

Beyond the EU Border: Strategy Plan

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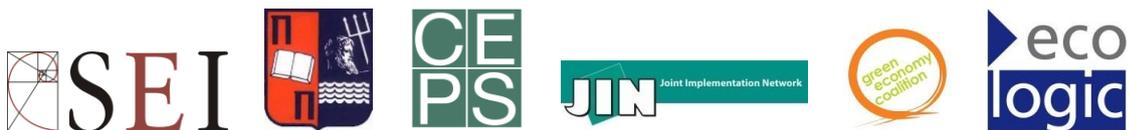
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1 Aim of the document

The aim of the document is to describe the strategy to develop and expand the GreenEcoNet platform beyond the borders of the European Union in order to tap into the huge potential of SMEs turning towards a greener economy in other parts of the globe.

2. Rationale and core concept

The rationale behind this strategy is that experience with the GreenEcoNet project development has shown that there is large learning potential for SMEs when they become familiar with success stories about green business development of other SMEs, in different countries and even business contexts. The experience with GreenEcoNet has also shown that a platform in itself may be insufficient to fully tap into this learning potential. SMEs often operate in their own local and/or national networks, which are often offline and mainly facilitated by local and/or national networking organisations ('multipliers'). In order for SMEs to learn from a broader set of success stories, GreenEcoNet has developed a combined approach based on online-offline interactions with an EU-wide online platform (<http://greeneconet.eu>) which is populated by SMEs and multipliers, thereby mobilising information that is available both on- and offline.

In order to extend the learning potential for SMEs in terms of green business operations to outside the EU, both in developed and developing countries, GreenEcoNet intends to also

broaden the geographical scope of its online-offline interaction model. For that, a hub-system is proposed which is centered around the online GreenEcoNet online platform, and which connects international, national and subnational networks to mobilise best practice information on greening SMEs, including tools for supporting that.

The core idea of the Beyond The EU Border Strategy is to establish a centrally coordinated international network of hubs. The hubs acquire from the GreenEcoNet coordination unit, i.e. the Secretariat (described in Chapter 3) a franchise to operate under the name of GreenEcoNet, which will be valid for a pre-determined period of time and which can be renewed.

In Figure 1, the proposed structure is illustrated with some, hypothetical examples. The GreenEcoNet coordination unit will connect:

- Superhubs: relatively large-scale, internationally operating organisations with proven networks and strong outreach capacity towards SMEs and their multipliers. Superhubs can have national or regional offices or sector-specific organisations, which could enhance the outreach capacity towards SMEs. These organisations can be included in the GreenEcoNet networking system as ‘Children of superhubs’.
- National hubs: these operate within a country and could have both a cross-sector focus (e.g. national SME supporting body) or a sector-specific focus (e.g. energy or agriculture sector).
- Subnational hubs can be identified as ‘children’ of national hubs with a specific focus on, e.g., a province or subsector.

These proposed entities and their potential roles in the Beyond EU GreenEcoNet Network are explained in further detail below.

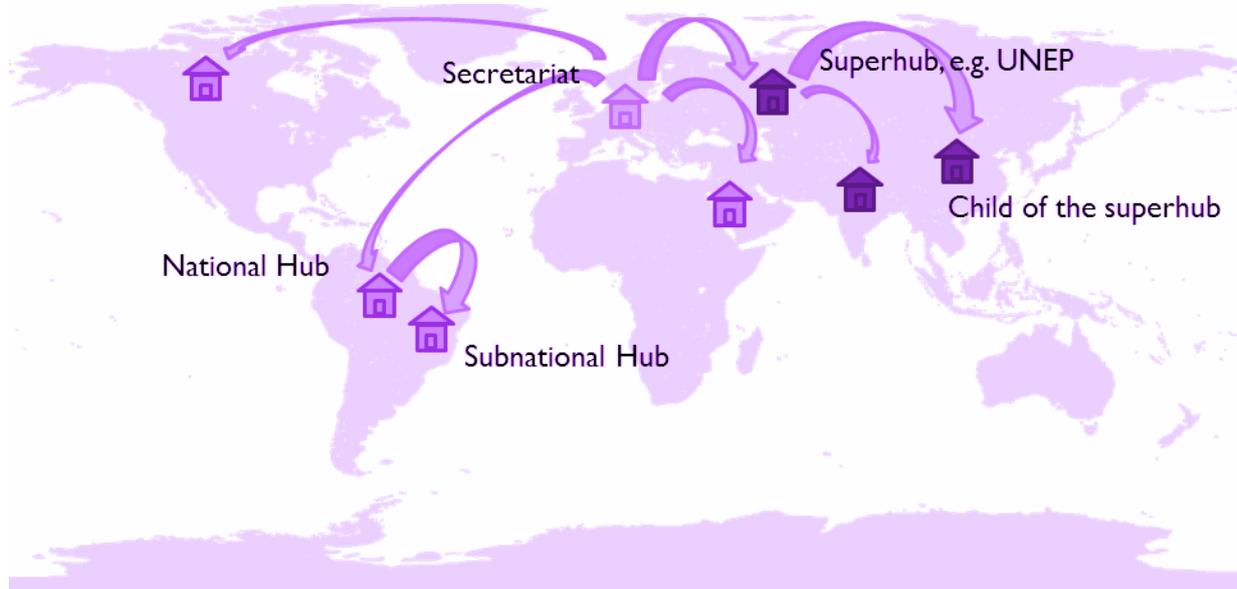


Figure 1 - Simplified representation of the structure

3. The GreenEcoNet Secretariat (GENS)

The GENS is a central independent organisation that will take responsibility of the GreenEcoNet platform at the end of the FP7 project (July 2016).

The legal and financial aspects as well as the structure and the operations of the GENS are described in the Deliverable 5.4 “Business Development Plan of GreenEcoNet platform beyond the end of the project” due by the end of May 2016 (GreenEcoNet project month 36).

The reasons behind the decision of constituting the GENS as an independent organisation are the following:

- 1) In order to sign long term contracts with the hubs and other organisations, the Secretariat needs indeed to become an independent organisation with a legal status.
- 2) An independent organisation would allow the GENS to operate freely and independently from the parent organisations without those incurring financial or moral liability
- 3) The implementation of the market place will introduce aspects of legal liability from which the partners in the project need to be protected. An independent legal persona would allow the implementation of a limited responsibility.

Whilst details about the legal status, the structure, the location and the revenue model of the GENS are outside the scope of the present deliverable and are to be included in the deliverable 5.4, some aspects need to be mentioned at this stage.

In primis, the legal framework of the country where the organisation will be based will be an important determinant of the status and form of the GENS. In particular, the GENS needs to be based in a country that is perceived by stakeholders and boundary partners as relatively neutral and where the legal and financial framework is advantageous to the development of such an organisation. This decision requires careful consideration because the lack of harmonization on legal and financial frameworks may make seemingly adequate set ups unsuitable. That would also entail moving the online platform towards a domain extension that is more neutrally perceived, e.g. .net. Secondly, the Secretariat will need to be based in an area which is easily and cheaply accessible globally possibly using means of transport that have low environmental or social impact, at least at macro regional level.

Finally, basing the GENS close to other international institutions with whom it could be cooperating on a global scale would be hugely beneficial.

The GreenEcoNet consortium considers Europe as the most suitable location for the coordination unit, as the initiative originates from an EU-funded project and the core of the work is focussed on Europe. From this location, it is considered most effective and efficient to expand the network to beyond EU regions.

Currently, we are considering Geneva (Switzerland) and Brussels (Belgium) as locations for the GENS, which seem to offer the most appropriate environments and respond to the above mentioned criteria. Preliminary work on the involvement of superhubs seems to suggest Paris (France) or Vienna (Austria) may offer other viable alternatives for the GENS' location (see Chapter 5, Section 5.2). This would enable more efficient, offline collaboration between the superhubs and the GENS.

The role of the GENS would be to:

- 1) Inspect, verify and certify the hubs as valid delivery mechanisms / franchisees of the GreenEcoNet platform and eventually rescind certification.
- 2) Coordinate the development and maintenance of the verification process which ensures that only "green" solutions, i.e. that can actually bring added value from the environmental and socio-economic sustainability point of view, are actually loaded on the platform. A framework and concrete guidelines ("verification process") agreed by partners will be developed for this task.

- 3) Coordinate the development and the maintenance of the taxonomies in accordance with the procedures developed in Deliverables D1.1 and D1.2.
- 4) Coordinate the development of the online platform and platform releases, maintain the live online platform to ensure continuity of service and monitor the usage of the online platform to ensure that content is relevant.
- 5) Coordinate relationships between hubs, the feedback from and to the hub(s) and manage conflict resolution when conflict arises.

4. The hubs

4.1 The hub concept

The hubs are existing organisations which will operationally manage and use the GreenEcoNet platform on a regular basis on the basis of periodically renewed (e.g. 3 years) franchisee contracts.

The hubs will benefit from such collaboration as it helps them to support achieving their strategic objectives concerning the greening of the economies in the regions and countries in which they operate. Similar to the European Commission when funding the GreenEcoNet project, the hubs, as part of their responsibilities, face the challenges of progressing towards low emission development in the region or countries that they operate in, realise that SMEs are by far the largest business community in this respect, but also know that SMEs form a relatively difficult community to reach out to for reasons of small business scales, lack of skills, and lack of familiarity with solutions and tools.

In particular, the hubs will manage the following processes:

1. Engagement of stakeholders and boundary partners in their area of competence. In their role as hub they will reach out to online and offline networks or directly to SMEs in the regions that they operate in. They will motivate these organisations to use GreenEcoNet as a platform for showcasing their solutions and/or to solicit support for their desired solutions through networking opportunities and tools available through GreenEcoNet.
2. Verification and approval or rejection of individual solutions, products and services for the respective geographical area of the hub (i.e. case studies) on the basis of the verification process approved by the GENS.
3. Load the case studies onto the online platform and ensure their maintenance
4. Verification and approval or rejection of individual tools proposed by organisations in their catchment area and sector
5. Use the platform to make available and disseminate relevant publications and news
6. Use the platform as strategic tool to support their initiatives and activities in the area of green transition in private enterprises

Similar to the online-offline model developed by the GreenEcoNet project, the hubs will tap into offline available information and make this available at GreenEcoNet. Vice versa, the hubs can distill from the latest GreenEcoNet information, packages which are specifically relevant for their 'own' SMEs or multipliers.

We envisage 4 types of hubs with different roles: superhubs, children of superhubs, national hubs and sub national hubs. In the following sections we briefly describe differences and specificities of each of those types of hubs

In the sections below, the different hubs and their roles are explained in further detail. Also criteria for their selection will be identified.

4.2 Superhubs

Superhubs are large scale, global or macro regional organisations, that have:

- 1) existing network of green SMEs or existing programmes on the transition to a green economy model in SMEs
- 2) internal verification processes of what constitutes a green business, solution, product and services which are either compatible with the GreenEcoNet verification process or stricter
- 3) have an organisational and financial setup which ensure long term sustainability and coherence of strategic objectives on the long term

Superhubs will sign long term (e.g. 6-year) partnership contracts with the GENS, which include unrestricted access to the platform mechanism. Superhubs will be allowed to - in coordination with the GENS - verify and approve other organisations as hubs of GreenEcoNet, in particular their branches and operational offices in other regions and countries ('children of superhubs', section 4.3). Two good examples of superhubs would be UNEP and UNIDO.

Example: UNEP (<http://www.unep.org/>)

4.3 Child of superhub

Children of superhubs are organisations that have been verified and approved to operate the GreenEcoNet platform by a superhub (in coordination with the GENS), and are monitored by the superhub. They are certified by the GENS under proposal by superhub. The feedback process is managed entirely through the superhub. Typical cases are local branches and operations of large intergovernmental organisations, like UNEP and UNIDO,

Example: UNEP local offices (e.g. http://www.unep.org/roa/addis_ababa_site/)

4.4 National hubs

National hubs are existing national organisation that have:

- 4) existing network of green SMEs or existing programmes on the transition to a green economy model in SMEs
- 5) internal verification processes of what constitutes a green business, solution, product and services which are either compatible with the GreenEcoNet verification process or stricter or adopt the GreenEcoNet approval and verification process
- 6) have an organisational and financial setup which ensure sustainability and coherence of strategic objectives over the renewal term establish in contract

They operate the GreenEcoNet platform on a time limited (e.g. 3 years) renewable contract.

National hubs can be general national SME networks, as well as sectoral associations. They are verified and approved by the GENS, and the feedback process is managed by the GENS directly. They will not have unrestricted access to the platform mechanisms, but the access

will be granted on an ad hoc / on demand basis. Superhub's children may act as national hubs wherever the situation requires it.

Example: Investors In the Environment in Great Britain (<http://www.iie.uk.com/>) or the Resource Efficiency Centre of the German Association of Engineers (<http://www.ressource-deutschland.de/>)

4.5 Subnational hubs

They are like standard hubs but they operate on micro regional base, e.g. at provincial level, and they are normally sectoral. They are verified and approved by the GENS under proposal of GENS members or a national hub, or through direct contact with the GENS, but the feedback process is managed through the national hub of relevance, if extant, or directly by the GENS in the other cases.

Example: BIOVALE - Building the Bioeconomy in York (<http://www.biovale.org/>) or Efficiency Agency NRW (<http://www.ressourceneffizienz.de/>)

5. Pilots

5.1 Introduction to pilots

To test if the proposed approach is feasible we are setting up a series of pilot cases with two different types of organisations: one superhub and 3 possible sectoral hubs. In the following we present in detail the superhub pilot which is the most advanced case studies. Finally, we are setting up the conditions to develop a series of pilot hubs over the next year.

5.2 Superhub Pilot

The first and most advanced pilot is currently being discussed with the Business and Industry Unit of the Sustainable Lifestyles, Cities and Industry (formerly Sustainable Consumption and Production/SCP) Branch of UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme). Here below is the datasheet of the pilot. The pilot will have global reach and will cover all sectors. The status of the pilot is advanced and we had several informal and formal meetings starting early 2014. In particular, we are thinking of initially testing whether the model works on 9 countries contextually to the release of the unit's green economy manual. It must be stressed that the agreement is not done yet, that it may still fall apart, and that engineering such an agreement for the first time requires an investment in terms of time and resources which is much higher than a standard, routine agreement, but that is proving a worthwhile stress test for our approach. If the pilot is successful, then we may have a valid process to replicate with other potential superhubs, e.g. UNIDO, ILO or UNEP.

6. Risk Management Plan

One of the key aspects of a successful deployment is the development as part of deliverable 5.4 of a complete risk management plan (RMP) for the GENS, where we identify risks, evaluate the likelihood and estimate their impact, and structure a series of preventative measures to reduce likelihood or impact and a series of contingency plans. The RMP then informs the legal, organisational and financial set-up of the GENS to ensure long term viability of the organisation.

7. The next steps

In this section we present the plan for action over the next year to achieve the strategy outlined in the previous sections. Details about the legal, organisational and financial aspects and budgetary implications will be included in deliverable 5.4.

Task 1: Set up a workgroup to investigate the development of the GENS composed by the scientific coordinators of the 6 organisations, with the support of the panel of experts and eventually of external advisors

Task 2: Develop the UNEP pilot study through to the conclusion of the first stage of loading the case studies from the 9 pilot countries

Task 3: Develop at least 2 national or sectoral level pilot hubs through to conclusion

Task 4 Constitute GreenEcoNet as legal entity and develop the draft contractual agreements

Task 5 Submit agreement to pilot hubs for discussion and approval

Milestone 1: Agreements approved by pilot hubs

Task 6 Map potential super hubs at macro regional and global scale, in particular in Europe, where GreenEcoNet needs to consolidate, and in two remote regions, ideally South East Asia and South America.

Task 7 Map potential national hub in at least 4 countries with different legal and political systems.

8.Change management procedure

The present document will be revised periodically to ensure its relevance to the evolution and development of the platform. We envisage a 12 months revisions cycle. At each revision cycle the document will be revised by the coordinator and a new draft produced which will be submitted to the other partners for discussion, comment and modifications and then submitted for approval following the process for deliverables described in the Consortium Agreement.