster” actually the benchmarking data points out this slight increase in mutual exchange.

The proposed area of improvement is accepted.

2.3 Overall Assessment – Result of the SILVER Label Assessment

As an overall result of the assessment, the assessor recommends to award the “Cluster Management Excellence Label SILVER – Dedicated to Cluster Excellence” with a validity until March 31st, 2024.

Energy Saxony is a member of the “Initiative go-cluster”, a cluster support programme at national level financed by the Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK). In this context advice, consulting, and various innovation-related support is provided to the member clusters by the contracted management office, since many years VDI/VDE Innovation + Technik GmbH. The go-cluster team is encouraged to closely monitor the development of Energy Saxony in the coming months (period without a dedicated managing director) and onwards from July 2022 for a few months (initial period for the newly contracted managing director), regarding the continuity of the positive development of the past two years. A personnel change of the position of the cluster manager here always incurs certain risks.

Over the years Energy Saxony managed to develop into a well-accepted and requested discussion partner for various Free-State ministries in Saxony for contributing to the conception and implementation of policy programmes and strategies. Energy Saxony is well integrated in the activities of the State of Saxony to achieve the goal of becoming one of the leading hydrogen locations in Europe. In this context, Energy Saxony closely collaborates as a consortium with the Chemnitz-based HZwo e. V., operating the Saxon hydrogen innovation cluster.

The presented recent pipeline of project ideas being under evaluation and funding proposals in preparation indicate that the turn-around of becoming autonomous in self-sustainable manner could be achieved. A further prosperous development of the cluster can be expected.

3 Confirmation of Assessment

The assessment of the cluster management organisation of **ENERGY SAXONY E. V.** took place on March 16th, 2022 and was conducted in due order:

i.v. Kergel

Helmut Kergel
Director
European Secretariat for Cluster Analysis
Berlin, March 28th, 2022

The assessment process and results were approved by:

i.A. Ziegler

Dr. Oliver Ziegler
Head of Government Relations and Senior Project Manager
European Secretariat for Cluster Analysis (ESCA)
Berlin, March 29th, 2022

Contact information:

European Secretariat for Cluster Analysis (ESCA)

Helmut Kergel (Director)

c/o VDI/VDE Innovation + Technik GmbH
Steinplatz 1
D-10623 Berlin/Germany

Email: helmut.kergel@vdivde-it.de; Tel.: +49 30 31 00 78 154