The Art of Networking

European Networks in Education

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The *Euroweaving* project partnership was formed by

Legend

Four different types of blue boxes have been highlighted in the text:

Table – Graphic representation of an issue

Quote – Statement of network actors interviewed or excerpt from literature

Tool – Form, instrument, method etc. useful for network planning or management

Practice – Action, procedure, technique recommended by network actors

Content

Introduction

There is hardly any field of educational action where the notion of *network(ing)* has not been postulated as a guiding principle and a key competence of practitioners at all levels of the hierarchy. Networks and networking are generally considered to have high potential for solving structural problems in education.

In the publication *The Art of Networking* a particular type of educational network is dealt with: European networks in the framework of the EU funding programmes for education and training. It is addressed to professionals in education – teachers, trainers, programme developers, managers, researchers and evaluators – who are already involved in networks or may wish to be so in the future. While the publication has its main focus on adult and school education and their corresponding funding mechanisms in the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme – Grundtvig and Comenius – we consider much of its content to be relevant also for other strands of the programme – networks in vocational training, higher education and in the transversal sub-programmes for Languages and Information and Communication Technologies – and even in part for networking activities in other fields such as cultural or regional development.

The Art of Networking is the result of *Euroweaving*, a project funded by the *Socrates/Accompanying Measures* programme.

This project was conceived against the background that networks play a prominent role in European lifelong learning policies. In contrast to their growing importance, most actors in the field agree that the achievements of many funded networks have been below the high expectations

hoped for. One of the reasons for this seems to be that many network coordinators and partners do not have a sufficiently clear picture of the concept of a network as a specific cooperation structure and of the specific activities and management processes necessary to make a network successful.

The Art of Networking was written at a crucial point of time for networks in the European funding programmes in education: the transition from the programme period 2000-2006 to the Lifelong Learning Programme starting in 2007. The authors are attempting to build on the experiences gained by and with networks and to learn from achievements and shortcomings before moving on to another programme generation. To this end, coordinators and partners of currently funded networks, and also European Commission officials, programme managers at National Agencies and external experts were contacted in order to learn from their experience and to pass good practice on to future network actors. *The Art of Networking* is to a large extent based on what these network actors told us, and we have tried to make their voice audible throughout the publication.

The complete results of the network survey conducted by the *Euroweaving* project can be studied in a separate research report which complements this publication. Moreover, at the request of the European Commission a further document with recommendations on the implementation of networks in the new programme period was produced. Both documents, as well as other language versions of this publication can be downloaded from the project website www.euroweaving.com.

The process of collecting relevant information and actually writing this publication was much more complex and demanding than we had expected.

Not only did we encounter different and sometimes conflicting views and interpretations of European networks in education in the various programme documents, the scientific and management literature we studied and in the interviews with the different types of network actors we conducted. A similar variety of approaches and backgrounds was present in our project team, to which we brought our experiences as network promoters, programme managers, external evaluators and researchers.

Katerina Kolyva and Esther Gelabert (*European Cultural Interactions*) have been working for years as independent experts for the European Commission in various programmes in the areas of education, culture and research. They have gained extensive experience in the evaluation of European networks.

Guy Tilkin of *Landcommanderij Alden Biesen* has been the coordinator of a number of European projects and networks in education and training, mostly in the field of project management, the use of new technologies in international projects, self-evaluation and European citizenship.

Nick Meyer brought into the project the experience of *NIACE*, itself a large network organisation. He has been involved in transnational education work for many years and participated in several national networks in the United Kingdom.

Holger Bienzle (*die Berater*) has gained experience with European networks and projects from different perspectives: as national Grundtvig programme manager for Austria, as an external expert and evaluator for the European Commission and as manager of European projects in research and education.

Wolfgang Jütte is Professor for Continuing Education Research at Danube University Krems. He has extensively

published on the analysis of cooperative structures and networking in adult education.

Reflecting these diverse backgrounds we had a very intensive debate on the specifics of European networks, on what is, can or should (not) be expected of networks, and on appropriate recommendations and tools to pass on to network actors. These discussions were demanding and extremely enriching, and led to several modifications and even the complete re-writing of some chapters. We have finally arrived at a joint view of networks, a view which has multi-perspectives as it attempts to take into account the requirements of the European funding programmes, the organisational capacity of networks, the needs of practitioners and institutions in education, and the insights in relational processes which social science offers. Our original hypothesis, that European networks require a very specific management approach which differs from ordinary transnational project management, has been clearly confirmed in the course of our work. This network-specific approach is reflected in all the chapters of this publication which deal with different aspects of understanding and implementing networks:

Chapter 1: Network Theory presents an academic perspective on social networks in general. It emphasises the fact that European networks in education, like all other social networks, are structures for interaction and cooperation between individual actors. To foster the relations between the network actors needs, therefore, to be a permanent focus of network coordination.

Chapter 2: European Networks in Education contrasts the wider view of social network analysis with the much more narrowly defined interpretation of the network concept by the EU funding programmes. The structural and function-

al characteristics of European networks in education are discussed, and finally the authors' view of the concept and mission of networks in the EU funding programmes is presented. This working definition serves then as a reference point for the following chapters.

Chapter 3: Setting up a Network addresses the main issues related to the planning and preparation phase of a network. It is not conceived as an A-Z guide to successful network applications, but highlights selected core areas of network building: developing the overall network strategy and embedding it in the educational context, focussing the network on its main activities, and selecting suitable network coordinators and partners. The logical framework approach is suggested as a useful tool for planning a network.

Chapter 4: Managing a Network describes eight specific management challenges which are derived from the structural and functional characteristics of a network. They constitute a network management approach which is distinct from ordinary transnational project management. This chapter includes theoretical inputs, recommendations and best practice examples from managers of currently funded networks.

Chapter 5: Evaluating the Network attempts to give answers to the standard evaluation questions — why? what?, how?, when? who? — from a network-specific perspective. Indicators for the achievement of network aims and objectives are introduced and a number of practical instruments for the evaluation of networks are presented.

Chapter 6: *Making the Network Sustainable* has two focal points: Promotion and dissemination activities — now referred to as *valorisation* in a European context — help to make the network visible to the field. The second issue is

to develop a strategy for the continuation of the network when EU funding has come to an end. Key questions related to sustainability are discussed, and, again, practical tools and checklists offered.

The publication can be read in different ways: Reading it from the first page to the last is one option, particularly for readers who want to get a comprehensive overview of the critical issues relating to networks. Other readers may want to pick out selected chapters which are particularly relevant to their current involvement in European networks. We hope to offer something to both groups.

Chapter 1:
Network theory

At first glance it may appear unusual that a practice-oriented publication on developing and implementing networks in European funding programmes starts with a chapter on theory. But this is justified, as social network analysis offers valuable insights into the network as social organism. Above all, European networks in education are not primarily artificial creations, born and bred in vitro through a funding programme, but a cooperative structure, initiated and developed by people. This central message of the social sciences may therefore well introduce this publication.

1. The network – a multi-faceted concept

1.1. On the term network and its career

In dealing with the terms network and networking, the extremely complex nature of the terminology is an issue that soon arises for the general reader. The language of networks is comparable to a jungle in which more and more trees are planted. The closer one gets to this jungle of networks, the more one is confronted with a wide range of different references, definitions and emphases. The concept of the *network* is applied to all the disciplines

of the social sciences. Everyone plants his/her own tree in the terminology jungle. In the process, it becomes clear that the term *network* has its own history and relates to different disciplines.

Even though we subscribe to an action and structure-oriented perspective in this publication, we still consider it important to have a theoretical overview in order to clarify concepts and avoid too simplistic a perspective. Each network is indeed unique and must be developed and managed anew.

Reticular (i.e. network-type) structures emerge as a typical characteristic of modern societies and are increasingly being organised in the form of horizontal and open networks. The term *network society* (Castells 1996) was coined for this purpose. Networks depict the growing differentiation and division of labour on the part of particular areas of society and the resulting need for coordination. Classical bureaucratic organisations are being replaced by new organisational forms which require different management and coordinating mechanisms, and which go beyond hierarchies and the market.

Currently, the concept of *network* is undergoing a terminological change. The multiple subtle nuances attached to its meaning and the different semantic connotations of the term refer to its metaphorical character, which also contributes to its dissemination. The term *network* originated in the field of the technical-natural sciences. Its attribution to traffic infra-

structure as *net*, as in the railway network and road network is an indication of this. Modern Information and Communication Technologies like the Internet, the *net of nets,* promotes the image of the network in a powerful manner. These technical networks can be contrasted with social networks. Through this, we gain a picture of an intertwined structure or system of social ties between actors, persons or organisations. The mixture of information-technical and social networks is also a developing reality. Mention is made of the *humanisation of the network* in the further development of the World Wide Web. The expression *Social Software* stands for such applications as communication support, interaction and cooperation. Among these, for instance, are weblogs, a type of online journal, and also wikis, websites in which content is capable of being altered and added to by every visitor.

1.2. Inter-organisational and personal social networks

Institutional networks in the field of education are usually a type of interaction in *inter-organisational networks, i.e. are understood to be a specific cooperation by several organisations designed to cover a longer period of time for the attainment of jointly stipulated objectives and added value for the individual participants (*Wohlfahrt 2002, p. 39).
Even though the understanding of the concept of network is diverse, particularly as a largely hierarchy-free and communicative zone of horizontal cross-linking, the independent organisational form of network is experienced as a

positive attribution. Accordingly, the notion of atomised institutions is replaced by a network of autonomous but interdependent actors who are focused on the common good. Networks appear functional because they respect the independence of institutions and still constitute a system. In the debate, networks experience positive benefits particularly as the third type of *regulatory mechanism. Neither monetary nor hierarchical status but contextual conditions like trust, recognition and common interests support networks. [...] They depend on ties of communication which do not disintegrate because of considerations of funding or power* (Faulstich/Vespermann/Zeuner 2001, p. 14). Networks represent common intentions, human-orientation, the principle of independence and voluntary participation as well as the principle of exchange.

Personal networks are an organisational answer to the complexity of needs of pedagogic professionals. Creating personal networks are not only helpful for individual problem-solving, but also compensate institutional deficits. Precarious or missing institutional resources are substituted by personal relations.
Personal networks relating to a specific occupational group are also highly important. In the latter case, experts make technical knowledge available to one another. They promote the transfer of know-how and advances in decision-making and responsibility. This is how it works, for instance within the school context amongst the network of teachers for

the generation of knowledge as a network of exchange and advanced training. Networks can thus be seen also as the basis of a professional community. One of the problems in the field of education is that one party may be unaware of neighbouring fields. The isolated perception from one's own institution must however, be overcome in favour of a more professional approach, centred on the functional solution to problems. A structure which promotes a view beyond the institutional field of work or professional boundaries is the cross-linked organisational form of the network. It creates opportunities for work-field-related and inter-disciplinary cooperation and strengthens professional ties. Here, networks have a socializing function.

1.3. Network analysis

Network analysis describes the systematic, scientific examination of networks at an abstract level for the purpose of uncovering its specific characteristics, its conditions, *modus operandi,* potential and benefits.
The basis of network analysis is an examination of relationships. It focuses on the ties and interactions between a specific number of elements or actors. In his theory of *embeddedness*, The American sociologist Mark Granovetter (1985) focuses on how action is reflected in social ties. To keep track of actions of an instrumental orientation, the incorporation of the actors in the social structure is considered. This refers to the fact of *being embedded* through personal ties much

like the structural incorporation of institutions. Direct and indirect social ties reveal opportunities or are obstacles to the concerted action of the actor. This has substantial consequences for cooperative action. Cooperation does not depend on the individual *goodwill* of atomised actors alone but also on the placement of the action in the system of relationships. Cooperation as a social process can neither be attributed to personal characteristics nor to structural context alone. On the contrary, it defines actions within a social, interdependent system.
Network analysis, it is more of an open instrument. Given the available space, the concepts of this method can be presented here only partially, given its complexity. For a description and analysis of social networks, three groups of characteristics (the relational, functional and structural characteristics) are differentiated (refer to Schenk 1995, p. 97 ff.).
The qualities of ties and commitments are included among the *relational characteristics*.
Among these are:

- their reciprocity,
- the diversity of the content of ties (multiple or single),
- their homogeneity or heterogeneity,
- the strong and weak commitments,
- the latent and current ties,
- their intensity (frequency of contact),
- their duration (stability) and frequency,
- the access opportunities linked to ties,
- the communication channels,
- the ties of different roles.

Questions about the content of ties are touched upon in the examination of the *functional characteristics*. These for instance, are:

- the exchange of resources,
- the role of communication,
- the job relief,
- the nature of support,
- the available help,
- the assistance,
- value and norm-orientation.

Above all, structural network analysis is interested in the morphology (design) of network of ties. In this process, questions about the parameters of the central structure, such as size, density, and cluster are raised:

… the questions are always aimed at the structure of the network: Who can reach who directly or indirectly? How dense is the net? Are there areas of density, cliques, bridges, centres, peripheral or isolated actors? (…) Do partial structures overlap? Do social circles intersect? The decisive factor is always the existence of direct or indirect links, their type and the pattern they form. (Ziegler 1987, p. 342)

In network analysis, there is an effort made to visualise the structure of the data. Today, advances in data processing make available new options for the presentation of complex social structures. These help in the exploration of structural correlations and in the successful communication of these findings. Most of these methods are however, very complex and require a comprehensive database. We are mostly dependent on the support of

experts and special software programs. But simpler forms of the visualisation of ties may also help in gaining awareness of one's own networks and their structure. The fact that they open up ways for actors in the field to visualise their own opportunities for interaction is included among the communicative side of visualisation.

The accumulation of data which contributes to the visual representation makes ties visible that are otherwise invisible. The network can be drawn and analyzed – in objective patterns much like in personal reconstructions – such as a map. Experiences and expectations are the social memory of the system and thereby, significant sources of information.

2. Analysing network structures

2.1. Informal and formal network structures

The relational perspective is the particularly highlighted in social network analysis. A social network can be defined as a structure of social relations of units and the linkages between these units. These relational structures will be looked at now.

In addition to and below the obviously visible organisational and cooperative structures, there is the often concealed reality of the informally cross-linked ties and interactions of actors. They can be viewed as latent social networks.

Ties have different degrees of formalised character. In the process, the pair of terms formal-informal represent the pole of the different forms of structure formation. In working rela-

Formal and informal ties
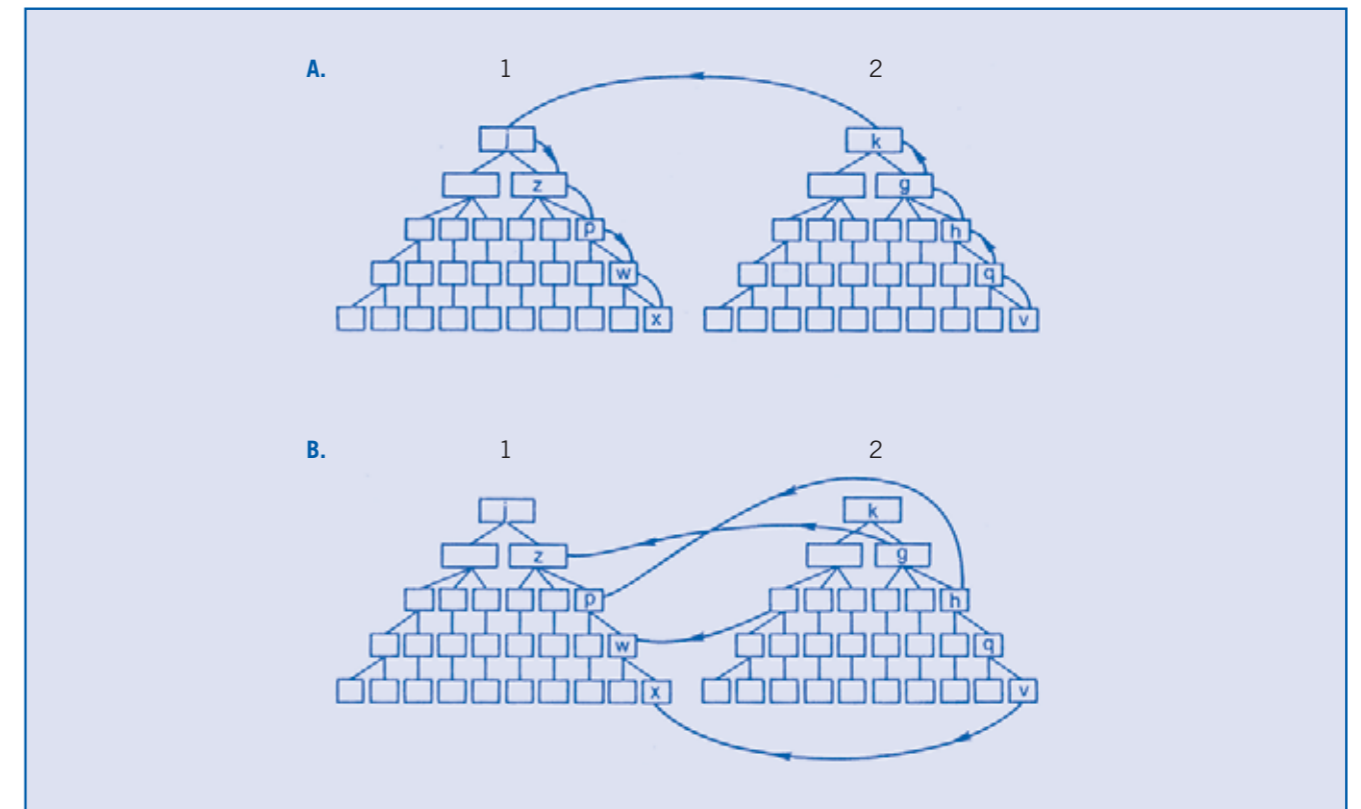
From: Chisholm 1999, p. 34.

tionships, people initially have formalised ties. Here, the functional correlation is uppermost, and roles are initially characterised by legal determinants and mandated in an organisational form. On the other hand, within the voluntary organisation, interactions are characterised by less formal ties. In contrast to formal structures, informal ties are dependent on people. Political scientist Donald Chisholm (1989) discovered in an examination of informal structures between multi-organisational structures – conducted with various traffic companies in the area of San Francisco – how effective informal channels can be as an instru-

ment of coordination. As opposed to formal official channels that are often hierarchical and indirect and thus, slow (see Illustration 12, A), informal routes between organisations are direct and thus, short (Illustration 12, B).

The differentiation between formal and informal actions, which is important from an analytical point of view, is often less significant for people acting professionally. They experience both as being closely related. Formal and informal actions mostly occur simultaneously. Initially formal ties are enriched through growing personal acquaintance and informal con-

tact. Viewed from a temporal perspective, they can be regarded as a continuum. The combined characteristics of formality and informality in routine work is what defines the working relationship.

2.2. Strong and weak ties

A difference is made between strong and weak ties in network research. This basic differentiation is based primarily, on the analysis of Mark Granovetter (1973, 1974). Ties can be ordered on one dimension in accordance with their strength. In the process, they require temporal expenditure, emotional intensity, intimacy and alternating assistance (*strong ties*) if the ties are permanent, emotionally binding and based on reciprocity like ties with friends, which have an exceptionally persistent character. They often assume a supportive function. Weak ties are far less intense and reciprocal than they are when maintained e.g. with acquaintances, and serve the purpose of acquiring information and job relief. In a survey on the search for employment (1974), Granovetter discovered that a large number of jobs were gained on the basis of informal contacts. He found that the majority of job seekers changing their jobs acquired the information leading to their new jobs through weak ties with acquaintances and not through strong ties with close friends. These results underscore the thesis of the *strength of weak ties*. Above all, it is the bridge-building function that makes up the strength of weak ties (see Jansen 1999 p. 100 f.). They connect

islands and social circles; new information flows into a single pool through them.

Strong ties are often redundant ties. The stronger the tie between two people, e.g. if they are friends, the more likely they are to have joint pleasure. Speaking in network-specific terms, these are redundant ties. No benefits of information emerge through redundant ties. Accordingly, it is most notably the weak ties as defined by Granovetters, that link partial groups and through which new and heterogeneous information flows intensively. The benefits of non-redundant ties result from the advantages gained from information sharing; they help in the process of overcoming excessively strong internal orientation. On the contrary insider relationships form strong ties and focus on themselves. Horizons are broadened in heterogeneous and diversified networks. Through the low selective spread of information, they are obviously quite capable of promoting innovation.

The table below shows the weak connections between different congested partial groups. Actors connected with one another thus build communication bridges.

The theory of *structural holes* was most notably developed by Burt (1992) and also contributes to the significance of weak ties. This approach emphasises how actors develop power through their strategic position within the network. This is true of the cut-point actor (*you* in the table above, who bridges structural holes in an overall network. According to

The bridge-building function of weak ties
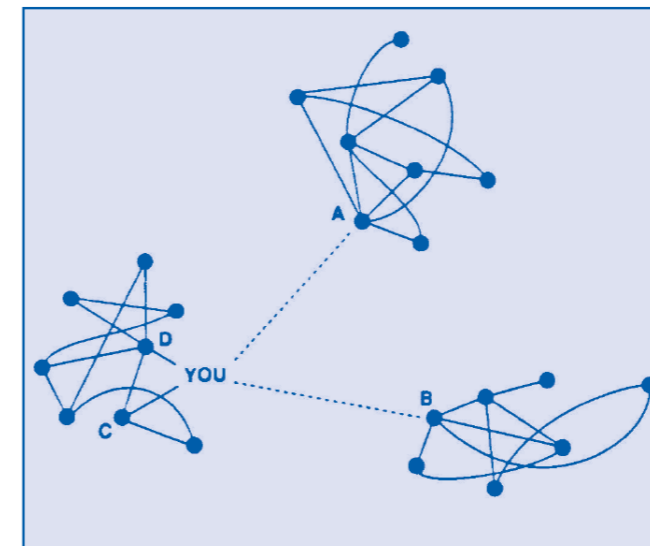
From: Burt 1992, p.27,
from : Jansen 1999, p. 179.

Burt, actors that do not have several non-redundant ties are regarded as more independent and more active. Benefits are primarily derived from their position in the flow of information:

Actors involved in bridging structural holes acquire a lot of non-redundant information through their indirect contacts, faster than others. Moreover, information about them is communicated within the network and reaches several other actors that are not directly linked with them. Here too, opportunities are revealed. The actor is present in the search processes of many other actors, is approached if necessary, by them and thereby, becomes aware of new opportunities. (Jansen 1999, p. 180)

These experiences should also be taken into due consideration in disseminating the activities of networks, as will be discussed in chapter 6 of this publication.

2.3. Multiple ties or networks of multi-dimensional ties

Ties between actors are complex and consist of multiple layers. They are capable of providing several resources. The complexity of ties is described in network-analytical terminology as multiplexity. Ties thus serve the purpose of
- exchanging information,
- acquiring material resources,
- political mobilisation,
- wielding power,
- solidarity,
- benchmarking,
- support,
- personal assistance in professional crisis situations.

Given this complexity of social ties, multidimensional networks of ties must be clearly demarcated. In this way, contextual differentiation can be made between information ties, exchange ties, power ties, support ties, friendship ties etc.

A lot of examples can be shown in the implementation of activities of European networks.

It has already been mentioned how formal ties are complemented by informal ones. The more the forms of tie are contained in a connection, the more multiplex it becomes. Multiplex ties are supportive, voluntary and personal and are regarded as stable uniplex. Networks promote the tendency of multiplex ties.

3. The control mode and organisational form of networks

3.1. Cooperation, coordination and the net work: an ideal-typical presentation

Before the question how networks can be *managed* is addressed, it is necessary to deal with the different steering mechanisms or control modes of networks from a theoretical perspective.

While cooperation represents the working ties between individual actors, coordination can be understood as the fine-tuning or the targeted alignment of actors. The special element in networks or nets from this perspective, is the fact that a number of (autonomous) actors are all linked to one another through specific ties and form a system in their entirety. Accordingly, they form a horizontal, heterarchical structure without centres.

While *cooperation* refers to the working ties of individual organisations, *network* refers to the huge number of cooperating partners.

However, differentiating between the terms *cooperation* and *network* is not always applied with sufficient distinction; they are occasionally viewed as interchangeable, and the terms used synonymously. In practice though, the concept of networks is far more complex and in no way clear-cut. Network-type forms of cooperation do not necessarily exclude or generally replace hierarchical control. Networks are increasingly organised in accordance with hybrid patterns. This means that different control patterns like hierarchy and heterarchy emerge side by side and are capable of interlocking.

3.2. Different organisational forms of networks

One central criterion which characterises a network is the nature of its relationships, which in turn depends on the resources that are exchanged as a matter of priority. Differentiation can also be made between

■ Exchange network
■ Support network
■ Interest represenation / advocacy network
■ Result-oriented network
■ Process-oriented networks

Networks assume different organisational forms that are functional according to their context. Different forms of networking, ranging from loose associations to club-type associations thus emerge. As can be seen in the following illustration, networks can be described by their distinctive characteristics and analyzed on the basis of their central dimensions. For instance, factors like the frequency of meeting, the degree of formalisation, decision structures (joint sessions, moderation etc.), the numbers and heterogeneity of members involved, openness or exclusiveness of access, geographical range (e.g. working at communal or international level), which can be presented differently depending on the network and context all serve as elements for classification.

● Cooperation, coordination cooperation, network

Cooperation   Coordinated cooperation   Network

From: Dietz 1999, p.211f.

● Criteria of the organisational structuring of networks

Dimension	Levels of organisation
Subject-specifity	Low-high
Moderation	Constant-variable
Voluntariness	Low-high
Hierarchy	Hierarchic-rather cooperative
Duration	Permanent-occasional
Intervals of meetings	Discontinuous – continuous
Size (number of meetings)	Small-large
Division of labour	Low-strong
Exclusiveness	Low-level access – limited access
Formalisation	High-low
Heterogeneity	Homogenous- heterogeneous
Range (spatial)	Local-international

3.3. Network management – shaping of dilemmas

Four functions of network control can be identified as follows (Sydow 1999, p. 295 f):

■ *Selection*:
The question of selection relates to the partners in the network and participants in an event: Who should be involved is a central question that should resolved in good time.

■ *Allocation:*
The assignment of duties and resources, the distribution of responsibility to key partners.

Regulation:

Cooperation in the network provides for the development and enforcement of rules between the organisations, and:

Evaluation

covers the complete network or selected rules of cooperation.

Networks are dependent on *feedback loops*. Sydow (1999) identified eight stress factors, requiring regulation in the networking processes which may also serve to impede network cooperation

Diversity – Single entity:

How can a balance be struck between the diversity of the actors involved and their integration into a single entity

Flexibility – Specificity:

How flexible is the network and how specifically designed is it with respect to its set objectives and identity?

Autonomy – Dependency:

How much autonomy is possible and what does it consist of? How much dependency is there and what does it comprise?

Trust – Control:

How much trust and what trust is there? What is regulated through control mechanisms and how?

Cooperation – Competition:

What roles do cooperation and competition play? How are the ties between cooperation and competition applied?

Stability – Fragility:

What roles do stability and fragility play? How do they manifest and what are the regulatory mechanisms?

Formality – Informality:

How are the ties between formality and informality managed? What relationship do they have with each other?

Economy – Governance:

What are the ties between functional and governing arrangements – in what ways are governing patterns established?

As specific qualities of networks, these stress ratios cannot be resolved but are structurally embedded (Structure dilemma); they can however, be managed and balanced productively.

The realisation of the intended outcomes is one major duty of network management in the articulation of this dilemma. Accordingly action guidelines of network management are:

- obtaining a balance of competence and responsibility,
- enhancing joint experiences and successes,
- creation of order out of disorder,
- managing conflicts,
- keeping mutual expectations transparent,
- gaining links outside the network.

(Baitsch/Müller 2001)

The realisation of the appropriate outcome is one major duty of network moderation in the articulation of this dilemma. According to this, action guidelines are (Baitsch/Müller 2001, p. v):

- obtaining a balance of competence and responsibility
- enhancing joint experiences and successes
- creation of order out of disorder

- managing conflicts,
- keeping mutual expectations transparent
- gaining links outside the network

We regard the eight stress ratios listed above as central. They are also suitable for use as evaluation criteria in the evaluation of networks (cf. Chapter 5 of this publication).

3.4. Trust as an important factor

Much like the similar phenomena of fairness and the appreciation of value, trust has to do with soft factors, which are significant in the developing of lasting and reciprocal ties. Cooperative action is always risky, because the actions of a trusting party are usually open and unprotected. In an action based on trust, one relies for instance, on the fact that the other party will keep to agreements. Here, trust helps in the replacement of control. Specific forms of cooperation, particularly in connection with a social dilemma demand trust as a matter of necessity. According to Niklas Luhmannn (1973), trust can generally be understood to mean the reduction of complexity. Moreover, trust is important for the attainment of objectives: *Trust is the expectation of a future satisfaction, which becomes the motive for one's own stipulated conduct.* (Luhmann 1973)

Trust is however, not only a prerequisite for cooperative ties but can be built upon and shaped, e.g. through fair processes (confidence-building measures). This is also

described as *rule-based trust*. This can be differentiated from *history-based trust* – confidence based on previous experiences – and from *category-based trust* – confidence based on joint social, cultural or organisational affiliation (*We of the Adult Education Centre*).

4. The wider benefits of participation in networks

4.1. Networked working as a basic professional attitude

Even though the focus of this publication is on networks in the European funding programmes which are expected to set precise objectives to and follow a rigid work plan, it is also necessary to draw attention to the wider benefits of networks. These wider benefits should also be taken into consideration in the development of networks and in the on-going process of self-reflection because they have a considerable value for network actors and are a precondition for creating win/win situations.

From a professional-theoretical perspective, networking can be understood as the process of building up ties by people and groups and as a fundamental basic attitude of professional action:

Networked working is a qualitative basic attitude, which does not entail precise 'product-related' cooperation alone, but the establishment of a communicative process of understanding of the long-term impact between staff. (Jungk 1994, p. 61)

This, at the same time, is a reference to the broad spectrum of the term networking. The

creation of a specific form of organisation, namely of a network, as well as the particularly qualitative orientation in the build-up of cooperative structures and ties can be described as networking.

4.2. Relations as social capital

The theory of social capital as shaped by sociologists like Pierre Bourdieu, James S. Coleman or Robert D. Putnam. *Social capital* is a multi-dimensional concept. Generally formulated, it tells us that specific ties may result in benefits to the actors.

Pierre Bourdieu has impressively worked out the special character of this form of capital, as opposed to economic and cultural capital. Social capital constitutes the ties that can be reverted to. It is firstly non-material and symbolic. Since the forms of capital are convertible as a matter of principle, social capital can be converted into economic capital. Bourdieu defines social capital as a network of ties, which emerges above all, as the end-result of long-term investment decisions. In the process, coincidental ties are converted into permanent ones and with a certain degree of commitment character. The build-up of social capital as investments in ties, aims at medium and long-term impact:

(…) the network of ties is the product of individual or collective investment strategies that are consciously or unconsciously established for the creation and sustaining of such social ties as (sooner or later) promise direct benefits. (Bourdieu 1983, p. 192)

James S. Coleman integrated the term s*ocial capital* into his action-theoretical model. According to him, social capital is not a person but a tie or structure proper. It is linked to the structures of ties; it is built up by them and it disintegrates through their changes as well. At the same time, Coleman emphasises that the social capital that is inherent in the structures of ties is productive only for specific targets and is context-specific, i.e. they prove to be largely without effect in another context, while ties constitute a capital in a specific context.

Moreover, there is a theory which relates the opportunities of action through social capital, less to individuals than to the social assets of the company. In particular Robert D. Putnam, who highlighted the productive aspects of social capital for societal development in his study on the structures of administration in Italy, advances this theory. This aspect of strengthening the social asset is also of relevance in the context of political education or active citizenship.

What does the concept of social capital now mean for network actors? Their opportunities for action do not depend on their material equipment (economic capital) or the number of staff (human capital) alone, but also on the tie resources (social capital) built-up by them (also compare Jansen 1999 p. 99). The way relations are embedded in the social system impacts strongly on their performance.

One important function of ties that is also relevant to professional action lies in the fact that they open up new ties.

Ties make know-how accessible, which have to be repeatedly established anew.

Ties as channels of access
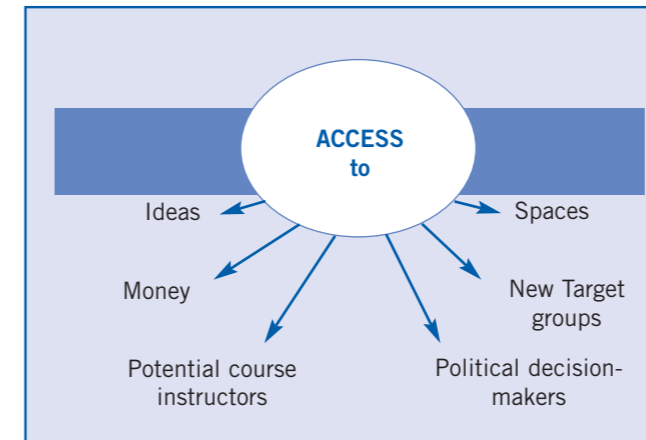
The flexible use of contact networks guarantees the acquisition of relevant information which is required for remaining up-to-date. In planning processes, they function as resource networks. They include the efficient utilisation of resources, simplifying the provision of instructors, the finding of relevant contacts and expertise (Yellow pages effect) as well as the option of competitor analysis. Even innovation relies on ties. To undertake new projects, one requires networks of ties, through which the required contacts can be channelled, particularly if one seeks to advance into a new area.

In working in cooperation with others, the contact network of the partner is often also envisaged. The other party contributes its potential network of ties (i.e. its contacts) to the working partnership. These newly emerging structures enable access to specific groups of addresses. Contacts may assume the role and

function of *door opener*. Contacts open up further contacts.

In spite of the significance of the concept of social capital, the relevance of this concept is constrained through the limited relational capacity of actors. Social contacts must be developed and maintained. This requires resources, which most often, translates into time because ties are bound to be selected in the process. Networks require social capital but the work on ties connected with it leads to a growth in labour and in some cases, to congestion.

4.3. Functions of educational networks in lifelong learning

Networks are an organisational answer to the diversity and complexity of educational needs of the various stakeholder groups of lifelong learning. The more diversified and specific learning needs and provisions become, the more pressing also becomes the need for integration of the diverse experiences and approaches. To form and participate in inter-organisational and personal networks seems to be one answer to overcoming the fragmentation of the lifelong learning landscape:

- Educational challenges are multi-dimensional and often linked to each other. Co-operation and exchange are needed to tackle them adequately.
- The fields of action in lifelong learning often lack coordination. This deficit is the starting point for networking. Networks aim at improving communication between actors and enabling joint planning processes.

- Networks aim to create synergy. If actors who have hitherto acted separately start to work together synergy effects can be expected. Synergy can be created between different
  - activities (projects, conferences, seminars, research, development of materials, lobbying…)
  - institutions (coordinating institution, partner institutions, Commission, European associations, national networks, public authorities…)
  - professionals (practitioners and managers of the above-mentioned institutions, members of networks)
- Networks are supposed to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of learning provision, and contribute to quality assurance.

This non-exhaustive listing shows that expectations regarding networks in education tend to be very – if not too – high. Sometimes networks are even expected to make up for structural deficits and thus become a projection screen for the unfulfilled wishes of the educational community. For this reason some researchers have started to talk critically about the *network myth*. But even if the expectations of networks are sometimes exaggerated, there does not seem to be a professional alternative to acting in networks.

4.4 Why join networks in education? Some motives and benefits

So far we have discussed two reasons for networking in education:

Networked working as a normal professional attitude of educators and the diversity and fragmentation of the lifelong learning landscape which requires integrated structures. But a third factor should not be neglected either: the question of what individual benefits the actors involved can expect and receive from a network.

The motives of educators in joining a network vary a lot, but can probably be put into one or more of four categories:

Categories of motivation for network participation
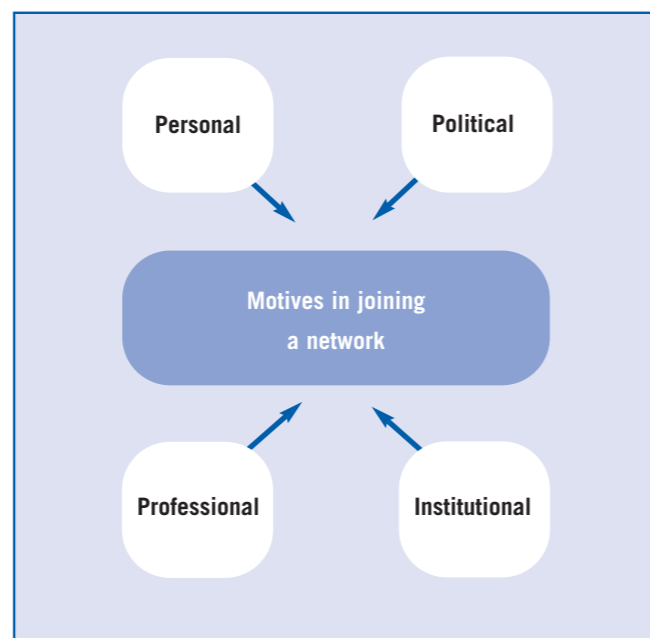
Personal
The striving for personal enrichment can be a driving force. People want to get to know colleagues in other countries, to learn something new, or just break out of the usual work routine.

Political
There may be a strong desire to lobby for certain (perhaps disadvantaged) target groups in education or to promote a branch of learning hitherto neglected by policy makers or the public at large. Values play an important role.

Professional
An attraction can be the wish to improve professional competences, to do a job better through getting involved in a network.

Institutional
Membership of the network may raise the profile of the institution concerned. Network actors may even be sent by their institution to represent it at the European level.

In some cases the motivation to join a network will be a mixture of the four incentives, in other cases one attraction clearly prevails.

Networks are in any case most effective if the people participating and their institutions as a whole expect and receive benefits. These concrete benefits the actors expect are mostly non-monetary and should be explicitly identified. They may include

- the regular reception of most up-to-date information
- the chance to test innovative learning materials without paying
- a forum for self-presentation and promotion
- contacts for project-making
- advice on particular challenges
- new ideas for improving the range of educational offers
- access to decision makers etc.

The more relevant the expected benefits are for the network actors, the more intense is the commitment to and involvement in the network.

5. Shaping of the network culture

Network coordination describes the creation of an organisational structure which is required to enable all participating actors to cooperate in a target-oriented manner in such a way that the network functions may be successfully developed. In the process, it is assumed that network processes on the one hand, require this superior control. On the other hand, networks are only controllable to a limited degree given the largely organisational independence of the actors. Network coordinators are always dependent on the active, independent participation of the individual actors.

Within (social) networks, there are specific forms and rules of exposure relating to the interaction with one another as well as how to cooperate. These rules and norms, in their entirety, characterise the network culture. Participating successfully in a network entails the prerequisite of accepting and contributing to the shaping of the respective network culture.

But it is necessary to bear in mind:

- confidence-building,
- the strengthening of social capital,
- the social factor as capital and the critical

success factor for networking (informal contacts and face-to-face-ties) emerge only in the course of time.

The greater the number of network partners, the greater the need for network coordination. The demand for clear consultation, jointly defined standards and competences increases. The flow of communication must be more strongly institutionalised and formally coordinated.

Bearers of knowledge, holders of power, committed professionals and people ready for action may contribute to a network their respective different competences. Networks require generalists, gatekeepers and liaisons that should be cross-linked in a competent manner. All partners in a network should identify their core competences and indicate the services and contributions they are able and willing to put into the network. (Baitsch/Müller 2001, p. 15)

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Chapter 2
European Networks in Education

In the previous chapter the network concept was introduced from the perspective of social science which places the focus on the relationship between network actors. This is an extremely important point of view with many practical implications and will therefore be referred to throughout this publication.

The wider perspective of social science, however, needs to be complemented by the much more rigidly defined requirements of the European funding programmes in education. Although networks differ in several essential characteristics from transnational cooperation projects they share the same funding mechanism. In this regard education networks in the European funding programmes are hybrids: evolving social networks with rules of their own, and time-limited project-type endeavours with limited resources, a set work plan, and sometimes rather rigid rules for their implementation.

1. Organisational preconditions of European networks in education

Even in the limited field of education, the term European network is ambiguous, as it is used for different types of organisational structures. These vary considerably in terms of their formality and organisational stability:

Different types of educational networks at European level

European associations

Legally established entities with **formal member institutions** or individuals: e.g. EUCEN, EAEA, EAIE.

Networks in EU programmes

Partnerships temporarily funded on the basis of a **work plan** and aiming to establish sustainable network structures.

Formality & stability

Personal networks

Informal network of **individual contacts** to other colleagues and organisations in Europe.

At the lower end of this scale *network* can stand for the cluster of personal contacts of an individual educationalist. Such networks are not formalised at all.

At the same time *network* is used for some of the around 1.500 European associations

which operate as interest and advocacy groups for their member institutions or individuals: legally established, long-term organisations with formalised statutes, regular membership, a yearly budget, and permanently staffed head offices.

When we speak of European networks in education in this publication, however, we mean a third type: networks within the framework of European funding programmes. This type of network operates within a project-type funding mechanism: Consortia of educational institutions are temporarily funded on the basis of a work programme. In the funding period they attempt to develop network structures which have the ability to endure after the funding period is over.

The latter type of European networks in education has a rather fragile organisational basis as compared to permanent European associations:

- Most of these networks do not constitute a legal entity, but are merely temporary partnership consortia formed on the occasion of the application to the funding programme.
- The network needs to develop its structure and implement an ambitious work programme in a rather short funding period of two or three years (plus potentially a possible second funding phase).
- In times of decreasing public spending on education, these networks often rely exclusively on EU funding, and the level of funding is generally speaking felt to be rather low compared with the tasks assigned.
- Moreover, in the case of adult education European networks are sometimes built by partner institutions which lack basic funding for their original activities.

This specific organisational basis of networks in European funding programmes implies certain preconditions for acting in the field.

Potential strengths and weaknessses of European networks

Potential strengths
- Flexible, adaptable to the needs of the field
- High level of motivation and commitment
- Comparably inexpensive
- Horizontal structures
- Shared decision-making

Potential weaknesses
- Cannot enter into contracts as a network with third parties
- Hard to employ full-time staff
- Sometimes not enough scope and resources for professional action
- Sustainability is critical

Based on an unpublished presentation of Pat Davies (EUCEN).

It is in the light of these ambivalent preconditions – a fragile structural base on the one hand, and a high human potential on the other – that the expectations of the European funding programmes and the actual achievements of networks ought to be evaluated.

2. The mission of networks according to EU funding programmes

In the main EU funding instrument for education, the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme, networks play a prominent role. Network actions are foreseen for all sectoral and also in transversal sub-programmes:

Network actions in the Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2013)

Sectoral programmes			
Comenius School education	**Erasmus** Higher education	**Leonardo da Vinci** Vocational education and	**Grundtvig** Adult education
Transversal programmes			
Languages			
ICT Information and Communication Technologies			
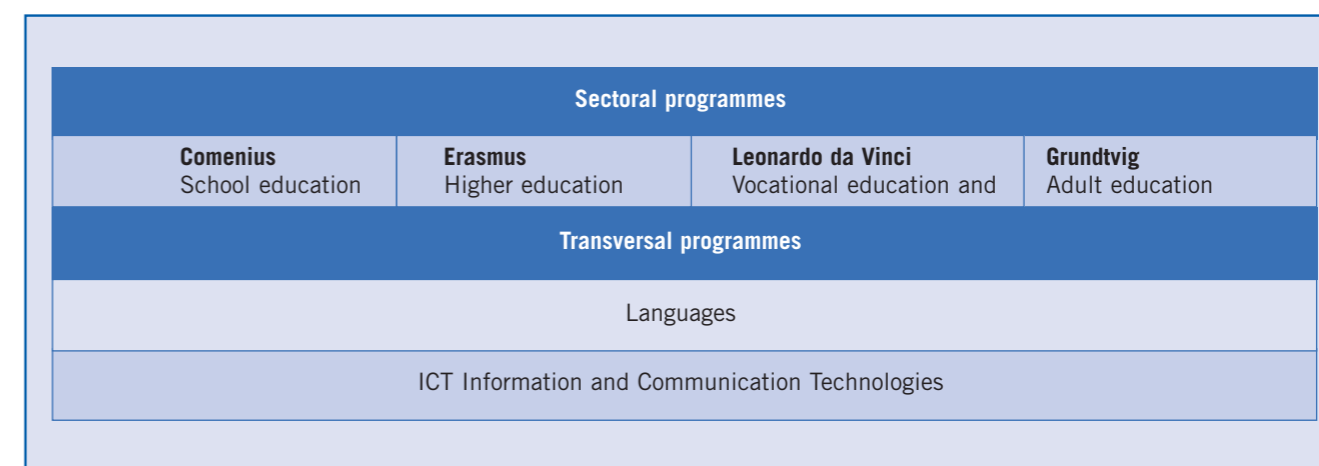
One of the main reasons for this emphasis on networks is the fragmentation of European cooperation activities: European networks can be regarded as an attempt to overcome the prevalent thinking in terms of isolated projects. This lack of interaction between funded projects and the educational field in question is one of the greatest weaknesses detected in the EU education programmes. Many educational concepts and learning products of high quality and innovative potential have been developed by ambitious pilot projects, but are not sufficiently visible in the field. Generally speaking, the developed materials are neither sufficiently known and used by practitioners, nor does the generated innovation perceptibly influence policy-making at national or European level.

Here networks are supposed to play an important strategic role. The EU funding programmes' expectations with regard to the integrating mission of networks is rather high. This becomes obvious in a term which recurs in many programme documents: A network is expected to become a *key player* in its respective educational field at European level. Becoming such a key player involves a long list of tasks that a network should fulfil:

The mission of European networks in adult and school education according to Lifelong Learning Programme documents

Provide a common platform, forum, or reference point for discussion and reflection on key issues, policy and research in the field concerned.

Debate function

Disseminate innovation and best practice generated by European projects and other initiatives.

Dissemination function

Assist in the networking of projects which are thematically related and funded by the EU programme in question.

Support function

In order to become a

KEY PLAYER

in the thematic field at European level a network is expected to

Provide an overview of the thematic field through comparative analyses and contribute to the development of a shared terminology at a European level.

Research function

Promote the implementation of innovative results, insights and best practice in relevant fields.

Advocacy function

Identify present, emergent and future needs of stakeholders and highlight potential areas for European cooperation.

Forecast function

Based on information fiches (on-line Guide for Applicants) on Grundtvig and Comenius networks published on http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/index_en.html , version January 2007.

In view of the rather fragile organisational basis of networks, and the limited financial and time resources the EU funding programmes grants to networks, it seems hardly possible that a network is able to fulfil all six potential network functions to the same extent. Of course the programme documents are to be taken seriously, as they are the basis for receiving funding, but they need to be interpreted in a realistic way. Less can be more: a network should focus on a few core functions instead of trying to accomplish literally every expectation that is expressed in the programme documents.

3. Critical points according to programme evaluation studies

This publication was written in the transition period between two generations of European funding programmes in education. It was therefore possible to consider the achievements and shortcomings of previously funded networks.

Several external evaluation studies were carried out independently from each other to assess the performance of Grundtvig, Comenius and Leonardo da Vinci (1998-2006). These studies highlight similar critical points:

Critical points according to programme evaluation reports

The network 'instrument' operating under G4 should be reconsidered and perhaps redesigned. (Grundtvig).

Despite some positive examples, the overall quality of dissemination via G4 networks is disappointing.

The effectiveness of the networks could be improved by clarifying some of the objectives and rules in order to extend their influence and secure their future in the long term.

The notion of networks "does not seem to be well understood by the target group" (Leonardo).

The specific role of networks needs to better developed and explained. In particular networks' complementarity to 'normal' projects and the possibilities of synergies and mutual enrichment between them have to be strengthened. (Leonardo)

There is some confusion, on the part of the beneficiaries, about the difference between a network and a project. (Comenius)

Networks need more clarity in objectives, better focus (Grundtvig).

It is necessary to make "networks more distinct from co-operation projects" (Grundtvig)

Three related problem areas can be distinguished from the results of external evaluation and these were confirmed in several interviews we conducted with EU programme managers and experts:

- There is an apparent lack of clarity about the mission of a network.
- Networks often need to be more focused on core aims and objectives.
- Many actors are not sufficiently clear about the difference between a network and a Transnational Cooperation Project (TCP).

The widespread confusion about the core mission of a network and the lack of focus of many European networks is probably a consequence of the above-mentioned multitude of expectations expressed in the programme documents. Networks often try to do too many different things and thus blur their core intention. In the following paragraphs we will suggest a more focused approach which concentrates resources on a few core functions of the network.

In order to arrive at such a proposal we need to analyse the structural and functional characteristics of a European network as we see it.

4. European networks versus transnational cooperation projects

One of the network promoters we interviewed explained frankly why he had applied for a network rather than for a cooperation project:

At first our network was actually designed as a project. But in view of the large number of partners we were advised to make a network application.

But is it not the number of partners which constitutes a network. European networks are not just large cooperation projects, although they may share several characteristics with them.

- They are normally built from the bottom-up, because they respond to a need in the field.
- They are partnerships funded for a limited period of one to three years.
- The funding is granted for the implementation of a specific work plan.
- They bring together partners with complementary expertise for a specific purpose and to share tasks accordingly.

These are only superficial similarities. In other, more crucial respects networks are distinctly different from projects. The most important difference is a strategic one. Although networks and cooperation projects contribute to the same overall aims, their approaches are different.

Main strategic difference between European Networks and Transnational Cooperation Projects

European Networks	Cooperation Projects
Contribute to quality, innovation and the development of a European Dimension in a specific educational field by	
bringing together key players in Europe and pooling strategic knowledge for further use at European level.	bringing together complementary expertise at transnational level for developing, testing and disseminating innovative and transferable learning products

There are also crucial differences at the structural level. A cooperation project is geared towards one main goal, i.e. the joint development (testing and dissemination) of one or more tangible products. Although a network may also develop products (reports, databases, seminars etc.), this is not its main purpose. This lack of the unifying element of product orientation has major implications:

- A network is process-oriented rather than product-oriented. A network process is much less predictable than that of a cooperation project. This poses particular challenges and limitations to planning and management.

- Normally networks do not have one single aim, but multiple and sometimes competing objectives. Consequently a network often consists of several distinct strands of activities or even sub-networks with a high degree of independence from each other.
- The aims of a network are not only multiple but also more complex than that of projects. It is, for instance, a more sophisticated task to influence policy-makers about issues relating to sustainability in education than it is to produce a training manual for environmental education.
- This *multiplexity* of network aims is also to do with the more generic level of network themes as opposed to the often very

specific topics and target groups of cooperation projects.

- The multiplexity of aims and activities, together with the programme requirements to represent a large number of European countries as well as different types of actors and levels of hierarchy, leads to an extremely high degree of diversity of actors in a network. An ordinary European project team is not only smaller, but also much less heterogeneous.

The table below summarises the most important differences between a network and a cooperation project.

Typology of European Networks as opposed to Transnational Cooperation Projects

European Networks	Cooperation Projects
European scale (>10 partners)	Transnational scale (>3 partners)
Pooling strategic knowledge	Generating concrete innovation
Process-orientation	Product-orientation
Strategic impact on the field	Delivery and use of products or services
Multiple and complex objectives	Few and concrete objectives
Separate strands of activities with high degree of autonomy	Interlinked work packages con tributing to the main outputs
Multiple target groups	Clearly defined target groups
Partnership which includes key players who represent the field	Partnership of practitioners with complementary expertise
Enlargement strategy of partnership	Closed partnership with possible associated partners
Sustainable structure or fabric of relations	Temporary cooperation structure

European networks in education are a multifaceted form of transnational cooperation: They are very process-oriented, have complex and multiple aims, consist of highly autonomous sub-units and are implemented by an extremely diverse set of actors.
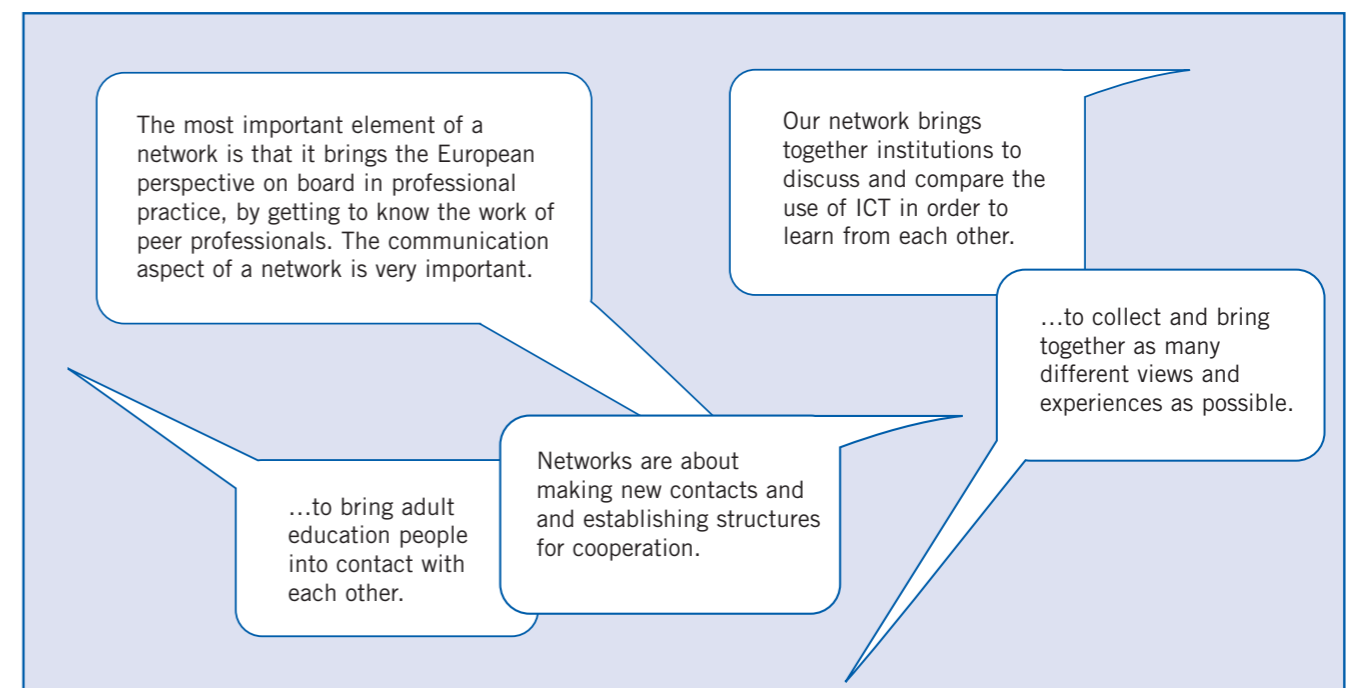
5. Priorities according to network partners

We asked coordinators and partners of previously funded networks what they considered to be the most important purpose of their network. Hardly surprisingly, interviewees stressed different aspects of the long list of network objectives and activities to be found in the various programme documents. Some primarily want to contribute to the theme in question or promote a certain aspect of education, others want to disseminate good practice and project results and therefore focus on events such as conferences, presentations, and exhibitions, while still another group is keen to create guidelines and recommendations for practitioners or policy makers.

One thing they all have in common is that they name as one of their top priorities – in many cases as *the* top priority) to bring together practitioners, to share different experiences and approaches and so to learn from each other.

Networks are about networking: network patners' statements

The most important element of a network is that it brings the European perspective on board in professional practice, by getting to know the work of peer professionals. The communication aspect of a network is very important.

Our network brings together institutions to discuss and compare the use of ICT in order to learn from each other.

...to collect and bring together as many different views and experiences as possible.

...to bring adult education people into contact with each other.

Networks are about making new contacts and and establishing structures for cooperation.

Our interviewed network coordinators and partners are very much in accord with the focus on relationships stressed by social network theory: In the first place, networks are about networking and learning. . This is also an important message about European networks and one that we want to promote with this publication, as these core functions of networks are not always given the value they deserve.

6. Our view of the mission of European networks in education

Our interpretation of the mission of European networks in education was influenced from three directions: the insights of social network analysis, the expectations of the EU funding programmes, and the experiences of network partners.

Different perspectives which influenced our interpretation of networks

- **Social science**
  Focus on relations of actors
- **Network partners**
  Focus on learning & sharing
- **The Euroweaving view of networks**
- **EU programme**
  Focus on strategic impact
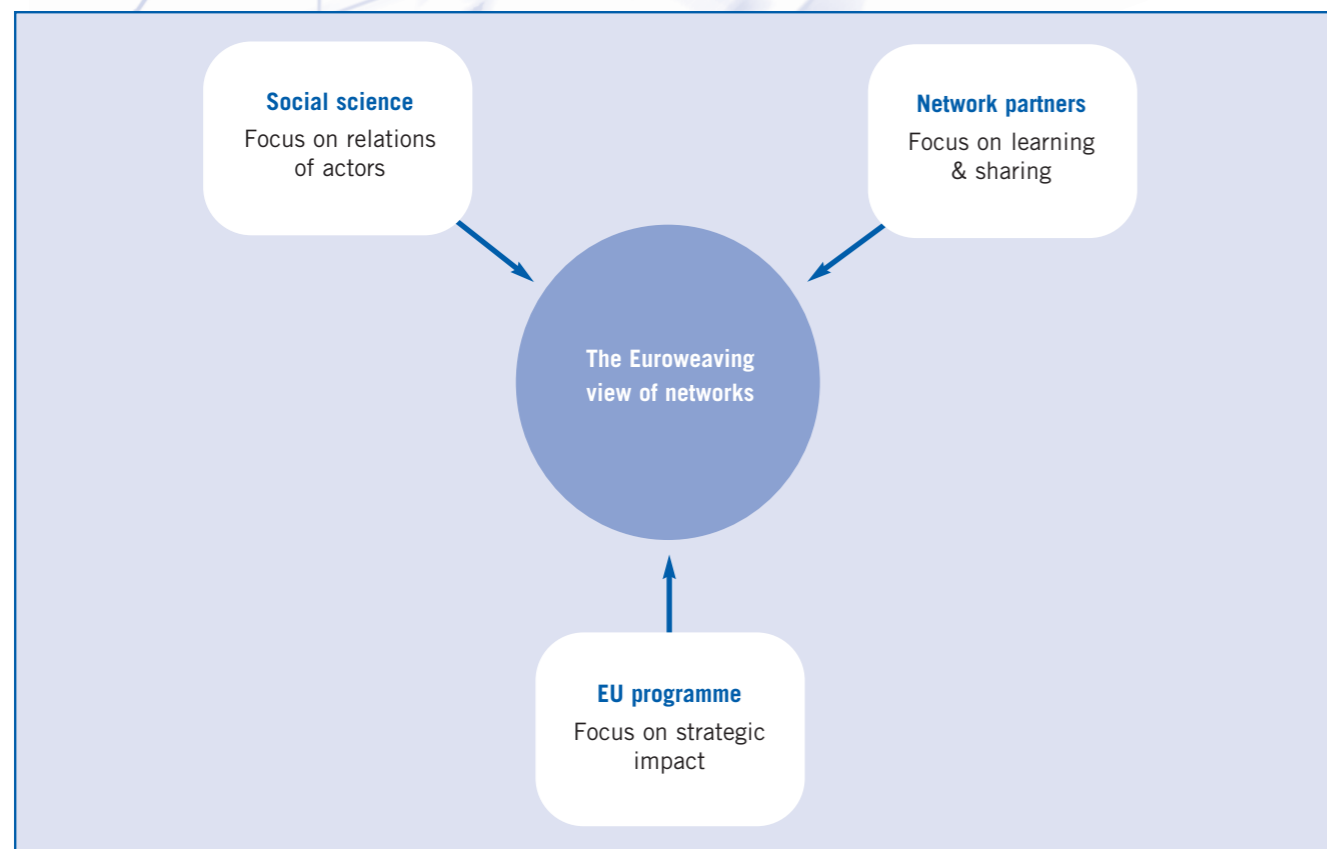
Taking also into account the structural limitations European that networks face due to the limitations of the funding mechanism and the fragile organisational base on which they operate, we recommend that networks in the EU funding programmes focus on three core functions:

Our interpretation of the mission of European networks in education

- **Networks are about networking**
- **Networks are about learning**
- **Networks are about shaping policies and practices**
- **What networks are about**
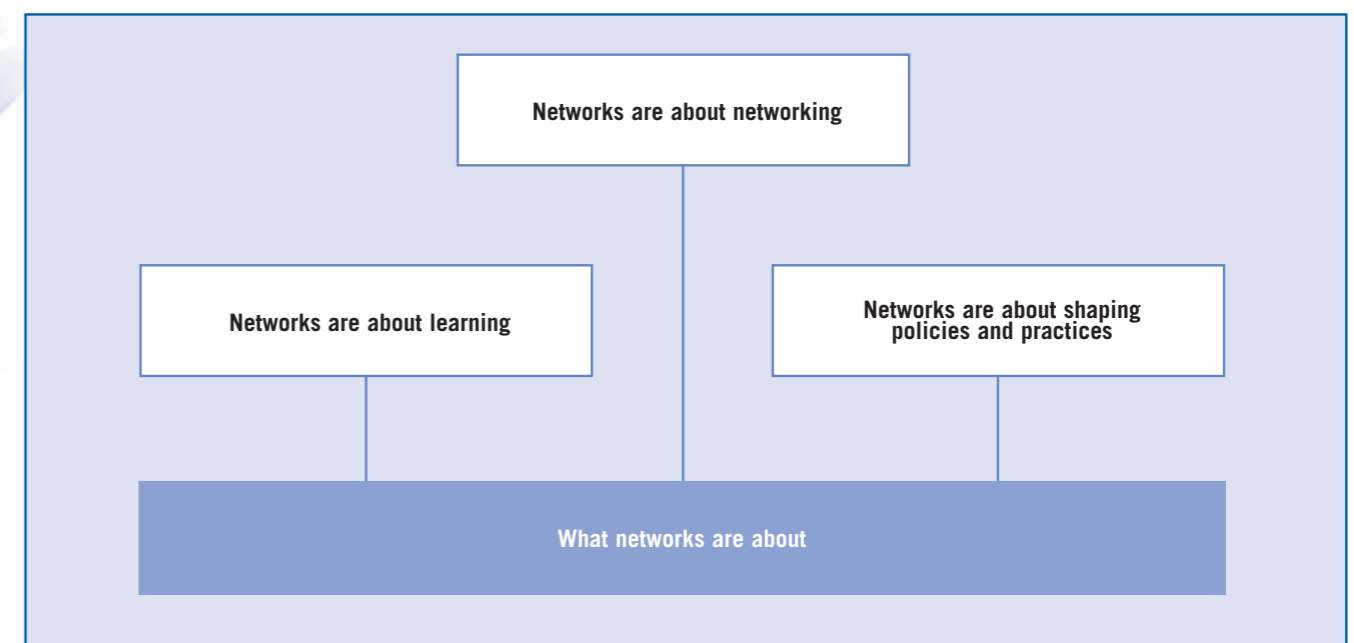
Networks are about networking

First and foremost, the objective of European networks should be to bring together practitioners, experts and policy-makers in a specific field and to create an organisational framework for intensive networking. This involves developing effective strategies as to how they can meet, share, and exchange their experiences and expertise for their mutual benefit. To plan, organise and implement provision for intensive and effective networking and keeping them alive is a challenging task in itself, which requires a considerable amount of the time and budget that a European network has available.

Networks are about learning

It should be an obvious priority for a cooperative structure in an education context, but is not always sufficiently emphasised a network should provide ample learning opportunities for all the actors involved. Of course learning activities within the thematic field concerned (best practice, research results, state of the art, different approaches and contexts in the European countries) should be a substantial

part of a network's work programme. But learning is also crucial at another level. Networks are such complex structures that they need reflection and transformation as an indispensable basis for targeted action. We are convinced that networks are not able to succeed without learning. Therefore personal and organisational learning should have a prominent role on the network agenda.

Networks are about shaping practices and policies

Although the creation and maintainance of suitable provision for networking, sharing experiences and learning for actors inside and outside the network would already be a considerable achievement, networks should go one step further. A network should make some sort of measurable impact in the educational field concerned. But networks should be realistic about what they can accomplish. This is why we combine the expectation of having an

impact on the field with the warning not to be over-ambitious, but to concentrate on *either* policy *or* practice and by setting themselves one or very few of the following tasks:

- to evaluate and make available to practitioners innovation and good practice in the field;
- to conduct research or make comparative analyses in order to provide the field with an overview of the state of the art;
- to support existing thematically related projects in content and management aspects and to act as incubator of new projects;
- to make recommendations to policy-makers at national and European levels with the aim of mainstreaming innovative practices.

The following chapters address the practical implications of our view of the functional and structural characteristics of European networks on establishing, managing, evaluating a network and making it sustainable.

Chapter 3:
Establishing and setting up a network

> Setting up a European education network involves long preparation, strategic thinking, the following up of local and European policy agendas and a highly dynamic multi-player team. The set-up phase of a European education network covers the period starting with the conceptualisation of an idea as a result of needs analysis and ends with the formulation of the network's future role and position in the sphere of European education.

1. The characteristics of the set-up phase of a European network

1.1. Main tasks involved in setting up a network

Setting up a solid European network can be a rather long process and is a demanding task. This is in part due to the complex nature of a network, but also because of the fact that the EU supports only a very limited number of networks in each thematic area. This chapter focuses on providing guidance on how to build the strong profile of a European network which is bound to be a key player in its specific thematic field.

The chapter's content results from interviews and informal conversations with network promoters, European Commission officials and external experts working for the Commission. Most of these actors tend to agree that one of

Statements of external evaluators on network set up

It is not always clear to whom the network and its different layers of activities are addressed. This is very important to design appropriate services and learning outcomes.

The distinction between a network and a large co-operation project is not always clear.

Most networks don't sufficiently justify the driving force behind their creation.

The definition of the network's capacity and the mapping of its potential are vital for its success.

Often networks are not aware of the scope and impact a European education network should pursue, and what steps they should follow.

the most challenging aspects of setting up a network is building its distinct profile and identity.

The set-up phase of the network is crucial for its future performance since it will help partners to define the path they will be taking in

the formulation of the three main network functions: networking, learning, and shaping policies and practices.

This chapter provides guidance and tools that will help. The following table shows the main tasks for network partners in the set up phase of their network.

Main tasks in the set-up phase of European networks

Mapping the strategy of the network		Deciding on the network typology
	The network's set up phase	
Forming the network partnership		Selecting the coordinator
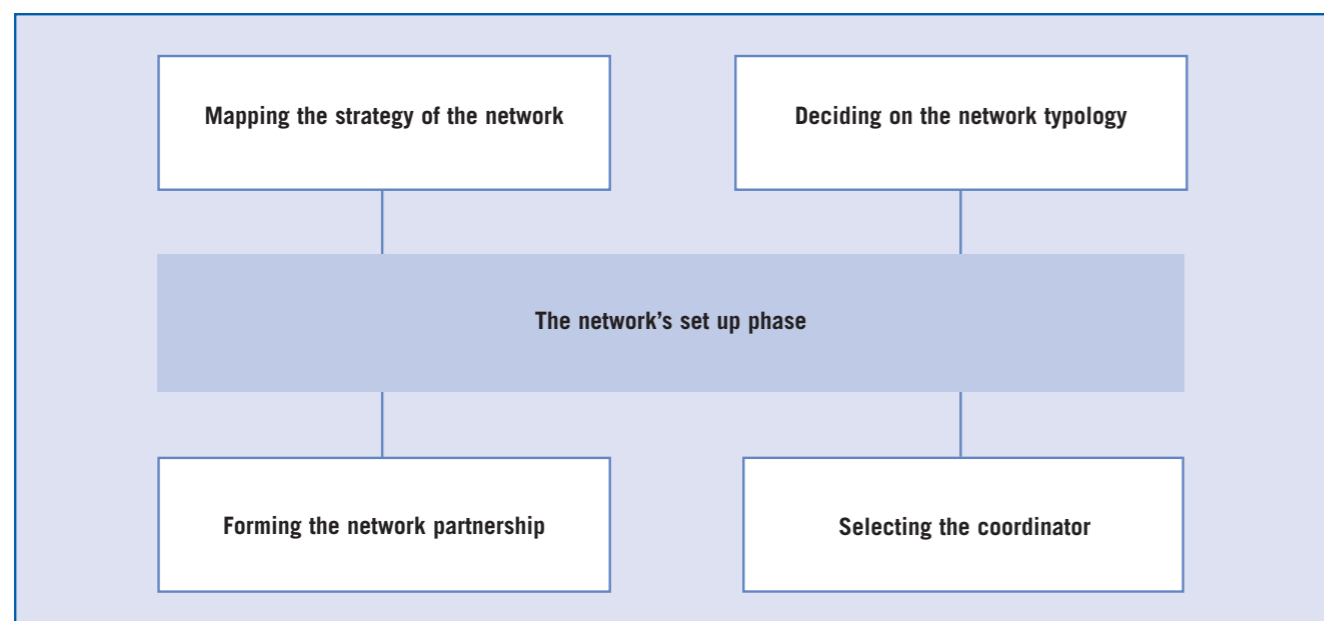
As a result of the set up phase, the network partners will be in a position to formulate and take decisions on:

- The *strategy* their network will be following: they will have agreed on the network's targeted audiences, will have mapped the state of the art in their thematic area, they will have identified indicators for innovation and they will have decided on what other similar initiatives will be relevant for their network's development.

- The *identity* of a network according to a selected *typology*: Will it be a dissemination network in which selection and transferability of good practice will be taking place? Will it be a resource network, in which content development and research will be the focus of the action? Or will it be an advocacy and policy development network in which partners will be working on policy analysis and lobbying techniques?

- The *coordinator,* who will be ensuring lead-

ership, efficient management and the visibility to the network.

- The *partnership,* which will be establishing the network along with all other interested parties that will be supporting the network's action.

- *Tools* and methods that will be useful for the formulation of the network, notably the logical framework matrix, which is often used in European co-operation programmes.

1.2. Different starting points for networks

There are diverse paths in the building of a European network. There have been European education networks that emerged from previously existing informal or formal structures and others that were set up from totally new initiatives. Between these two scenarios, there is an array of possibilities. It is often the case that European networks emerge from a group of partners that have jointly undertaken a Transnational Cooperation Project (TCP) and wish to take the results further, without a strongly premeditated development strategy.

Network histories

A network emerging from an already existing network of volunteers
The coordinator of a network of European schools was the founder of ESP (European Schools Project), a Europe-wide network of teachers and schools working on applying ICT in school (in its early days this was based on volunteer work). This ESP-network had national coordinators and these coordinators became partners in the European network.

A network that started as a result of a series of TCPs
The partners of a network on self-evaluation were part of the core group of a Comenius teacher training project and an Accompanying Measures project on the same theme (self-evaluation). The partners then decided to take the subject one step further in order to have more impact. They did not wish to produce something new, but wanted to exchange knowledge and good practice

An arbitrary (unplanned) start to a network
There are also a few networks that started rather arbitrarily. These either followed a recommendation of the European Commission that encouraged a network in their specific field of expertise, or started as a large co-operation project, which then emerged as a network. In both cases, the initial plan was not to set up a network but the network structure and functions emerged in the process.

Since there is no single starting point for a network, there is no one method for setting up a network. Nevertheless, it is good to keep in mind that when a network structure is an entirely new initiative, the design and set up strategy for the network will be a longer and more demanding process than in cases where the network is a follow-up to preceding cooperation activities.

2. Mapping the strategy of the network

2.1. Elements of a network strategy

The group of motivated education professionals that are ready to set up a network should bear in mind that they are expected to become European key players in the thematic field of their expertise. Consequently, they should be able to demonstrate in their network proposal their capacity to generate and promote development in the field across different European states.

The following graph presents the main issues that need to be explored and analysed thoroughly when defining the strategy of the future network. These issues should be in line with the requirements of the EU funding programme (that each coordinator and partner within the network should be familiar with).

Taking as an example a network of special education needs:

When mapping its strategy, such a network should consider the potential interests of any *targeted* institution related to special education, namely teacher training institutions, schools, associations of special education, governing bodies and special interest committees and the needs of the learners themselves. This should happen ideally in all European countries, taking into consideration all areas of special needs (disability, access, exclusion, etc).

They should then consider the *state of the art* in special needs education in all the European countries that are participating in the network and at pan-European level (research, curriculum development, teacher training methods, policy, promotion and awareness raising levels).

Moving on, the network partners will need to map and make a list of *other already existing initiatives* for special education (other national/European networks or associations, informal/formal initiatives, volunteer or government driven action, projects and campaigns, events and publications).

Finally, part of the network's strategy will be to analyse all *policy and programme* documentation and action in the field of special needs (including legislation, framework programmes, annual action plans, and specific policies both at national and European levels).

2.2. Identifying target group needs and expectations

During the set up phase, the potential network partners are expected to identify their network's orientation. This will follow a needs analysis in their field, by identifying areas of concern, priorities in their area of action, specific requirements and the expectations of their potential target groups and policy contexts. At this stage, they are expected to work on gaining knowledge and defining a strategy for the content and structure of their network. What partners need to be aware of at this stage is the multiplicity of target group objectives and the diversity of interests of the actors and the benefits that the network will be offering. They should also consider and bear in mind the strong diversity of potential target groups of a European education network as a result of the requirement to take into account geo-political, socio-cultural and cross-sectoral differences. They would thus need to always *think double*, taking into consideration both the national and European context.

In fact the scope of a network universe is by definition very large; some authors refer to it as *infinite*, when describing it. The following suggestions should provide some useful hints for strategy mapping (cf. next page):

Tasks involved in developing a network strategy

Target group needs and expectations

The state of the art in a thematic area

Elements of the network strategy

Similar existing initiatives

Policy and programme context
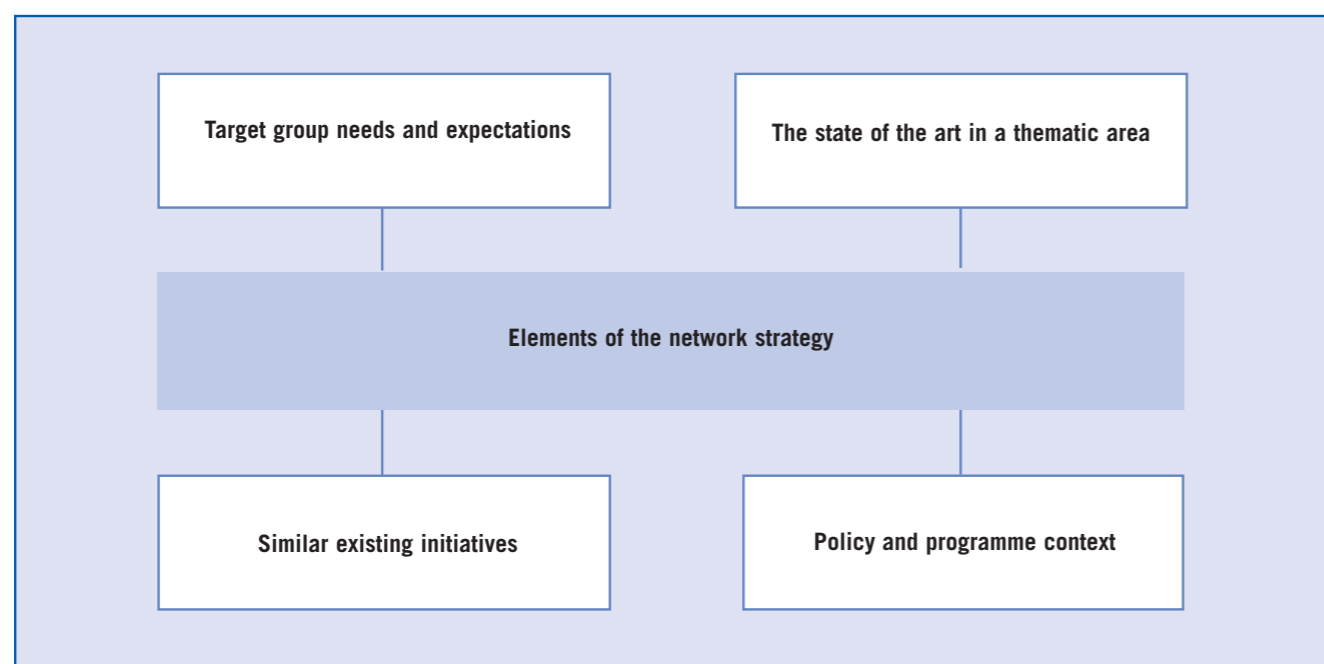
The scope of the network target group

A network evaluator we interviewed provided three specific recommendations for future networks:

- To bear in mind that the target group of a network is much larger than the immediate target group of the partnership. It is true that the latter is at the core of the network target group and that meeting their needs and expectations is vital for the success of the network. Nevertheless, the network should strive to be much broader and reach other external actors and organisations. The use of adequate communication tools can contribute considerably to achieving this aim.

- Previous coordinators and partners within the European programme sector for which the application for funding is made are important target groups for the networks that should not be underestimated. The EC funding framework indicates that European networks should promote their involvement in various possible ways.

- Several funding programmes have their own virtual community for all actors and projects involved in a specific programme. That is the case, for instance, in the Grundtvig Virtual Community. These on-line tools, whose links can be found on the European Commission's website, can be very useful to better identify this segment of a network's target group and its needs.

Once the target groups for the network are clear in this preparatory phase, it is imperative that a mapping of the fields of interest and needs and the motivation of the potential network actors takes place. These will be the potential users of a network's web portal and virtual tools; the potential trainees; the potential readers of publications; or the main-

Three guiding questions for the needs analysis stage

Which of the network aspects will be innovative for them?
The network's involvement with new technologies, a newly developed theory, the diversity of expertise and geographical representation, the network's advocacy skills, its potential to promote their work to wide audiences, the media and press…

Which support mechanisms could the network offer them?
An arena for learning new methods, a forum for knowledge sharing, an observatory to monitor new trends, new methodologies and tools for their work; a platform for further networking and disseminating…

What is the future network's target public?
Learners; learning providers; associations involved in education; bodies providing guidance; authorities at local regional and national level; research centres; enterprises; non-profit organisations; voluntary organisations; higher education institutions; umbrella organisations…

streamers of the disseminated good practices. A sound needs analysis, taking into consideration the elements above is the driving force of a network, and thus a key element in the application.

2.3. Defining the state of the art

By the end of the set-up phase, the future network's partners should be able to demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the state of the art in their specific thematic field and hopefully be in a position to indicate precisely the innovative elements of their network.

It is essential that the future key network players show strategic knowledge of the latest developments in the educational systems and practice at European level (and often beyond the EU). Such developments might include methods, actors or research outcomes. This obviously implies a contextual research phase and consultation (gathering information from existing literature and data from key players). A thorough analysis of the state of the art will contribute to the establishing of the learning function of the network. Those network evaluators and European Commission officials consulted have pointed out that in the past, network promoters had not been sufficiently aware of the importance of this crucial point.

Innovation can occur in different activities and areas of a network's performance.

Types of innovative elements of a network

Innovation in content
Advancement in terms of concepts and definitions, new terminology and discourses

Innovation in content
Organisational structures, managerial tasks, coordination tools

Innovation in policy
Advocacy discourse, policy development, agenda planning, position editing, strategy shaping

Innovation in methods
Use of new technologies, transferable and adaptable methodologies, tools, guidelines

2.4. Identifying similar existing initiatives

When defining the network's strategy, partners should gain strategic knowledge of all other similar initiatives that exist or have existed in their thematic field, especially if they are or have been funded by the EU.

As we have discussed previously, the networking of thematically related European projects and the dissemination of their results is an important programme expectation as regards networks. Networks are expected to provide content support to other projects and partnerships, and facilitate interaction among them by bringing them together and creating a platform of knowledge sharing and content development that derives from a diversity of geographical areas and a variety of expertise. Networks are not supposed to reinvent the wheel or start activities from scratch. Unlike projects, which are supposed to produce something new and original, networks are meant to contribute to thematic areas by bringing together key players, connecting already existing expertise and gaining knowledge at a European level. Taking this objective into consideration, the European Commission promotes network development as a strategy for mainstreaming and bridging among different projects and networks.

Consequently, in order for a network to succeed in its set up phase, it is important that its partners identify all other networks and projects (especially EU funded but not exclusively) that have operated in a similar field.

While following research and defining the most relevant initiatives to the network theme and its field, partners will be contributing to the networking function of their future network. It is very probable that some of the contacted institutions will be interested in the network's mission and activities and will potentially join and promote the network, formally or informally.

It needs to be highlighted that connecting expertise in previously funded European projects has been one of the weakest areas specifically identified by European Commission officials. We strongly recommend that network promoters consider it as an important element in their strategy.

There are several support mechanisms that can help to identify related projects and initiatives:

- The European Commission and National Agencies regularly publish compendia of funded projects in the programmes they are responsible for.
- There is a project database for transnational cooperation projects selected in various actions of the Socrates programme: http://isoc.siu.no.
- Programme managers in National Agencies have a good overview of the projects in their country. Although their role (and unfortunately, also the resources) in network actions is extremely limited, they are normally more than willing to act as links.

- Officials in the European Commission and its Executive Agency can identify relevant projects and initiatives.

2.5. Mapping the network policy context

A widespread weakness of previous network proposals has been the tendency to formulate them in a de-contextualised manner, without sufficient consideration of the European (and national) life long learning policies and thematic key issues that they should be responding to. Before formulating the network application, it is vital that partners gain substantial strategic knowledge of the policy and programme framework in which the network will operate.

At least three levels are to be taken into account:

1. the broader European policies,
2. the aims and objectives of the funding programme and its sub-actions for the whole programme period,
3. the specific priorities of the yearly Call for Proposals.

When applying for a European network in the framework of the Lifelong Learning programme, applicants will have to be aware of the programme's overriding aim, i.e. to make a contribution to the Lisbon process.

Overall aim of the Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2013)

The general objective of the Lifelong Learning Programme is to contribute through lifelong learning to the development of the Community as an advanced knowledge-based society, with sustainable economic development, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, while ensuring good protection of the environment for future generations. In particular, it aims to foster interchange, cooperation and mobility between education and training systems within the Community so that they become a world quality reference.

From: Decision No 1720/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006 establishing an action programme in the field of lifelong learning

The EU's lifelong learning strategy as an important means to achieve the ambitious Lisbon goals is developed in two key documents: the *Communication Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality* (November 2001) *and the Resolution on lifelong learning* (June 2002).

Networks in education should also closely follow the *Education and Training 2010* work programme (*Objectives process*) with its eight thematic key areas:

- Modernisation of higher education
- Teachers and trainers
- Making the best use of resources
- Maths, science and technology

- Access and social inclusion
- Key competences
- Information and communication technologies
- Recognition of learning outcomes

Other crucial policy processes in particular sectors of education and training to be closely followed when building a network, are the *Bologna* (higher education) and the *Copenhagen* processes (vocational education and training).

Further long-term policies in education concern the recognition of qualifications (EUROPASS, European Framework of Qualifications), key competences, language learning, e-learning and life-long guidance strategies.

Policy-shaping at European level is well under way, and will continue to be so over the next few years. It cannot be dealt with exhaustively here. It will suffice to draw attention of the need to monitor policy development closely when setting up a network.

Once reference to the relevant policy contexts has been made, the specific objectives of the *Life Long Learning Programme* need to be considered. A European education network should in any case make a contribution to achieve (some of) them.

Specific objectives of the Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2013)

(a) to contribute to the development of quality lifelong learning, and to promote high performance, innovation and a European dimension in systems and practices in the field;

(b) to support the realisation of a European area for lifelong learning;

(c) to help improve the quality, attractiveness and accessibility of the opportunities for lifelong learning available within Member States;

(d) to reinforce the contribution of lifelong learning to social cohesion, active citizenship, intercultural dialogue, gender equality and personal fulfilment;

(e) to help promote creativity, competitiveness, employability and the growth of an entrepreneurial spirit;

(f) to contribute to increased participation in lifelong learning by people of all ages, including those with special needs and disadvantaged groups, regardless of their socio-economic background;

(g) to promote language learning and linguistic diversity;

(h) to support the development of innovative ICT-based content, services, pedagogies and practice for lifelong learning;

(i) to reinforce the role of lifelong learning in creating a sense of European citizenship based on understanding and respect for human rights and democracy, and encouraging tolerance and respect for other peoples and cultures;

(j) to promote cooperation in quality assurance in all sectors of education and training in Europe;

(k) to encourage the best use of results, innovative products and processes and to exchange good practice in the fields covered by the Lifelong Learning Programme, in order to improve the quality of education and training.

From: Decision No 1720/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006 establishing an action programme in the field of lifelong learning.

European networks have great potential here, particularly in promoting quality and innovation, exchanging good practice and disseminating innovative results, and thus contributing to the realisation of a European area in their thematic field.

Programme objectives covering the whole programme are complemented by more specific objectives for the sub-programme (action) concerned, e.g. Grundtvig and Comenius.

And finally, having taken into account the wider policy contexts, aims and objectives for the whole programme period, there is another group of thematic and policy priorities to consider: those of the annual Calls for Proposals. Again they concern the overall programme and the sub-programmes.

This presentation of the different layers of policy and programme requirements to consider when applying for a network should not intimidate the reader. The good news is that many of these requirements overlap. Our core message here is that networks ought to refer explicitly to those wider contexts if they want to be successful. And many networks did not do so sufficiently in the last programme period…

Unless the network promoters have already been operating at the level of European policy, it can be a challenging task in the preparatory phase to identify the relevant European policy frameworks and initiatives. The following list of internet links may help in doing so.

European programme and policy resources to consult when defining the network strategy

Key documents of EU education and lifelong learning policies
http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/introduction_en.html

Basic documentation of funding programmes related to lifelong learning, education and training
http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/programmes_en.html
http://eacea.cec.eu.int/static/index.htm

Additional programme documents such as Calls for Proposals, Guidelines for Applicants and action-specific information notes
http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/grundtvig/apply_en.html
http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/comenius/activities/comenius3_en.html

Other European policy agendas, which are not primarily educational, but may have implications for lifelong learning, such as the information society, social exclusion, regional development, tourism and business development, research and innovation, public health and consumer protection, equal opportunities.
http://ec.europa.eu/

Positions of European and national umbrella organisations that operate in the network's sector, as, for instance, in adult education EAEA (European Association for Education of Adults) or EUCEN (European University Continuing Education Network)

International organisations active in lifelong learning, such as
UNESCO: www.unesco.org/education
OECD: www.oecd.org
Council of Europe: www.coe.int

The Grundtvig Quality Kit offers further information on where and how to find relevant information related to European life-long learning policies:
http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/socrates/grundtvig/doc/kit.pdf

For gaining an overview of European policies in education, and understanding the rationale behind political agendas, it might also help to get in contact with European Commission officials or members of the European Parliament. In addition to receiving valuable information, such contacts could also be beneficial for the general development of the network and its networking function in particular.

3.   Deciding on the network typology

3.1. Types of networks

To meet the latter aim it is important to decide what the main focus of the network in question will be, or, in other words: what type of network partners have in mind.
Within European education networks, three types of networks can be identified:

- dissemination networks
- resource networks
- policy development networks

It might be possible for a network to belong to more than one of these categories because different priorities and types of activities are envisaged. Nevertheless, taking into consideration the limited funding period and the necessity of devoting a considerable proportion of the resources available to the development of the network structure itself, a clear prioritising and decision on the main focus should be made at the set up phase.

3.2. Dissemination networks

A *dissemination* network supports and promotes the exchange of good practice among actors. Such a network should also trigger innovation in the field through the efficient promotion of the exploitation of the results of other projects, initiatives and research outcomes.
A European dissemination network acts as a platform for mainstreaming and the benchmarking of good practices at the Member states level. In order to succeed in the set up of a dissemination network, it is essential to understand that the partners involved should have a high degree of promotional and dissemination experience and capacity, ideally at European level. They should also have good knowledge of the field and be excellent networkers in order to ensure that the 'connection' among the different projects is successful.

Dissemination networks: the merchants in the market

Dissemination networks can be compared to a market place full of merchants and clients. Each participant becomes involved with the objective to either 'buy' or 'sell' knowledge (most of the time they are doing both). Such a network, being a market platform, requires a strong ability to market, strong selling skills and promotion expertise.

Scope	Possible partners	Typical outputs
■ Identification and exchange of good practice ■ Dissemination and valorisation ■ Promotion of innovation ■ Mainstreaming and benchmarking ■ Support of projects ■ Adaptation and transfer of methods	■ Representative in the field ■ Promotion and dissemination experts ■ Marketing and advertising experts ■ Public authorities ■ Umbrella organisations and platforms ■ Other networks	■ Good practice compilation / data base ■ Promotional products ■ Dissemination events ■ Training sessions ■ Wikis, online platforms, web tools ■ Networking; social fabric of relations

3.3. Resource networks

A resource network contributes to the development and exchange of research outcomes in a specific area, and thus to become one reference point for the field at the European level. This implies enlarging the scope of the theme and the analysis on a large scale. Its main concern is to become the field's observatory in such a way that it is recognised as the main reference point in its thematic area, both for the European institutions and for the other network actors or the public.

A resource network often focuses on anticipating field trends, comparative studies, as well as curriculum development and is mainly concerned with the advancement of its field through continuous research (often action research to keep an adequate connection with the field) and data analysis. Its main activities include conferences and publishing, although evaluation studies and feasibility studies could also be part of its action plan.
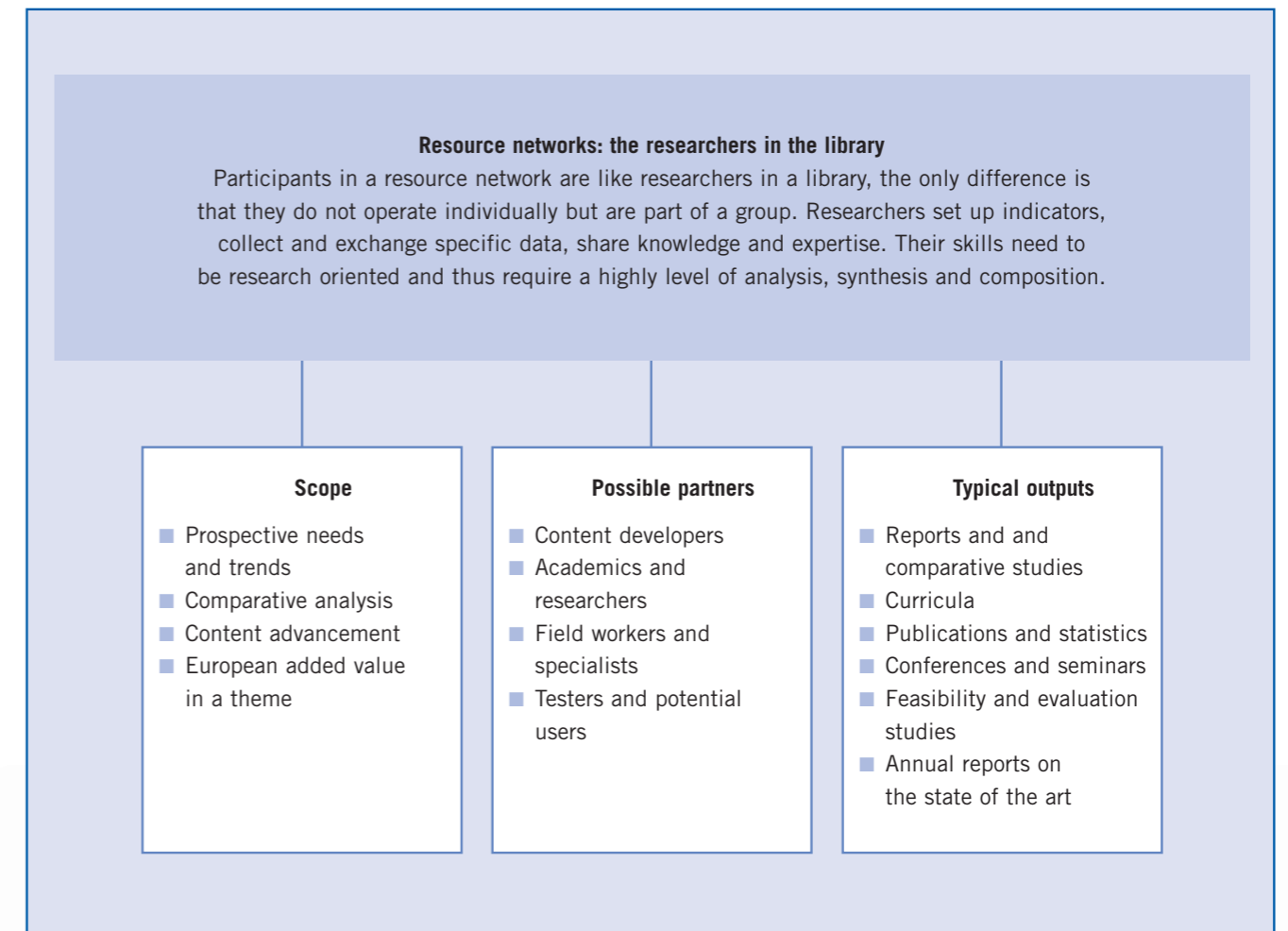
Resource networks: the researchers in the library

Participants in a resource network are like researchers in a library, the only difference is that they do not operate individually but are part of a group. Researchers set up indicators, collect and exchange specific data, share knowledge and expertise. Their skills need to be research oriented and thus require a highly level of analysis, synthesis and composition.

Scope	Possible partners	Typical outputs
■ Prospective needs and trends ■ Comparative analysis ■ Content advancement ■ European added value in a theme	■ Content developers ■ Academics and researchers ■ Field workers and specialists ■ Testers and potential users	■ Reports and and comparative studies ■ Curricula ■ Publications and statistics ■ Conferences and seminars ■ Feasibility and evaluation studies ■ Annual reports on the state of the art

3.4. Policy advancement networks

A policy development network focuses mainly on the shaping of policy in its field. Its main concern is to either shape agendas by influencing legislation and guaranteeing the representation of interests at the European level (or at a national or regional level) or to contribute to the drafting of legislation and policy action. Central to its activities and overall scope for its existence is the advocacy and shaping of policy and practice in a specific thematic field or subject area.

Specifications of a policy advancement network

Policy networks: the delegates in a parliamentary assembly

Participants in a policy network are like delegates and politicians in a parliamentary assembly: they advocate and support public interest in their specific field. Their main focus is to improve education at system level: to change policies, to increase budgets, to raise awareness, to attract the attention of the public and the press, and to involve policy makers in their action. They need a high degree of eloquence, policy analysis skills and a clear agenda. Their arguments need not only to be strong but consistent and pertinent.

Scope	Possible partners	Typical outputs
■ Advocacy, interest representation ■ Policy development ■ Content advancement ■ Follow-up of policy agendas	■ Public authorities ■ Policy makers ■ Professionals, field experts ■ Mass media	■ Policy statements ■ Policy analysis and positions ■ Awareness raising activities ■ Campaigns ■ High press attention Annual reports of the state of the art

Network evaluators have identified in several network proposals for networks wanting to move into policy development and accessing policy makers, a certain lack of know how concerning advocacy. Subcontracting a consultant policy expert to support and monitor the process can be a strategic move. Indeed, a policy network should closely follow European life-long learning policy initiatives and reports and be aware of existing European policy documents on the specific thematic field, for instance, concerning disabled people.

Of particular interest are the recommendations provided in the Grundtvig European Quality Kit on the scope of policy contacts that partners should make in adult education.

They need to keep in touch with

■ national experts in the Grundtvig Working Group of the European Commission, an informal but influential board of experts;

■ national representatives in the programme committees, the official representation organ of the member states;

■ the executive administrators in education ministries at national and regional level;

■ elected members of the European Parliament, particularly the members of the Education Committee;

■ elected members of regional and national parliaments and the education spokespersons of the main political parties;

■ regional and national representatives of the European Union.

It goes without saying that keeping regional and national media informed is an absolute must!

4. Selecting the network coordinator

4.1. The role of coordination in a European network

In Chapter 1 it was emphasised that social networks are largely non-hierarchical and self-organising structures. Within the context of the European funding programmes for education, however, networks have a clear *centre*, the network coordinator and his/her institution. Even if a European network is run democratically, the network coordinator and the coordinating organisation undoubtedly play a crucial role in providing direction for the network, its management and quality control.

This vital position of the coordinator originates in the fact that networks follow a centralised funding mechanism: the financial agreement, which is the contractual basis of the network, is signed by the European Commission and the coordinating institution on behalf of the whole partnership. As a consequence, the coordinating institution is responsible to the European Commission for the overall success of the network, i.e. for the implementation of the work programme and the achievement of the envisaged results specified in the network proposal. The coordinating organisation has also full liability for the total grant the network receives.

It should be thoroughly considered in the set-up phase which institution and person(s) are best suited for the coordination of the network.

Some of the following preliminary questions might be useful to ask before deciding on the network coordination:

■ Does the coordinator have strong leadership and communication skills?

■ Does the coordinator have a solid track record in the management of complex projects?

■ Does the coordinator have the ability to mobilise other actors and resources in the field?

■ Is the coordinating institution influential in the thematic area of the network?

■ Does it have a sufficiently strong institutional capacity?

■ Does the network rank high in the priorities of the coordinating institution?

4.2. What is required of a coordinating institution?

As we have stated before: a European network is expected to become a *key player* in the thematic field concerned. And the coordinating institution is supposed to be the flagship of a network.

These two assumptions make clear that the coordination of a network should not be taken over by a small or inexperienced institution. In

the programme document the ideal coordinating institution of a network is described as follows:

Requirements of the coordinating institution according to programme documents

Co-ordination of a Grundtvig network should be undertaken by an organisation with a solid infrastructure and strong links with the relevant national and regional representative bodies in its country in the subject area concerned. Appropriate European organisations, including associations, working in the field concerned may also be well equipped to take on this task.

From an information fiche (on-line Guide for Applicants) on Grundtvig networks published on http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/index_en.html , version January 2007.

Two fundamental requirements are highlighted here:

Solid infrastructure

A coordinating institution must have the capacity to implement the network in a professional way. This involves having
- adequate administrative and managerial capacities;
- a solid financial base, as the institution will be liable for EU grants of several hundred thousand euros,
- staff with the necessary expertise and qualifications in the thematic field;
- perhaps an institutional culture which reflects the non-hierarchical and flexible approaches which most networks adopt.
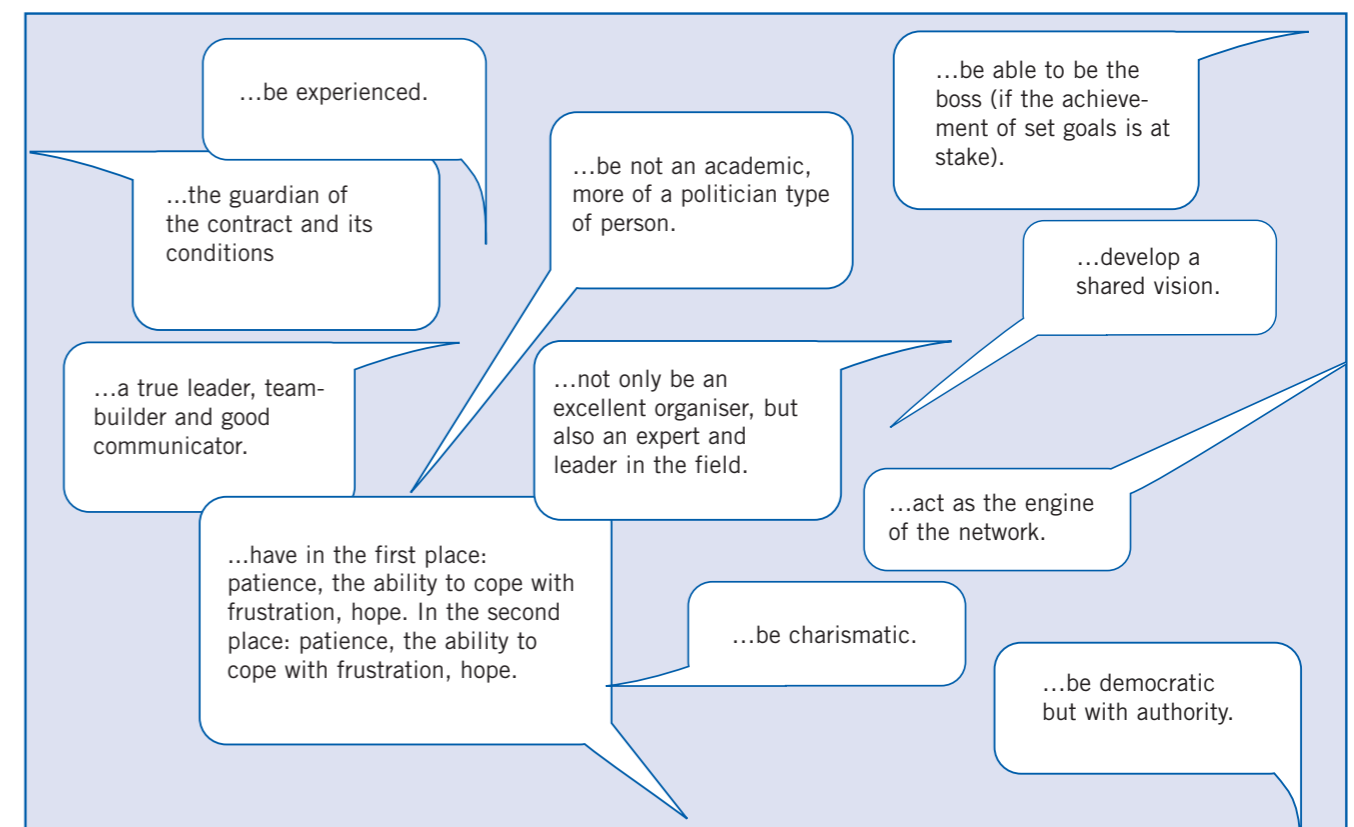
Strong links

Naturally, an institution which coordinates a network must have great networking potential and a proven record of cooperation at national and European level. Therefore an ideal coordinating institution would be an umbrella organisation of education providers – a network in itself – a renowned higher education institution, or a public authority. If this is not the case the institution should at least be able to demonstrate convincingly that it has access to the most relevant players in the field and is likely to take them on board the network in one way or another.

4.3. What makes a good network coordinator?

At the individual level, as in all forms of transnational cooperation, the network coordinator plays an extremely important role. This is particularly the case in a network due to its complex and multiple mission. When asked about the profile of a competent network manager, coordinators of existing networks described an almost super-human being:

A network coordinator should …

…be experienced.

…the guardian of the contract and its conditions

…be not an academic, more of a politician type of person.

…be able to be the boss (if the achievement of set goals is at stake).

…develop a shared vision.

…a true leader, team-builder and good communicator.

…not only be an excellent organiser, but also an expert and leader in the field.

…act as the engine of the network.

…have in the first place: patience, the ability to cope with frustration, hope. In the second place: patience, the ability to cope with frustration, hope.

…be charismatic.

…be democratic but with authority.

These requirements can be grouped into three clusters: management skills, expertise in the field, and interpersonal competences.

Management skills

A network coordinator definitely needs the ability to plan, organise and monitor the network activities. Planning and organising skills need to be complemented by the ability to *get things done*, as there is often considerable pressure of time related to the work plan. But a lot of things do not go according to plan. So a coordinator should also be able to react flexibly and adapt to changing requirements and challenges. His/her institution should be able to support him/her at times of difficulty and periods of crisis management.

Another important management skill is the

ability to delegate responsibility. A network coordinator who wants to do everything by himself/herself cannot be successful.

Finally, reporting and financial management must not pose a threat, for these are important parts of the coordination of a network. An institution with an experienced administration team would be in the position to offer strong support.

Expertise in the field

There are two conflicting opinions on the question as to whether it is enough for a network coordinator to be a good manager, or also needs to be an expert in the field. We think that both qualities are essential. A coordinator must be an expert in order to be able to assess the value of contributions and to make decisions which are relevant to the educational field. Ideally, a network coordinator is a senior expert who is well-known and respected by the educational community in question, and through existing contacts able to mobilise (parts of) the field. Likewise, the institution he/she belongs to needs to prove a sound record of experience in the specific field concerned, and ideally have an excellent reputation in the specific thematic area. The reputation of the institution would not only help the dissemination and promotion of the network to its target audiences and the wider public, but it would hopefully bring the network further membership.

Interpersonal competences

Above all a network coordinator must be a good communicator. Communication is essential in an endeavour to bring people together in order to share experience, learn form each other and jointly make an impact on the field. As mentioned above, it is an asset if a large personal contact network already exists. Since the network process tends to have peaks and troughs, the ability to motivate other people is needed. But a network coordinator should not be the driving force all the time, but also have the sensitivity to realise when action should not be taken in order not to disturb the *fragile magic* of the network (cf. Chapter 4). Awareness of intercultural differences and respect for diversity go with these skills.

It is quite a lot to demand all these qualities of one single person. Not surprisingly, some networks share the tasks of a coordinator among two or more people or at least alleviate the coordinator's burden with the formation of supportive management committees.

5. Forming the network partnership

5.1. Identifying the key players in the field

At the set up phase of the network, partners will already need to be thinking about the patterns of relationship of their partnership and interested parties. Identifying the key players in the field helps to gain strategic knowledge about the main actors in the specific area of action. In some cases, this exercise will also help to define the strongest allies or competi-

tors. It will hopefully contribute to the building of a partnership and will play a major role in the networking function of the network.

The mapping (i.e. searching and pre-selecting) of the key players in a specific field in a multi-player perspective (practitioners, academics, policy-makers) should lead to the making of a list of influential organisations and people that will be either helping the network's set-up or could eventually end up being further involved in the network's development and sustainability. If the network is to become influential, it is important that its partners represent different trends in the field.

At this phase, the core partner group who initiated the network idea should not only be able to identify them and gain knowledge of their expertise, action and what they can offer, but should also select the strategies to approach and involve them in the set up phase, as their specific expertise could be crucial at this stage. They could, for instance, define the main directions of the network, assess the strategies and mainstreaming potential of the outputs, or explore their potential contribution to sustainability.

The key players in the network's field of interest should potentially include people and institutions of the following areas of expertise:

Key players and expertise sought in a network

The above table provides a brief list of what types of institutions and expertise network partners should be looking for when defining the key players in the field in the future network (in dark blue). It also gives an idea of what should be their main strong points (success indicators) in order to be selected as key players and potential partners or even members of the future network.

The graph is meant to present the strongest and most successful key players in the field: their strategic knowledge, potential for innovation, mainstreaming capacity and European added value will hopefully help partners define the strengths and weaknesses of the network. It will also help to select the most relevant partners and to identify the strongest competitors. However, when planning a network partnership (at the application stage) and the eventual formal or non-formal partici-

pation of members (once the network evolves into a formal institutional identity) it is advisable to also consider smaller and less representative institutions as network partners. Sometimes such institutions can prove that they have the necessary contacts (often *weak ties*) and through them can bring key players to the network.

The important challenge in identifying key players in a specific field is trying to combine and balance:

- geographical representation,
- expertise,
- transversal aspects (gender, age, ethnic group, disadvantaged groups, special needs, etc.).

5.2. Competences and roles in a network

Networks demand different competences, according to the type of network (dissemination, resource, policy advancement network). In order to achieve the network's objectives, it is essential to identify the expertise that is needed. ... In a network structure each partner has a specific (and quite unique) task that is vital for the network's success.

What follows is an inventory of the partner profiles that should be present in an ideal network. Partners should decide among themselves the profiles and the number of partners that will be needed to fulfil each function according to their needs.

When 'shopping' for new partners, one should consider finding the ones that have the ability, the motivation and the institutional capac-

ity to play one or more of the following roles, in line with the network typology:

- *Content developers* concentrate on (action-) research and provide content input;
- *Testers* pilot developed products;
- *Evaluators* are experts in quality control;
- *Promoters* plan and implement the marketing and dissemination strategy;
- *Managers* guarantee efficient coordination and administration;
- *Networkers* contribute to enlarging the network's potential (often European or national umbrella organisations);
- *Policy makers* link the network's activities and mission with policy development, and possibly ensure mainstreaming at national or European or level.

When building a network, it will be necessary to assess the networking and relational capacity or potential of each of the network members within the learning context and in promoting policy and mainstreaming practice. This could be an additional selection criterion, as it contributes to achieve a network's mission.

5.3. Different forms of participation in a network

The network promoters have to decide whether future network actors will take part in the formal network partnership with a contractual arrangement (formal partners), or if they will contribute to the network and receive in-kind benefits without contractual arrangements (non-contractual actors).

The network structure, as described in the European programme documents, allows for such a differentiation as far as the extent of involvement is concerned. Unlike transnational cooperation projects where you have either partners or non-partners (and perhaps associated or silent partners") a network offers various different possibilities for participation:

Forms of involvement in a network

Contractual actors of the network	
Funding body	European Commission, who finances the network through its funding programme
Coordinator	Responsible for planning, organising, implementing, and monitoring the activities
Core partners	Lead work packages and sub-networks, members of management boards.
Partners	Permanently involved in implementing some of the main activities
Sub-contractors	Provide consultancy, expertise or other services for an agreed fee.
Associated partners	Contribute to the network for non-monetary benefits (testing of products etc.)
Direct users	Profit from information, products or services (institutions and professionals).
Beneficiaries	Eventually benefit from a higher quality of education (=adult learners, pupils).
Supporters	Distribute information or mainstream network results (decision and policy makers)
Sponsors	Co-finance network activities (national or regional authorities, private sponsors).
Non-contractual actors of the network	

Not all networks make full use of this differentiated classification, and many problems seem to arise from making everybody involved a core partner, although this might not reflect the real interests of some actors.

People should find their own place within a common approach, one of the interviewed network actors rightly said, and the network management should try to help people do so.

A crucial border line is of course the (non-)status of a contractual network partner, i.e. of (not being officially included in the network application. This has the major implication of being entitled to receive EU funding for staff costs or not.

But a network should not only be regarded as the consortium of official partners. A network is much wider than its immediate partnership and offers many potential ways to participate. We agree with one of the interviewed network coordinators:

When designing a network, you have to be able to complete a graph correctly that consists of two concentric circles: One, consisting of the core partners, and the next, consisting of the supporters.

What could be incentives for becoming such a *supporter*, or non-contractual actor?

- To learn from good practice for the formulation of new approaches;
- to explore teaching and learning methods in specific areas;
- to participate in the development of new models addressing specific needs in the field;

- to network intensively with stakeholders and institutions with the view to solving a specific problem;
- to identify present and future needs where European cooperation could be beneficial;
- to promote the institution and its work and increase visibility;
- to enhance professional or institutional expertise and thus gain a broader vision;
- to gain institutional confidence and prestige by belonging to a European circle.

6. The potential of the logical framework matrix for the formulation of a network

The formulation of the application for a network can be done in several ways by using diverse methods and tools. To assist in the complex task of formulating the overall network in a coherent manner, the logical framework matrix may help you to formulate clearly the purpose, objectives, activities and resources of your network. Additionally, it will help from the outset with the exercise of designing performance indicators, and assessing the risks of your network success. The

matrix will also contribute to the drafting of an application for EU funding.

The logical framework matrix (the log frame) – proposed by the EU and required in several of its programmes – consists of a matrix with four columns and four rows, which summarise the key elements of a project plan, i.e.:

- the hierarchy of objectives of the project (project description and the logic for intervention l);
- indicators for the achievement of set outcomes;
- how the project outcomes will be monitored and evaluated (sources of verification);

- the key external factors critical to the project's success (assumptions).

A logical framework can also include the means required to implement the activities, the basis by which inputs (personnel, budget) and output (learning outcomes, services) can be determined.

The log frame can facilitate building objectives and activities in a coherent manner, supported for instance, by a simple numbering method (*Objective 1; Activity 1.1; Objective 2: Activity 2.2 etc.*). This simple method will avoid the classical problem of the proliferation of activities in network design, and which are not always essential to achieve the network mission.

The log frame is a summary of the network application, and thus it will contribute enormously to the writing process. It is important to highlight that its content should be developed in a participatory manner, given the horizontal nature of a network, and its collective ownership.

Logical Framework Matrix for European networks

	Intervention logic	Objectively verifiable indicators of achievement	Sources and means of verification	Assumptions
General aims	What are the general aims to which the network will contribute?	What are the key indicators related to the general aims?	What are sources of information for these indicators?	
Specific objectives	What specific objectives does the network intend to achieve in order to contribute to the general aims?	Which indicators clearly show that the objective of the action has been achieved?	What are the sources of information that exist or can be collected? What are the methods required to get this information?	Which risk factors should be taken into consideration?
Expected results	The results are the outputs envisaged to achieve the specific objectives. What are the expected tangible and intangible results?	What are the indicators to measure whether and to what extent the network achieves the expected results?	What are the sources of information for these indicators?	What external conditions must be met to obtain the expected results on schedule?
Activities	What are the key activities to be carried out and in what sequence in order to produce the expected results?	Means: What are the means required to implement these activities, e. g. human resources, IT equipment, training, studies, facilities… Costs What are the network costs? How are they classified? (budget breakdown)	What are the sources of information about action progress?	What pre-conditions are required before the network can start? What conditions outside the network's direct control have to be met for the implementation of the planned activities?

7. Lessons to be learned from previous network applications

The previous sections of this chapter have provided strategic knowledge on how to develop the concept and partnership of a European thematic network, based on a sound analysis of its context, which essential in guaranteeing a sound start-up basis for a network aiming to be a European player at the key level.

The next step is network formulation. The following table summarises interviews with net-

work evaluators and the European Commission, and provides some recommendations that could be used in network formulation, based on previous weaknesses identified in Socrates II network applications. This table could be used as a guide to define the thematic network area, the network objectives, the network results and products and the methodological approaches.

Formulating the network application: key elements to consider

Main thematic area targeted

A European key player should provide a broad overarching scope to its area of intervention, and address its approach in a mid- to long-term perspective (bearing in mind that the theme should not be too narrow).

Both the policy and political side and the training and practitioners side can be addressed in a European network, but a clear priority should be made.

A strong link should be built with thematically related EU projects in various ways (cluster meetings, promotionof new projects).

Network objectives

A sound network application should formulate SMART multiple objectives (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time-bound), and should clearly determine the specific target groups of each objective.

Emerging networks should focus on only a few core objectives and activities in order to develop a clear mission, rather than try to meet simultaneously all EU programme expectations of networks. In a renewal phase of funding, networks are encouraged to expand their scope to those required objectives yet not fully fulfilled.

The objectives should be relevant to the network partners running the network, coming from different socio-economic contexts (identified through an initial needs analysis). This is essential to keep partners motivated, and it is a precondition of a network's continuation.

Network results and products

Envisaged processes and outcomes, typically underdescribed in applications, should be well formulated at three levels: Networking, learning and promoting innovative practices and policies. There should also be a clear reference of the target groups of the respective products.

Methodological and didactical approaches

For a network to work, it has to prove added value for every member of the network. The application should strongly demonstrate the learning and networking driving forces of the network.

The application should clearly contemplate how the network enhances reflection and dissemination of educational innovation.

Chapter 4:
Managing a Network

Managing a European network is quite different to managing a transnational cooperation project, although they do have some elements in common.

Network management poses several specific challenges for the coordinator.

Of course, coordinating the network involves steering it in the desired direction and ensuring that the aims set will be met. But it is just as crucial that a network manager is sometimes able to allow the network to evolve by itself, and to give the actors the freedom to interact in the manner that they feel is most appropriate for them. The art of network management consists of making the right decisions to achieve this balance….
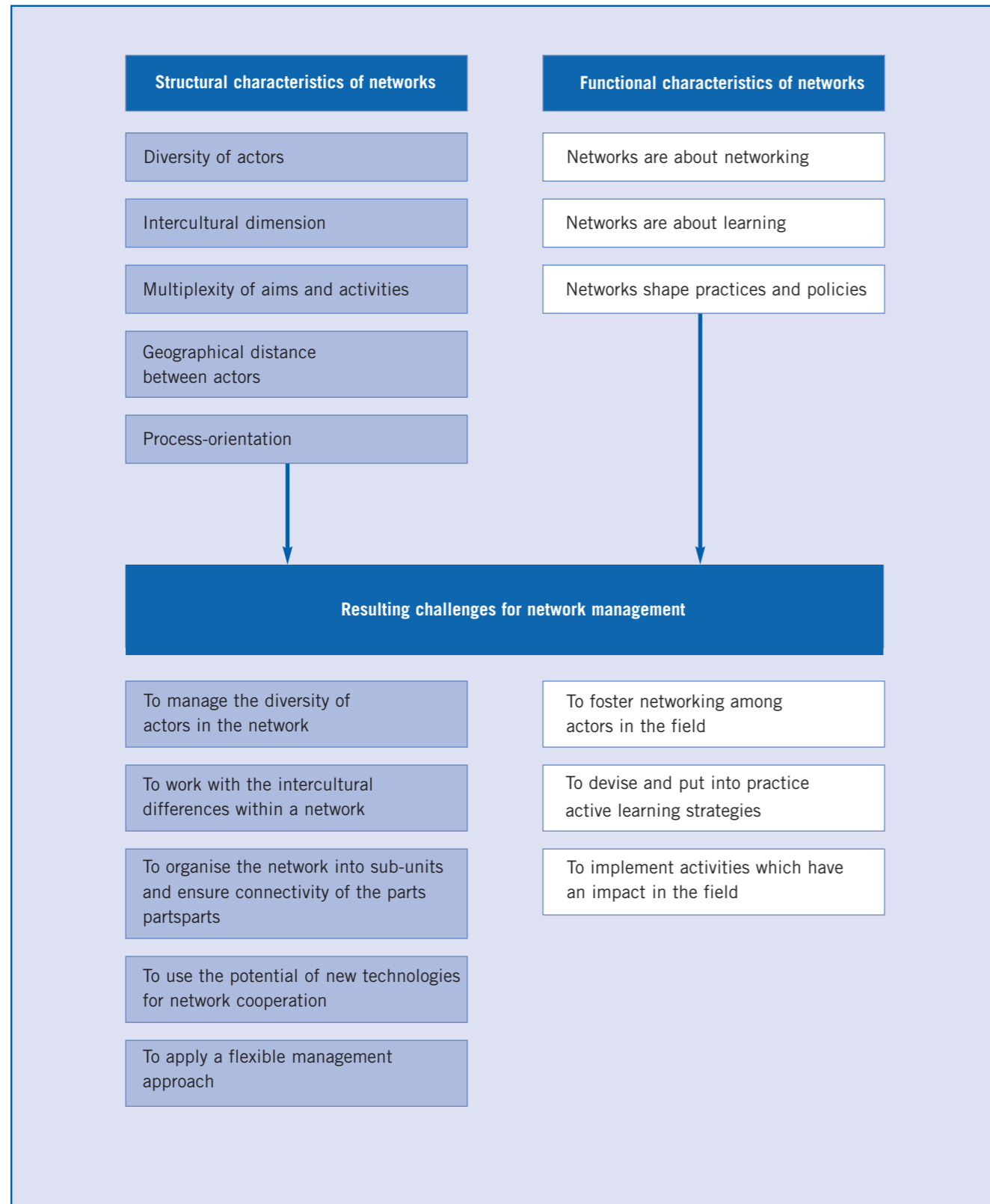
1. Challenges of network management

1.1. Management challenges arising from the characteristics of networks

We have already stated previously that at a superficial glance European networks may look similar to transnational cooperation projects, as they share similar funding requirements and mechanisms. Notwithstanding this superficial similarity, as we pointed out, networks differ considerably from cooperation projects in terms of their structural and functional characteristics.

These substantial differences have very practical implications for network management. A network manager should of course know the tools of transnational project management (as, for instance, elaborated in *A Survival Kit for European Project Management*), but this is not sufficient. A network manager will also be confronted with challenges that are very specific to networks. It is these peculiarities of network management this chapter is devoted to.

Specific challenges for network management

Structural characteristics of networks	Functional characteristics of networks
Diversity of actors	Networks are about networking
Intercultural dimension	Networks are about learning
Multiplexity of aims and activities	Networks shape practices and policies
Geographical distance between actors	
Process-orientation	

Resulting challenges for network management

To manage the diversity of actors in the network	To foster networking among actors in the field
To work with the intercultural differences within a network	To devise and put into practice active learning strategies
To organise the network into sub-units and ensure connectivity of the parts partsparts	To implement activities which have an impact in the field
To use the potential of new technologies for network cooperation	
To apply a flexible management approach	

2. To manage the diversity of actors in a network

2.1. Types of diversity to be found in a network

Network consortia are very large groups as compared to the usually much smaller teams in cooperation projects. But it would be a misconception to think that the main difference lies in the number of people and institutions involved. It is the diversity of actors which poses the greater challenge. The high degree of diversity is a result of the two-fold embracing character of a network.
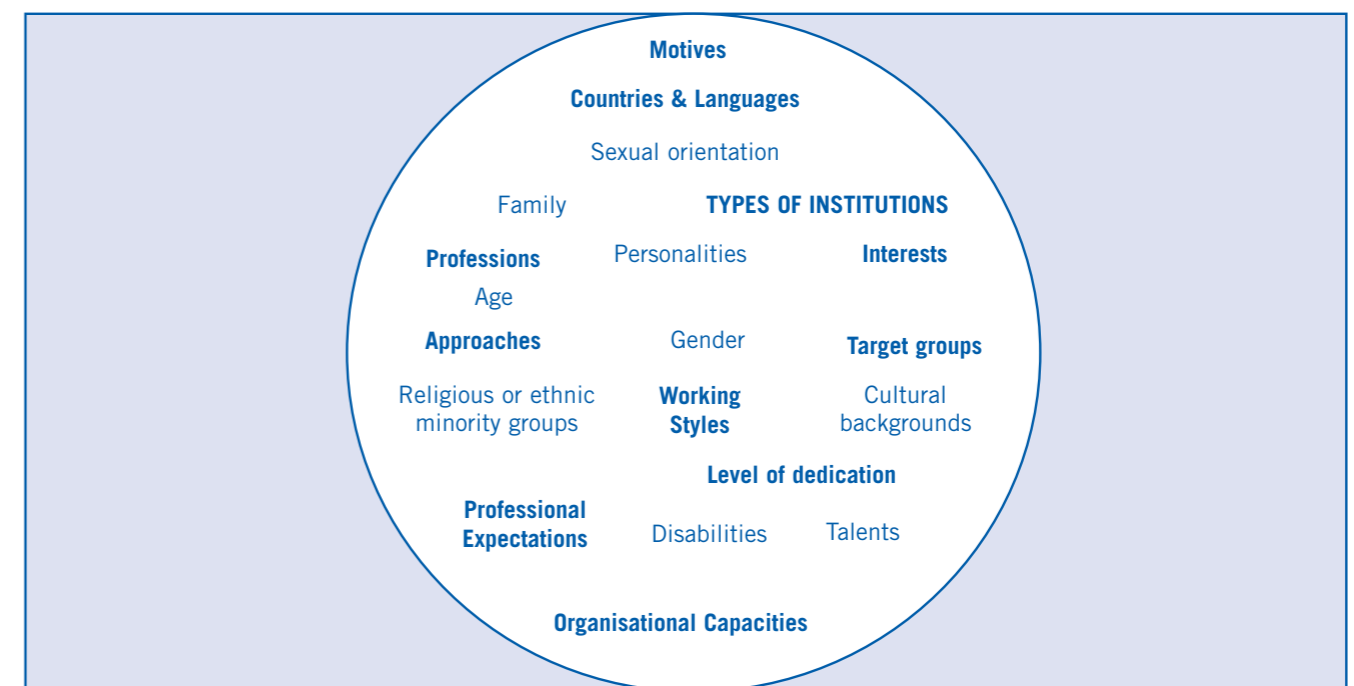
■ The funding programmes require the representation of actors from a large number, if not all, countries participating in the programme.

■ If possible, all types of actors in the field – from grass-root initiatives to policy-making public authorities, should be involved in one way or another.

This has consequences for the management style needed, for the organisation of the work and for the skills needed to manage conflicts arising from this diversity.

Social research claims that nowadays a high degree of diversity can be observed in most groups and organisations. In many working contexts people differ with respect to their gender, age, physical, cognitive and emotional capacities, cultural and religious backgrounds and other characteristics. But on top of these ordinary elements of diversity there are several additional differences which are particularly relevant in networks. These are highlighted in the chart below.

Diversity in a network

Motives
Countries & Languages
Sexual orientation
Family   TYPES OF INSTITUTIONS
Professions   Personalities   Interests
Age
Approaches   Gender   Target groups
Religious or ethnic   Working   Cultural
minority groups   Styles   backgrounds
Level of dedication
Professional   Disabilities   Talents
Expectations
Organisational Capacities

Network management therefore always involves the management of diversity.

What a network manager can learn from the concept of diversity management is that the heterogeneity of a network is not only a constant source of challenge, but also a potential strength. If network management succeeds in giving space to individual talents, the interests and capacities of its actors and their organisations, it can draw on a highly resourceful pool of skills and knowledge.

To realise this potential, a network manager requires personal qualities such as communication and motivational skills, ingenuity, a good sense of humour, and, perhaps most importantly, the skills of careful listening. On the other hand it is rather unlikely that a network will succeed if the diversity of actors is not acknowledged and accepted.

2.2. Allowing diverse forms of involvement for diverse actors

There is one form of diversity which is often the hardest to accept by a fully committed network manager: Some network partners will probably have quite different levels of commitment to the network. This might in some cases have to do with the limited financial resources the EU funding offers. But often the reason lies in the nature and intensity of their interests, and is often due to this fact. But this is natural and should be accepted rather than considered an obstacle to success. A coordinator should not strive to erase these differences by trying to raise everybody to the highest possible level of involvement.

On the contrary, it is typical of social networks that some members do more, and some do less. The art of network management is to find the right place and role for each actor involved.

As described in the preceding chapter of this publication, European networks in education allow diverse form of involvement. Unlike cooperation projects where you have either partners or non-partners (and perhaps associated or *silent* partners) participation in a network can range from core partners, who might lead work packages to occasional respondents who might be only marginally involved in one or two stages.

Not all networks make full use of this differentiated classification, and many problems seem to arise from making everybody involved a core partner, although this might not reflect the real interest of some actors.

People should find their own place within a common approach, one of the interviewed network actors rightly said, and the network management should try to help people to do so.

We fully agree with one of the interviewed network coordinators:

When designing a network, you have to be able to complete a graph correctly that consists of two concentric circles: One, consisting of the core partners, and the next, consisting of the supporters.

A network is not a narrowly defined partnership, but a system of mutual interests and benefits, in other words: a win-win situation. Win-win situations can only be created if net-

work actors gain their desired benefits with the level of investment they are ready to make (provided the ratio between the two is realistic).

As discussed previously, benefits can be personal or institutional. Research has shown, however, that in the long run, institutional win-win situations are more relevant for the success of a network.

Drawing institutional landscapes

In one Grundtvig network each partner was requested by the network coordinator to draw their education landscape:

And, most importantly: win-win situations are only win-win situations when they are perceived as such. It is an important task of a network manager to make the benefits for each network member visible and to communicate them clearly. To this end, visualisation techniques that can be applied in working or reflective sessions are extremely helpful.
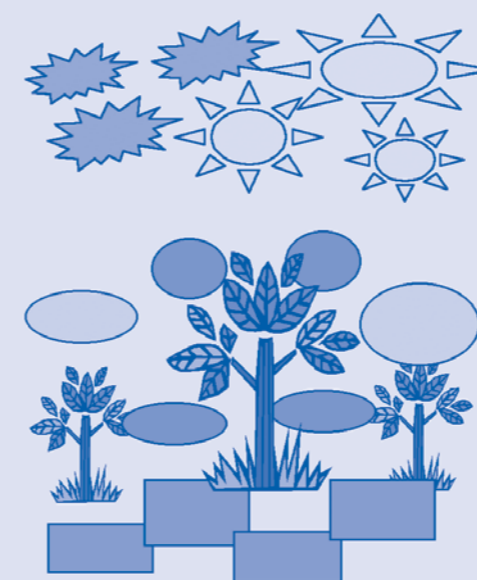
The trees in the centre represent the institution, its fully grown areas of activities and emerging saplings. The institution is founded in the soil, its customers, clients, commissioners and other stakeholders.

The clouds stand for factors impeding further development, the suns and stars for positive sources of influence.

With such a simple visualisation tool, the effects of involvement in a network for each participating institution can be monitored and made visible.

The tool has been turned out to be very effective in assuring the commitment of network partners.

3. To work with the intercultural differences within a network

3.1. Cultural differences: a challenge and a chance for learning in a network

When talking about diversity in a European network, one factor needs to be particularly highlighted: the cultural differences between the countries in which the network actors live and work. Managing a transnational network of actors from a large number of European countries is something quite different from a local or regional network. In contrast to the latter the universe of a European network is less unified by shared traditions, approaches, values and communication codes.

These apparent cultural differences in human interaction are things every network experiences. They create challenges for all network actors, but also an opportunity for learning about the field and personal development. Many network actors agree that it is the intercultural challenge, which, together with the diversity of institutional approaches represented in networks that constitutes the unique learning field European which networks in education offer. Even if some other network coordinators may be less than enthusiastic, the intercultural dimension of a network cannot be ignored but needs to be actively addressed by the network manager.

3.2. Work-related cultural differences which influence the network

We emphasised earlier in this publication that social networks in general, and therefore also networks in education, are very much based on soft factors like trust and mutual appreciation, and the readiness to support other actors' interests. The development of these fundamental network attitudes very much depends on contextual conditions which differ considerably from one country to another:

The different education systems in which networks actors operate, different mentalities and prevailing schools of thought regarding education, or different working styles and management approaches are some of the most influential contextual factors in which network cooperation takes place.

For managing networks in an intercultural environment it may therefore be helpful to bear in mind Geert Hofstede's five dimensions of cultural differences in work places and organisations.

⊠ What does (inter-)cultural learning mean?
An answer from a network on intercultural education

All ideas about intercultural learning build on an implicit or explicit idea about culture. They have in common that they perceive culture as something human-made. Culture has been referred to as the "software" which people use in daily life; it is commonly described as being about basic assumptions, values and norms that people hold…

Very often looking at culture implies looking at the interaction of cultures. Many authors have stated that, if it were not for the existence of more than one culture, we would not think about culture at all. The apparent differences of how humans can think, feel and act are what make us aware of culture.

Culture, therefore, cannot be though of simply as "culture", it has to be though of as "cultures".

From: IIZ/DVV (2005), Adult Education Embracing Diversity II. Developing Strategies for Mainstreaming Intercultural Learning Based on Needs and Experiences, Bonn, p.75, developed by the NILE network (www.intercultural-learning.net).

⊠ Hofstede's five cultural dimensions of values in the workplace

Power distance
The extent to which the less powerful members of organisations accept and expect that power is distributed unequally.

Individualism versus collectivism
The degree to which individuals are integrated into groups.

Masculinity versus femininity
The distribution of roles between the genders.

Uncertainty avoidance
A society's tolerance of uncertainty and ambiguity, the extent a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations.

Long-term orientation versus short-term orientation
Values associated with Long Term Orientation are thrift and perseverance; values associated with Short Term Orientation are respect for tradition, fulfilling social obligations, and protecting one's 'face'.

From: www.geert-hofstede.com

This is not the place to discuss in great detail the implications of these five dimensions in day-to-day network management. One example may therefore be enough:

When it comes to decision-making procedures, working arrangements or documentation standards in a network, people from different managerial cultures might react quite differently. In a culture with a high uncertainty avoidance index, where formalised structures and standardised procedures are prevalent, as, for instance, Germany, detailed work plans, written agreements and extensive procedural rules will be expected. On the other hand, such uncertainty avoidance measures might irritate network actors from an organisational culture like the United Kingdom, where a more flexible and adaptive organisational model is common and staff are used to acting on a more ad-hoc basis.

Network managers will, to a certain extent, act according to their own cultural background, but need to be prepared that the same and seemingly obvious management action might have quite different effects on different network actors.

In the interviews conducted, network managers stressed quite often that coming to terms with these differences in working contexts, approaches and values, demanded a considerable proportion of their time and energy. At the same time, however, they were seen as an important source of inspiration and learning. And indeed the unusual diversity of institutions and differences between cultural backgrounds that one encounters in a European network make them a unique field of learning and professional enrichment. The time needed to explore this field is well invested.
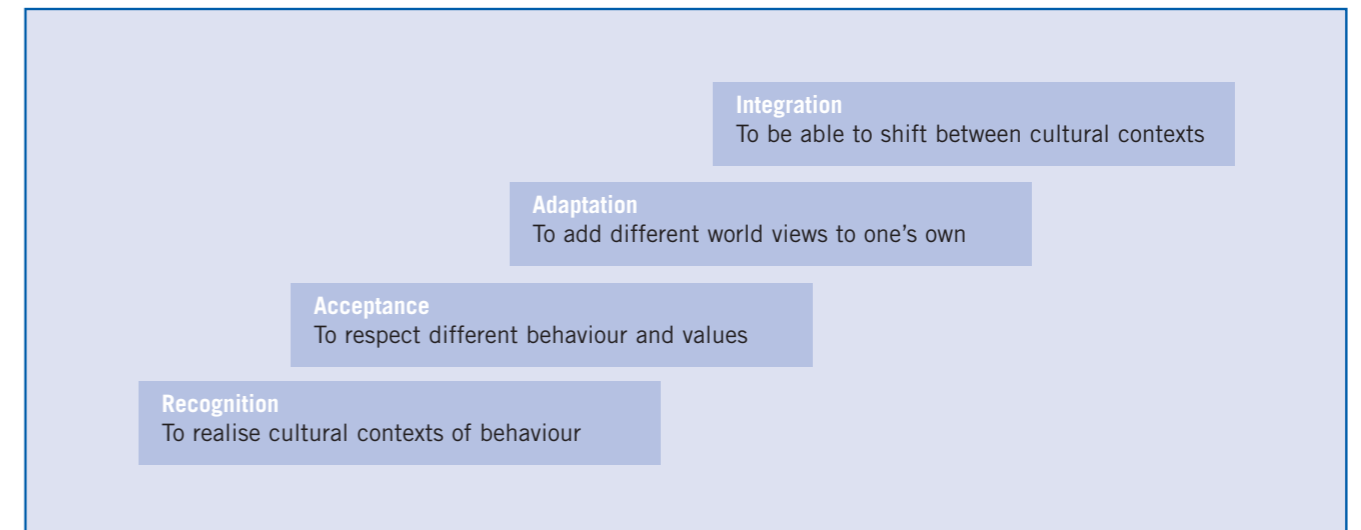
3.3. Acquiring intercultural sensitivity

In order to be able to address the intercultural challenge constructively, a network manager needs to develop his or her own intercultural sensitivity.

Intercultural sensitivity avoids the trap of stereotyping. In fact it is something completely different: instead of ascribing diverging forms of behaviour of other people as pre-conceived national characteristics, intercultural sensitivity is a process of increasing one's recognition and acceptance of cultural differences. Milton J. Bennett described this process in several distinct stages. The following chart is a modified and simplified version of Bennet's model.

Stages of intercultural sensitivity

Integration
To be able to shift between cultural contexts

Adaptation
To add different world views to one's own

Acceptance
To respect different behaviour and values

Recognition
To realise cultural contexts of behaviour

While developing one's cultural sensitivity should be an aim desirable for all actors in a network, it is a fundamental prerequisite for a successful network manager. Only thus is a network manager able to make conscious intercultural choices. Benett gives a striking example:

Is it good to refer directly to a mistake you made by yourself or someone else? In most American contexts, it is good. In most Japanese contexts, it is bad. However, it might be good in some cases to use an American style in Japan, and vice versa. The ability to use both styles is part adaptation. The ethical consideration of context in making a choice is part of integration. (IIZ/DVV (2005), Adult Education Embracing Diversity II. Developing Strategies for Mainstreaming Intercultural Learning Based on Needs and Experiences, Bonn, p.76)

4. To organise the network into subunits and ensure connectivity of the parts

4.1. Dividing network action into separate strands of activity

In all forms of cooperation structures, organisation means planning put into practice. The core task of organisation is to structure the work in a way that ensures that the set aims and objectives will be met.

Earlier in this publication we have pointed out that one of the structural characteristics of a network is that its aims are multiplex – multiple and complex – as compared to the rather one-dimensional aim of a product-oriented cooperation project.

This multiplexity of aims requires a subdivision of the network's work programme into strands of activities which are, to a large extent, independent of each other. Some of

them may run over much of, if not all, the funding period.

When organising such separate sub-strands, it is, however, crucial that it is clearly defined from the outset
- how the objectives of the sub-strands contribute to the achievement of the overall network aims;
- how the various sub-strands of action relate to each other;
- where critical points (milestones) are built in to allow for assessing if the right track is being followed.

There are various ways as to how to subdivide the network into smaller and thus more workable units. The most suitable form of subdivision largely depends on the specific nature of

the network concerned. Network sub-groups can be organised according to
- Content aspects (special interest groups)
- *Products* (e.g. publication, recommendations)
- Network activities (identification of good practice, advocacy, relationship management etc.)
- Chronological sequence (network phases)
- Geographical proximity of actors (similarity of working conditions, to allow for more working meetings)

Here are two examples of how networks organised their activities in different ways: While the first – coming from higher education – divided the work into thematic interest groups, some of the work groups in the second example focus more on different types of network activities.
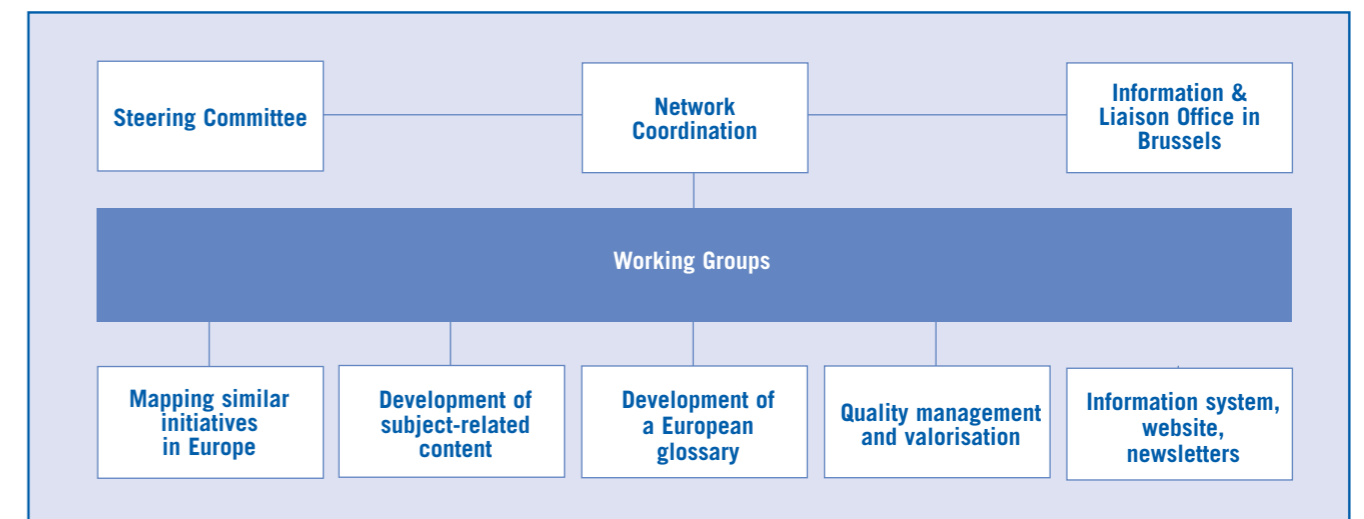
Network organisation according to thematic areas

(From: http://www.hihm.no/eway/custom/design/concitnet/ccn.gif)
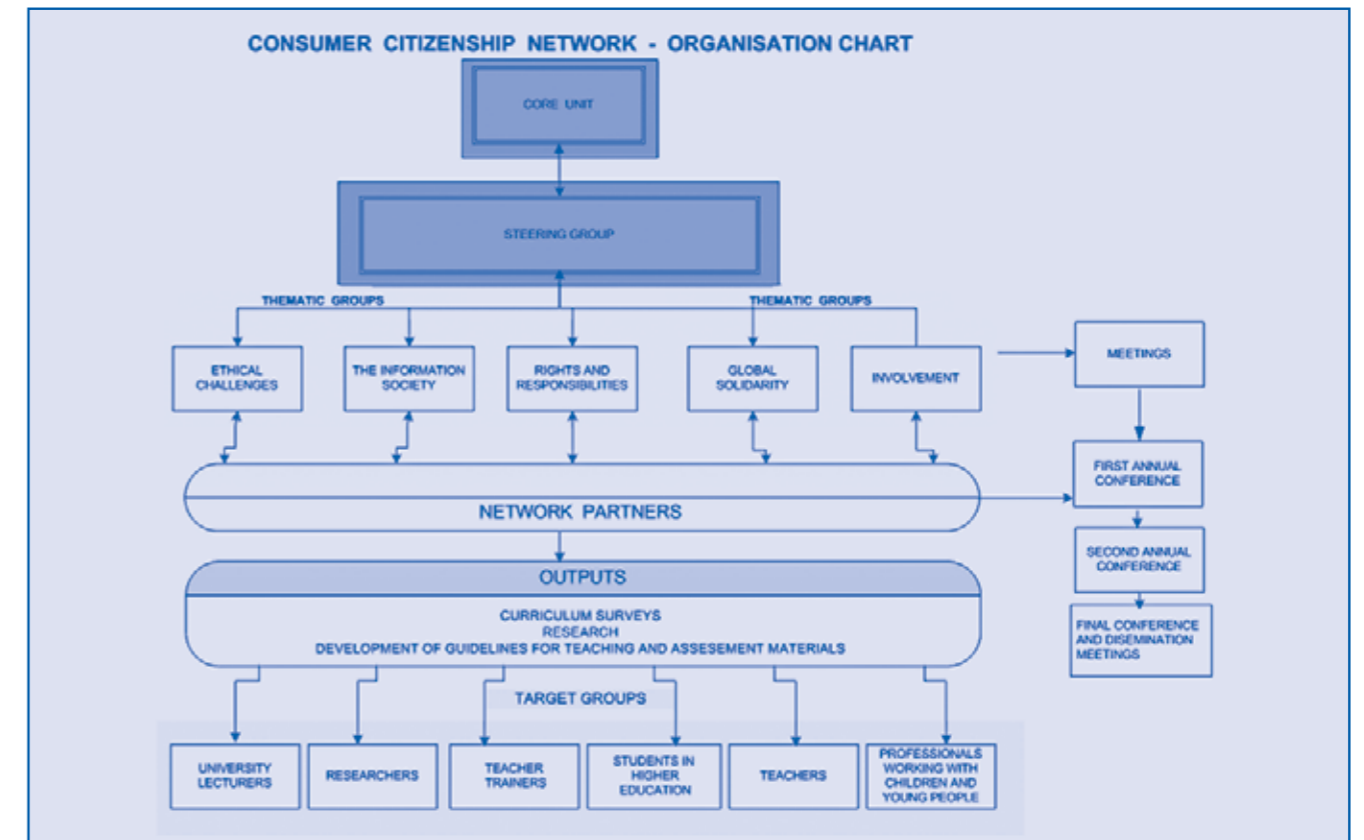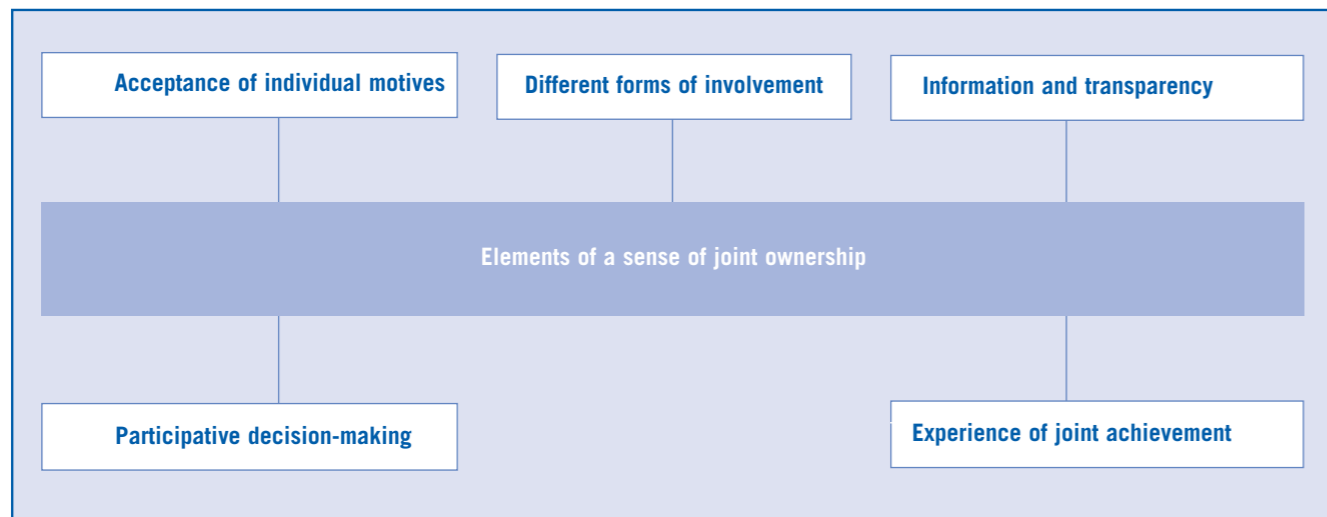
Network organisation according to main tasks

Based on the framework used in INFONET.

Forming independent sub-groups and thus forcing network actors to chose is not always easy for a network manager. One network coordinator reported that their partners heavily resisted being split up into different interest groups. They insisted on doing all the conceptual work in the plenary sessions in order not to miss out on anything important. It was only during a second funding period that a more adequate shared structure could be agreed upon.

4.2. Developing joint ownership from heterogeneity

So far we have emphasised the centrifugal forces in a network and the resulting consequences: to accept diversity, to allow for different forms of involvement, to manage cultural differences, and to organise separate strands of activities.

It is, however, crucial for the success of the network that the coordinator makes, at the same time, provision for unifying and connecting the otherwise disparate actors, activities and results.

One necessary step is to actively enhance a sense of ownership among (some of the) network actors. This is also the case in relation to projects, but because of the much greater heterogeneity, it is more difficult to achieve in networks. Ownership can be described as the degree to which network partners feel themselves owners, actors and decision makers in the network.

The first two elements shown above which can contribute to developing a sense of ownership have already been discussed: Acceptance of diversity and the possibility of different forms of involvement.

Sense of ownership of a network

| Acceptance of individual motives | Different forms of involvement | Information and transparency |

Elements of a sense of joint ownership

| Participative decision-making | | Experience of joint achievement |

The best way to ensure full information, transparency, and indeed ownership is to actively involve partners already present from the planning and application stages. Experienced network coordinators stress the importance of this point.

Network partnership agreements need only be mentioned here as an important instrument for ensuring transparency. This is not the place to discuss in any detail the role of partner agreements in transnational cooperation, as this can be found elsewhere (*A Survival Kit for European Project Management*). It is not the signature underneath such a document which establishes ownership, but the process of discussing in detail and finally agreeing on the main aspects. Any such agreements, if they are to be used for developing trust and ownership, require a considerable investment of time on behalf of the network management. But as a network coordinator rightly said in one of our interviews:

You have to invest in people!

Full information and transparency about what is planned needs to be complemented by a transparent internal information policy throughout the life-time of the network. This is of particular importance in the complex organisational structure of a network, where members do not normally have the chance or even wish to take part in everything that is going on.

Perhaps most importantly: doing things together and thus experiencing a sense of achievement can contribute to a feeling of ownership, as the following, rather simple, example illustrates:

Network presentation at a large conference

One experienced network coordinator emphasises that joint content-related activities can be the best team-building exercises. She gives the example of a network presentation at a major conference. While this is usually done by the coordinators, several partners of the network in question did the presentation as a team. Working on the presentation together and jointly appearing in public had immediate effects on the sense of ownership.

4.3. Forming a team of core partners

Bearing in mind the varying intensity of involvement and commitment that network actors are ready to display, it would be an illusion to think that the same extent of ownership could be reached throughout the whole partnership. A network manager should not spend a lot of energy in trying to achieve this unrealistic goal. It is necessary to distinguish between – explicitly limited – win-win situations, which should indeed be created for all actors, and sense of ownership and responsibility for the network which will be strongest in a smaller group of core partners.

- As early as possible a network manage should form this core team whose members show a high level of commitment and sense of ownership of the network;
- normally comprises no more than 8-10 people;
- take the lead role in planning, implementing and evaluating the network activities;
- act as leaders of work packages, interest groups, sub-networks etc.;
- are members of the more exclusive management units;
- receive the largest part of the grant for staff costs.

It needs to be underlined at this point: the usual level of granted EU funding as compared to the size of the network consortia and the mission of networks is not sufficient. Some network partners might expect that this limited grant should be distributed fairly equally among all partners. And some networks actually do so because they want to adopt a participative approach.

But it is certainly much more effective if the money, particularly for the staff costs which are necessary to do substantial work, are concentrated on a smaller sub-group which in return makes a proportionate contribution to the overall success of the network. If such an approach is communicated openly, and, again, the incentives other than financial ones to be gained for network actors are promoted, it will be accepted in the field.

One network coordinator interviewed made a suggestion as to how this limited core group could be slightly expanded from time to time:

🌐 Reserve of travel money

Spreading responsibilities and, accordingly, the money unevenly in the network is not always an easy and pleasant job. To soothe disappointment among more peripheral actors, a network coordinator recommends to retain some of the travel money for these people. Funding which makes travelling to and participating in network events possible is often an incentive. Thus the relatively small core partnership can occasionally be extended.

4.4. Installing and maintaining an adequate management system

An absolute must for ensuring connectivity of the heterogeneous parts of a network is the establishment of adequate management structures. Not everybody can be involved in everything that is going on in a network. At least one plenary meeting of all network partners per year is necessary to ensure that network actors can experience the network as a whole. But due to the obvious limitations regarding the efficiency of plenary meetings with a large number of people involved they can be present at only one type of meeting, and probably not even the predominant one.
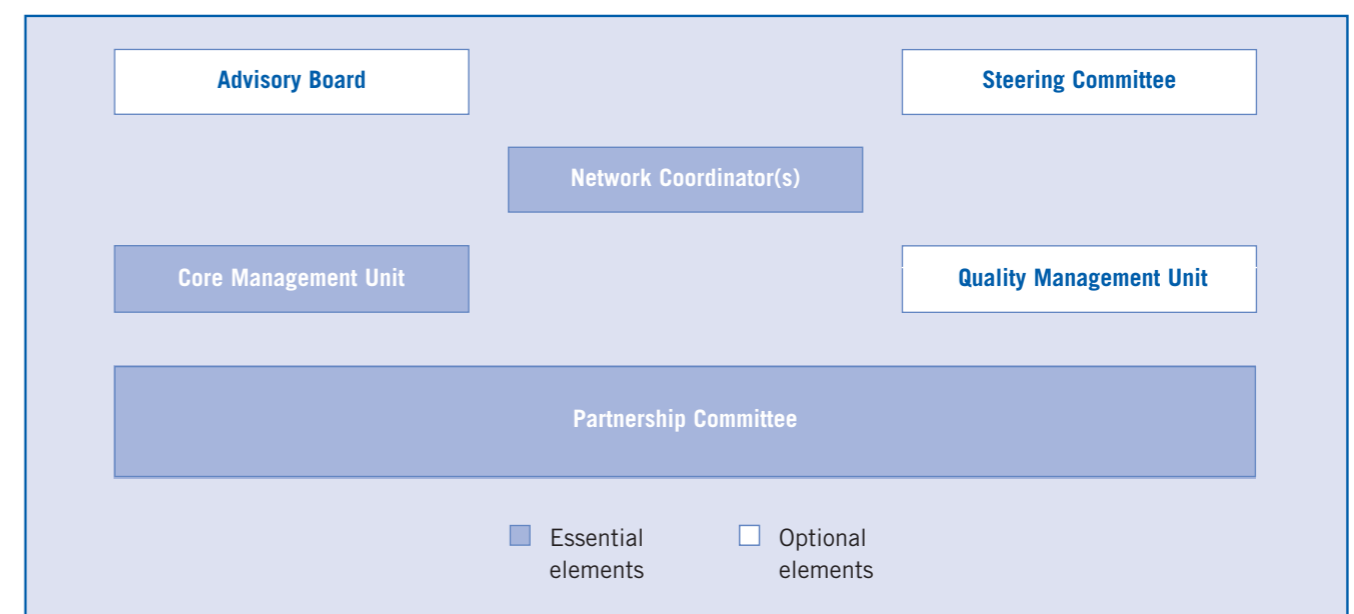
A much more differentiated system must be developed by networks for

- communicating, bundling and discussing the results of the various-strands of activities;
- monitoring and evaluating achievements;
- making every-day management decisions;
- developing, assessing and adjusting the network strategy.

There is no one single management system that would be suitable for all networks. Each network has to decide what types of management functions, units and committees are needed in order to accomplish its specific mission. The table below contains possible elements from which network managers might select those which they deem appropriate for their own network. Some of these elements will probably be essential for all networks, while others make sense only in particular contexts.

🔵 Possible elements of a management system

Advisory Board	**Steering Committee**
Network Coordinator(s)	
Core Management Unit	**Quality Management Unit**
Partnership Committee	

■ Essential elements   ☐ Optional elements

The role of **Network Coordinator** actually consists of three complementary functions: the content leader who is a senior expert in the field and therefore able to oversee the content development of the network; the process manager who facilitates controls and steers the network activities; and the administrator who takes care of the contractual and financial issues.

Each of these three functions requires specific competences and each is demanding in its own way. For this reason it may be advisable to split the role of coordinator up among two to three people.

The **Core Management Unit** can consist of four to six core partners and supports the network coordinator(s) in the day-to day management of the network.

The **Partnership Committee** comprises all network partners. It should meet at least once a year and is often combined with a more comprehensive network conference. The most important decisions should be taken in this plenary in order to ensure that all partners have a chance to influence the course the network takes.

These three essential management bodies can be complemented by three more committees if deemed appropriate by the network in question:

It is advisable to create a separate **Quality Management Unit** which consists of one to three appointed network partners and the external evaluator. The Quality Management Unit is responsible for the evaluation of the network progress and the achievement of set quality goals. One network coordinator interviewed found it very useful to combine the role of quality manager with the role of ombudsperson. In the case of conflicts – which are not unlikely given the diversity of actors and interests in a network – an ombudsperson who is neutral and not responsible for the whole network can often be a better mediator than the network coordinator who is likely to be directly involved in the conflict.

An **Advisory Board,** involving stakeholders and external experts, can be useful at the strategic level. The board can play a role in monitoring and evaluation by giving external feedback on achievements, shortcomings and plans for the future. Moreover, an advisory board might be able to introduce new ideas from outside the network and may act as a dissemination channel.

A **Steering Committee**, if installed, is the top-level management body of a network. Members of these partners are appointed by the management of the coordinating and core partner institutions, sometimes complemented by representatives from public authorities and external experts. The steering committee takes decisions at the strategic level, which are then implemented in the day-to-day management by the network coordinator.

Networks have an extremely flat hierarchy, and actors will expect participative and democratic decision-making. But as the number of people and organisations involved can be rather large, not every network actor will be involved in all management and decision-making procedures. To make up for this, at least transparency and accountability must be granted. To this end it is highly recommended that the network coordinator provide a fully-fledged management plan in which the management system is described:

- the procedures of decision-making (Which decisions are taken by whom?)
- the composition of each management body (Who is represented in which committee?)
- the type and frequency of network management meetings (Which committees meet how often?)
- the format and storage points of documentation of management decisions (How are decisions recorded and where can the documents be found?)

Some of the networks interviewed had positive experiences with a rotating system of membership in management bodies. This way participative decision-making and ownership can be enhanced without endangering the workability of committees by virtue of their size. On the other hand, the continuity and joint development of small and coherent teams might be at risk.

At the end of this section on the importance of management structures of a network it needs to be said: many of the network coordinators we interviewed made a point that they were giving of their best, but this was not really enough because of the budget limitations imposed on a Grundtvig or Comenius network. To run a network professionally, the equivalent of a full time post of a senior network coordinator supported by an assistant would be needed. In reality, in the Socrates programme period those networks were the lucky ones who could afford to employ at least a part-time coordinator. For this structural deficit even the best management system cannot totally compensate.

5. To use the potential of new technologies for network cooperation

### 5.1. Group dynamics in a network and communication technologies

Another structural characteristic of European networks in education which is of paramount importance to network management needs to be highlighted, although it might sound rather simplistic at first: network actors are geographically spread over almost all of Europe and can therefore meet face-to-face only sporadically.

In most networks, as our interviewed network coordinators stressed, these personal meetings are the highlights of the network process: network actors come in close contact to each other, meet new people, get fresh ideas and therefore become very motivated. This motivation, however, tends to decrease considerably when they return to their daily work in their home institutions, more or less distant from their network peers.

Communication technologies have great potential for raising the low points in the graphic below, i.e. for reinforcing group dynamics in a network:
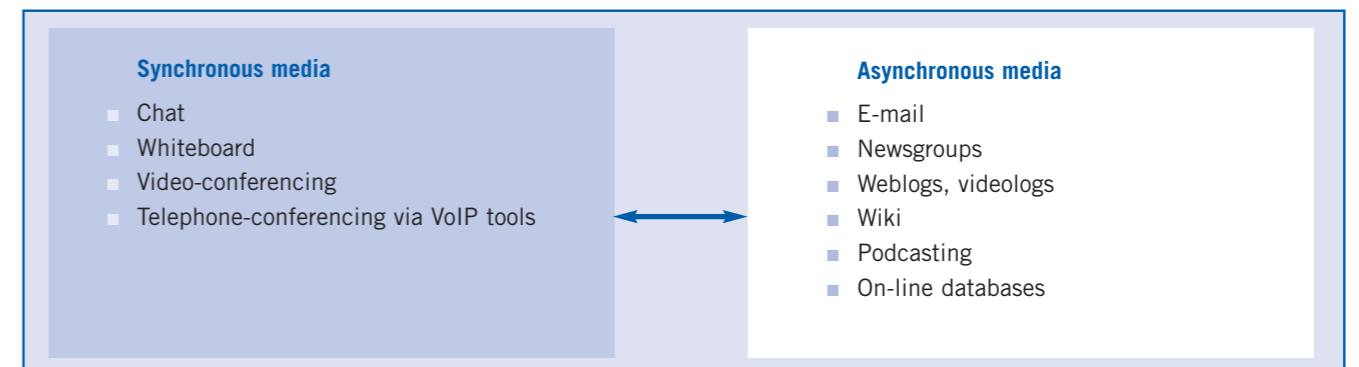
The group process in long term cooperation
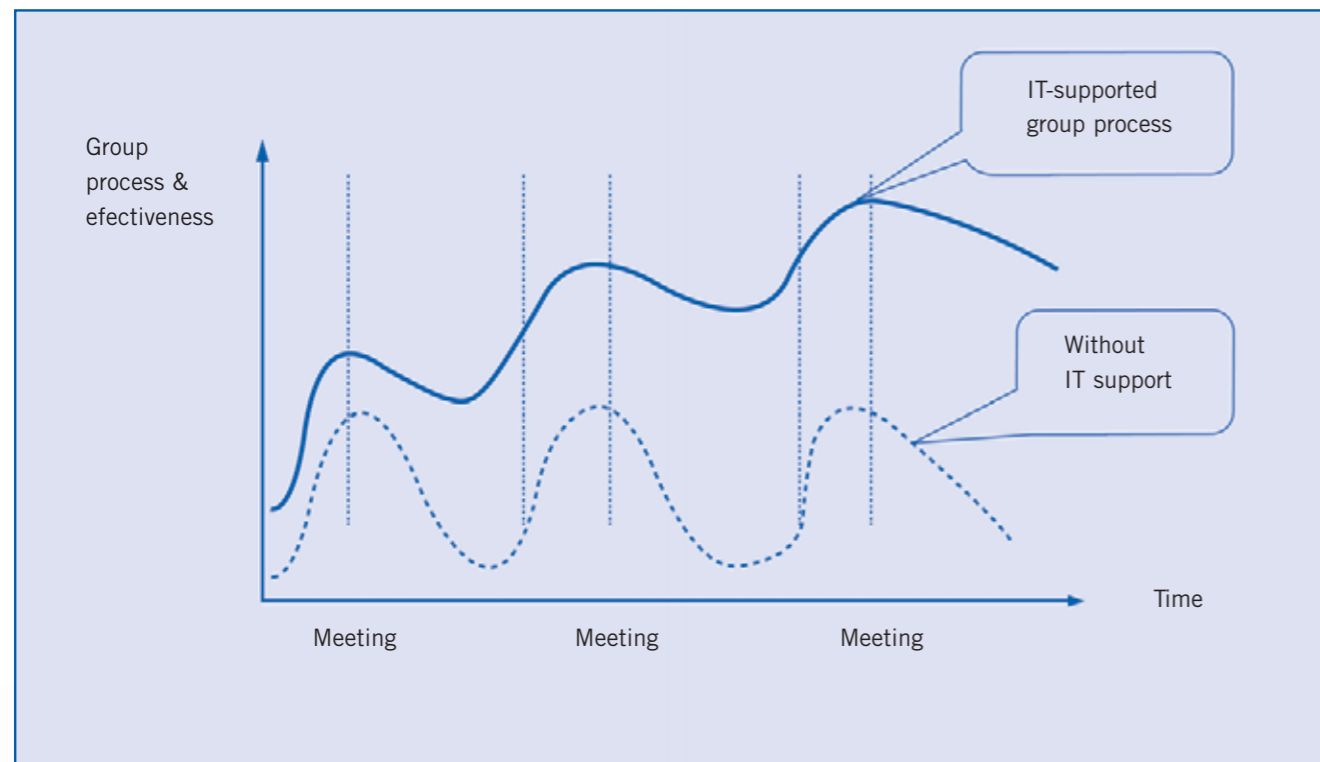
From: A Survival Kit for European Project Management.

Communication processes in networks are complex and diverse. Accordingly, there are various possibilities for using technologies to support these communication processes.

Communication is a fundamental element of cooperation. It has two main aspects, which are both crucial for networks:

■ Communication ensures the transfer of information. In a network it is vital that actors have full and permanent access to all content and management related informa-tion, as otherwise trust cannot be developed.

■ At least as important is communication for social action. The aim of social action is always to facilitate understanding between the communication partners. In European networks this is indispensable for keeping up actors' motivation for cooperation.

When selecting appropriate technologies, a network can choose from a number of synchro-nous and asynchronous media.

Synchronous and asynchronous communication tools

Synchronous media	Asynchronous media
■ Chat	■ E-mail
■ Whiteboard	■ Newsgroups
■ Video-conferencing	■ Weblogs, videologs
■ Telephone-conferencing via VoIP tools	■ Wiki
	■ Podcasting
	■ On-line databases

Asynchronous media permit longer time inter-vals for reaction. They are well suited for pass-ing on information or documents, but also to acquire knowledge about a certain subject area. Asynchronous tools can, for example be helpful for getting an overview of a network or some of its working groups and what they have achieved to date.

Synchronous media, however, are instruments suitable for assessing and jointly evaluating processes and their results. They are particu-larly useful for opinion- and decision-making processes in a network, as they enable direct communication and opportunities for actors to give feedback. Other typical areas of use are brainstorming sessions and virtual meetings in which new ideas are to be developed.

With the new generation of easy-to-use syn-chronous communication media – *Skype* may be named as one of the most common tools – , virtual communication becomes increasingly attractive as an alternative to face-to face

meetings in transnational networks as they can help in coping with limited resources.

Many recent Learning Management Systems (e.g. *Moodle*, to name one of the many common open-source tools) combine synchronous und asynchronous technologies.

Given the large number of actors, their geographical spread, and the limited financial resources, they have a considerable potential for European networks.

5.2. Choice of technologies and the development of a media culture

The potential of information and communication technologies in networks, however, is not limited to improving communication between face-to-face meetings. In principle there are five main potential applications for new technologies in a network:

■ An advanced Learning Management System can serve as the central community platform for networking, communication, and network management.
■ Virtual business card libraries (e.g. *Plaxo*) and virtual contact systems (e.g. linked in or *Ryze Business Networking)* can support and systematise joint contact management in a network.
■ E-learning environments can provide a framework for individual and organisation learning in a network.
■ Analytical software, e.g., *InFlow* can help with visualising and analysing network structures.

■ Functional support tools, e.g. for e-surveys or polls, can support network evaluation activities.
■ New knowledge management tools – e.g. wikis (wikipedia.org), blogs (www.blogger.com), news aggregators XML (RSS feeds) , tagging – (on-line bookmarking – help with identifying and systematizing information relevant to the network.

The use of a web-based collaborative platform is of particular importance for network management, as it gives network actors full access to network-related information and details and the means for contacts with all actors involved. It can be the central tool for effective communication, co-operation and knowledge sharing.

Typical elements of a community platform for networks are:

■ file archive for management and content-related documents
■ environments for sub-groups
■ joint calendar
■ joint address book
■ show case for dissemination
■ debate forum
■ chat room
■ virtual group (meeting) room

A great variety of community software is available. A network manager can choose between commercial products as, for example *Groupcare Business Solutions* (www.groupcare.dk) or *Blackboard Community System™* (www.blackboard.com) or one of the rapidly

growing open-source applications (cf. the directory of available software issued by the Free Software Foundation and UNESCO: http://directory.fsf.org/).

But the choice to be made is not primarily a decision on the best technical solution. The more important question is whether the chosen IT system will be adequate to lead to an additional quality of communication, cooperation and pedagogical action. Here *adequate* must not be confused with *technically advanced and multi-functional*. A really suitable virtual cooperation platform is tailor-made to the specific information needs of the network in question, and does not overwhelm users with technical functionalities they do not need or they are not even prepared to use. So buying a licence immediately for seemingly omnipotent collaborative software is seldom the right solution. Instead information needs and the attitudes of network actors towards certain tools should be identified and evaluated first before a choice of media is made.

The choice of media in a network is not an easy task. The right selection depends on many variables, e.g. the number of actors, technical infrastructure, and people's media preferences. The latter have not only an individual dimension – age, personal media histories, etc. – but also an intercultural background (e.g. communication cultures with strong written or oral traditions).

This is why social scientists confirm that the choice of media in networks should not be

made unilaterally but rather in communicative contexts as objects of inter-personal bargaining. They emphasise that successful media-based communication in professional and private life is not a result of individual media competence alone but requires the development of an explicit communication and media utilisation culture in individual social groups, networks and organisations.

It needs to be taken into account that the same media can used in different ways. Even e-mail, the most common day-to-day communication tool, can be used quite differently: e.g. as a simple piece of information, as a reminder, or as a form of communication which expresses empathy and appreciation. Depending on how the medium is used, virtual communication is more or less time-consuming.

In the interviews we carried out with network actors it became evident that many networks do not sufficiently develop such a media utilisation culture. The results are often highly sophisticated collaborative systems that nobody uses or reluctance on the part of network actors to use any means of communication apart from e-mail. No doubt the best choice of media in a network is the one which does not create any communication barriers and which is actually used by the majority of actors. But networks also have a mission here: They should encourage network actors to get acquainted with technologies which have the potential for the processes of cooperative net-

working and learning. In general European networks in education seem to have used this potential only rudimentarily as yet.

This *virtual challenge* of networks, however, will no doubt be an increasingly important one for any network manager in the coming years.

6. To apply a flexible management approach

6.1. Networks in education as Complex Adaptive System (CAS)

Sometimes implementing a network seems similar to trying to square the circle. A network manager needs to design, plan and steer the network effectively. On the other hand networks have a life of their own due to the diversity of actors, the multiplexity of their aims, the imminent open-endedness of networking and learning processes and the tensions which arise from that heterogeneity. Network managers frequently experience the limitations of the inability to plan and steer, finding that *things developed totally different from what was planned,* as one interviewed network coordinators stated.

This fact needs to be accepted rather than regarded as a deficiency in management skills. It is very much in line with recent project management schools such as Agile Project Management.

Agile project management is a methodology that evolved from examining what scientists call Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) in nature, like the phenomena of the flocking of birds or the marching of ants for strategic pur-

poses. These systems are characterised by complex behaviours at the systems level that emerge as a result of interactions among sub-groups or individual agents. CAS tend to be remarkably capable of adapting to the changing requirements of a complex and dynamic environment. These adaptations occur as a result of spontaneous self-organisation rather than being instigated by an external dominating force. Interestingly enough, similar tendencies were identified in the social systems of human beings.
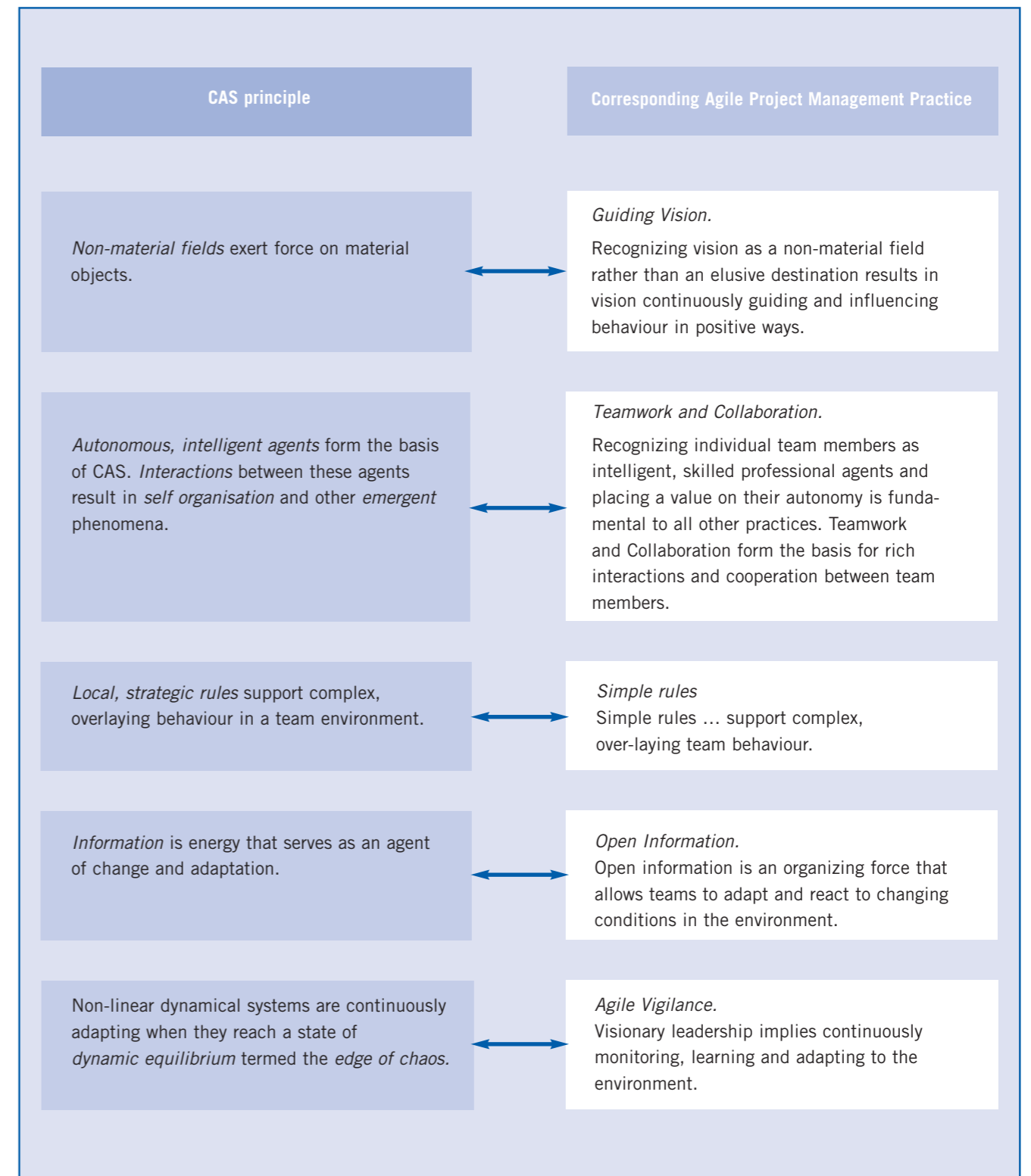
Networks in education can also be regarded as Complex Adaptive Systems. Their collective resourcefulness is greater than the sum of the experiences and the competences of the individuals involved: network actors interact of their own accord, and the network as a whole needs to evolve and continuously adapt to the changing needs of the educational field in question.

6.2. Agile network management

In order to foster this process of adaptation and self-organisation of a network rather than impede it, a flexible management approach seems to be appropriate. In Agile Project Management the focus is on leadership, rather than on planning and controlling as in more traditional schools of management.

The principles of Agile Project Management were derived from observing Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) in nature, artificial intelligence and human society and can be summed up as follows:

Principles of Agile Project Management

CAS principle	Corresponding Agile Project Management Practice
Non-material fields exert force on material objects.	*Guiding Vision.* Recognizing vision as a non-material field rather than an elusive destination results in vision continuously guiding and influencing behaviour in positive ways.
Autonomous, intelligent agents form the basis of CAS. *Interactions* between these agents result in *self organisation* and other *emergent* phenomena.	*Teamwork and Collaboration.* Recognizing individual team members as intelligent, skilled professional agents and placing a value on their autonomy is fundamental to all other practices. Teamwork and Collaboration form the basis for rich interactions and cooperation between team members.
Local, strategic rules support complex, overlaying behaviour in a team environment.	*Simple rules* Simple rules … support complex, over-laying team behaviour.
Information is energy that serves as an agent of change and adaptation.	*Open Information.* Open information is an organizing force that allows teams to adapt and react to changing conditions in the environment.
Non-linear dynamical systems are continuously adapting when they reach a state of *dynamic equilibrium* termed the *edge of chaos.*	*Agile Vigilance.* Visionary leadership implies continuously monitoring, learning and adapting to the environment.

From: Agile Project Management, CC Pace Systems, www.ccpace.com

In an Agile Management approach, the network coordinator becomes a visionary leader instead of an *uninspired taskmaster*. A coordinator's main task is to develop a guiding vision for the network, to continuously keep it alive and promote it in the day-to-day work. It is through such a positive and indirect way that network actors are *managed*, rather than through an extensive set of rules, minute work plans and strict control mechanisms. Team work and different forms of self-organised collaboration are encouraged, and network actors are given a large amount of freedom to do what they think is fruitful. The network coordinator interferes only when necessary, and avoids excessive ex-ante planning. Thus more time for real leadership remains: for observing what is going on, for learning from these observations and adapting to the network environment accordingly.

It is no doubt a great challenge to reconcile this soft interpretation of an agile network manager with the rather strict funding mechanisms of an EU programme, but we are convinced it is the most rewarding management strategy for a network.

7. To foster networking between actors in the field

7.1. What is networking?

Networks are about networking: This clear message comes from social science and is confirmed by the network actors we interviewed. But what exactly is *networking*?

Networking involves
- identifying the individuals and organisations with whom you (want to) share something relevant;
- getting to know these people at a professional and at a personal level;
- understanding the professional, institutional, and cultural context of the colleagues;
- identifying common ground and/or complementary expertise;
- exploring potential areas of cooperation and learning.

In the context of European networks networking means above all: to become mobile at national and European level in order to get in touch with practitioners and policy-makers in the field concerned.

According to Austrian educationalist Christa Bauer, networking needs a readiness to welcome difference, the willingness to make offers and to expect something in return. A good networker offers trust, displays good communication skills and views misunderstandings and crises as productive.

7.2. Putting networking on the agenda

If the message *Networks are about networking* is taken seriously the actual networking activities should cover a considerable part of the network's work programme.

What can a network manager do to enhance networking?

- To make people understand what networking is.
- To demonstrate the potential benefits of the network.
- To dedicate enough time to networking activities.
- To make partners establish and maintain contacts to local stakeholders: practitioners, managers, researchers, policy-makers, learners.
- To actively develop trust, transparency and ownership in the network.
- To map the network actors' networking capacities, especially the weak ties.
- To invite external people to network events and pay for their expenses to enable them to come.
- To include networking activities at annual conferences and all other network events.

In order to learn from each other it is indispensable to understand the working culture of the partners from other countries. Here one example of how a network organised the networking process.

Study visits as a structure for networking and learning

One coordinator interviewed insisted on carefully planned study visits to educational institutions representative of the field in question in the countries which hosted a meeting. Half a day per meeting were spent on this activity. This type of activity was also seen as an essential counterpart to the more theoretical approaches of other network activities. Moreover, it was an excellent opportunity for networking with local actors.

7.3. Make networking possible – let networking happen

A European network in education is not only a structured organism which is carefully planned, organised and implemented accordingly. The authors of the study *How networking works* draw our attention to the fact that the members of social networks interact on their own behalf and thus create network structures which cannot be found in any network application or report.

The fragile magic of the network

There are as many different maps of the network as there are members, perhaps even more: these maps evolve according to the unfolding of time, to places, to the interests of individuals who comprise the network…No single person can experience the network in its entirety. Each member chooses from among the countless possibilities offered according to preference, and therefore experiences the network only partially.

A "friendly" network seems to emerge, serving frequently as a means of exchanging opinions and as a mode of reflection taking place outside of the member's own daily context or isolation.

From: IETM (2001): How Networking Works.
IETM Study on the Effects of Networking, p.20.

The quoted study makes the useful distinction between the network as a *web*, a structure designed and guarded by the network promoters, and the network as a *system of emerging phenomena* which results from network members' individual interaction with other members.

It is not the least important skill of a coordinator to respect this fragile hidden structure

while at the same time pursuing the aims envisaged in the application which were the basis for granting European funding. The latter needs frequent interventions with the help of the whole range of project management instruments. The emerging personal networks, on the other hand, need, to a large extent, to be left alone to develop and grow to the benefit of the people involved.

This double nature of a network is something a network manager should constantly bear in mind. It can be graphically represented as follows:
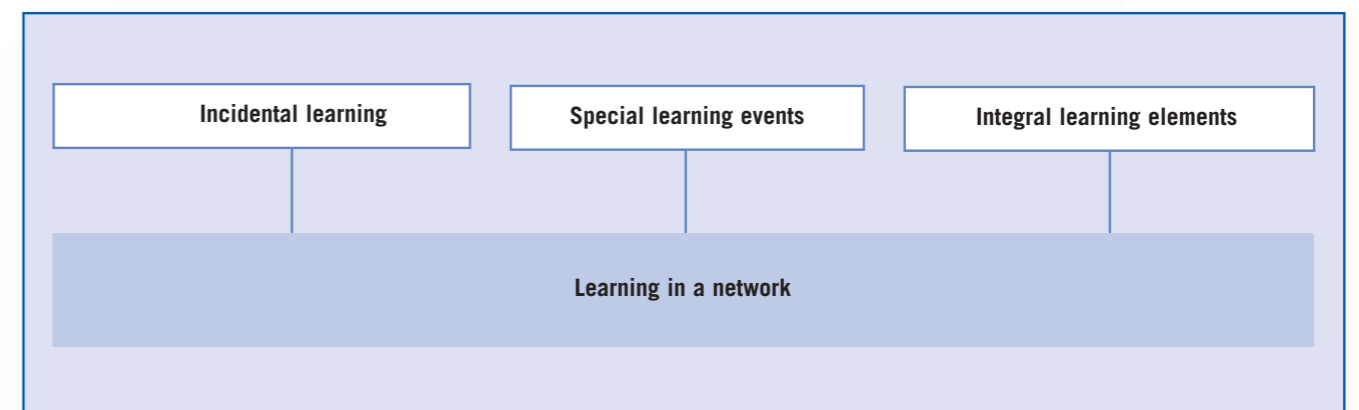
Networks in a networkies

Formal network	System of personal networks
■ Aims, work plan, ■ management system, ■ working groups	■ Contact clusters, ■ as many as there are members
Carefully designed WEB	**EMERGING PHENOMENA**
■ Devised, planned, "made" ■ Strategic intent ■ High degree of formality ■ Detailed structures ■ Relatively stable ■ Needs steering	■ Indirect result of individual, often spontaneous contacts ■ No strategic intent ■ Low degree of formality ■ Light structures ■ Fragile ■ Evolves (only) by itself

The message we intend to send out here is: networks need to be left alone – sometimes. A network manager ought not only to know when to act, but also when it is better to let things happen.

If the two are balanced, the main outcome of a network can evolve: the fabric of contacts and relationships for mutual support and learning exists. This fabric consists of many sub-networks – some carefully woven, other just come into being somehow. If other results might be doubtful when it comes to potential sustainability – this fabric of contacts and relationships has the potential to last beyond the funding period.

8. To devise and put into practice active learning strategies

8.1. Learning experiences in networks

When we asked network actors what they had learned in their networks the answers we received can be put in the following categories:

■ New knowledge in the thematic field
■ European perspective on the working field concerned
■ Management skills
■ Intercultural understanding and competences
■ Promotion and dissemination skills
■ Networking competences

According to our interviews these learning experiences in networks take place in three different formats:

How learning occurs in a network

Incidental learning	Special learning events	Integral learning elements

Learning in a network

Incidental learning

Some networks do not devise any explicit strategies for learning. Learning, they claim, occurs somehow *automatically* by implementing other network activities:

We created a very successful modular course and through creating it we learned a lot…
I learned a lot as a coordinator, it was a steep learning curve for me…

Special learning events

Other network actors insist that learning should be put explicitly on the agenda and that separate events which are dedicated to learning should be frequently planned and implemented.

We had three good conferences and each conference dealt with one aspect of our network topic. Through the conferences we learned a lot and the general theme of each conference reflected our learning.

Integral learning elements

Intentional learning activities do not necessarily need to be separate events, but can be included in other network activities:

All network meetings should have at least some specific learning parts in them.

While we do not doubt that incidental learning occurs, we strongly adhere to the point of view that the learning potential in a network can be substantially enhanced if it is a prominent and continuous part of the work programme. After all, we are talking about networks in *education*, so it should be natural that the network

actors practice themselves what they promote amongst their target groups: learning.

Here two examples of learning activities organised by networks.

🌐 Examples of learning activities

The trio approach (based on a model of the PEFETE network)
In addition to plenary meetings, one Grundtvig network organised meetings of trilateral learning groups. The main purpose of the trio meetings was to present the situation in each country and to produce a country report covering concepts, themes, providers and target groups.
The trios met once a year. Each meeting was organised in a different country to improve mutual understanding and meeting lasted three days:
The first day was for discussion between the three countries.
On the second day, the host countries could invite people from organisations which were not participating in this project.
The third day was mainly a working day, focusing on the preparation of one of the publications.
The meetings had an appointed chairperson and a rapporteur who reported the results to the network co-ordinator. The trios offered an in-depth exchange between partners and opened the discussion about improving existing practices and the necessary development of innovative approaches.
The trio approach does not only foster intensive learning, it is also cost-efficient and flexible: In the different phases of the network the groups can be easily re-shuffled, responding to newly emerging needs and tasks.

Network study circles
In another network, a considerable part of each network meeting was dedicated to getting to know the educational landscape of the host country, the national status quo, challenges and perspectives with regard to the network topic. To these debates a wider expert audience was invited. In addition to these one-day discussions national reports were compiled in order to better understand the working contexts of the other network partners. Virtual study circles on a collaborative platform between meetings further explored the issue. They lasted for eight weeks each and were facilitated in order to ensure intensive discussions.

There are different ways of implementing learning in a network. It is, however, crucial to communicate within the partnership that learning is one of the most important objectives of the network. To underline this importance the learning aspect ought to be subject to on-going evaluation.

8.2. Network development as a learning process

Social network research directs our attention to another aspect of learning in a network: learning from the network process itself:

In networks, learning is most often however, not the goal but the inevitable concomitant phenomenon and a quasi "mode of survival". "Learning" and "Knowledge" therefore, become the central terms of network development and transformation. (Weber 2006)

Often this type of learning makes changes in the original plan necessary. But that is worth it, says one of the network coordinators we interviewed:

A network is a learning process. If you don't deviate in your activities it cannot have been a good network because it means you haven't learned anything that you didn't know from the start.

It is the open-ended, process character of a network which, for instance, requires the ability to cope with ambivalent and open situations. The needs of the educational field concerned are constantly changing, new trends and methodologies are evolving, new policies are being introduced. A network in education

must be able to respond to this changing environment. These requirements for change can only be dealt with adequately if new insights, knowledge and competences are acquired by the network actors, and by the network as a whole. In other words: A network is likely to fail if such personal and organisational learning about the network process does not sufficiently take place.

Another important learning field evolves from interacting and networking, from exchanging information and experience. In networks, everyone is a network actor and at the same time, a learner and a teacher.

This learning process can sometimes be enhanced by making the interactions between network actors visible. Here, as briefly mentioned before, software for visualizing and analyzing network structures has considerable potential.

InFlow (www.orgnet.com), for instance, offers network visualisation and network analysis in one interface.

Example of Social Network Mapping Softwar (InFlow)
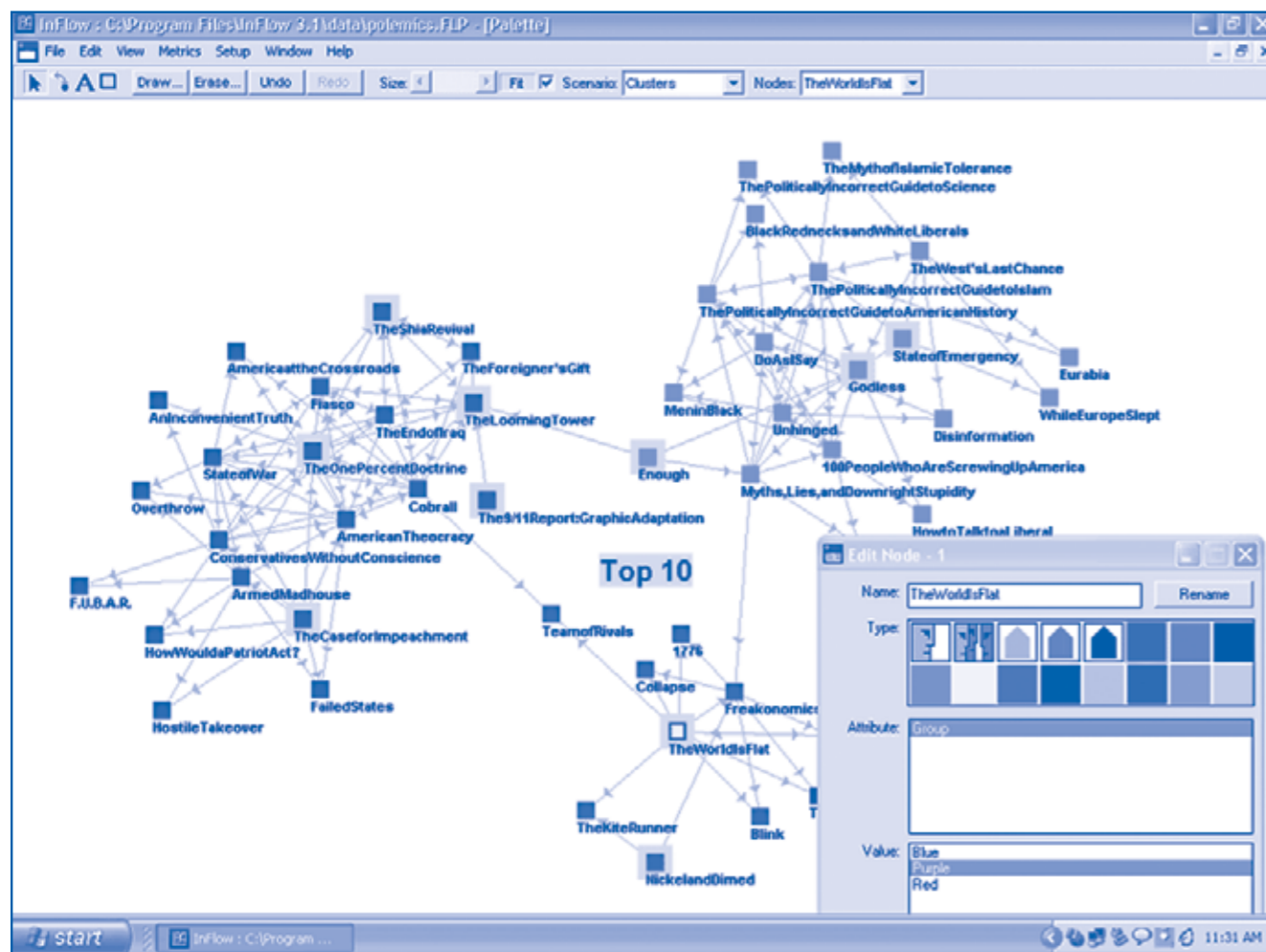
Other examples are UCINET and NetDraw (www.analytictech.com), applications that examine the complexity of the composition of the network . The program cooperates with NetDraw with visualisation capabilities and the ability to create cross tabs. The functions include methods of centrality measures, subgroup identification, role analysis, elementary graph theory, and simplified permutation-based statistical analysis.

8.3. Collaborative learning and Social Software

Using Social Software may enhance the learning processes in a network.

Social Software can be defined as applications which support communication, interaction and cooperation. Amongst these for instance, are web logs, a type of online journal, as well as wikis, websites whose content can be changed and complemented by every user. The interesting element in these tools for network activities lies in the fact that Social Software is capable of supporting self-organised learning, communication and evaluation.

Weblog

A weblog (blog) is a type of website where entries are made (such as in a journal or diary), displayed in a reverse chronological order.

Blogs often provide commentary or news and information on a particular subject, such as food, politics, or local news; some function as more personal online diaries. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, web pages, and other media related to its topic. Most blogs are primarily textual although some focus on photographs (photoblog), videos (vlog), or audio (podcasting).

From: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog [28.8.2006].

Weblogs in networks may open up a communication space and stimulate the exchange of information, know-how and experiences as well as stimulate reflection . They serve the purpose of self-reflection and may be applied as a form of self-evaluation (e.g. of job conferences, meetings). In the course of the project, they may also transform into a collective memory for the network. Here too, a search function may be helpful.

Link functions are also helpful for the purpose of cross-linking the project with other networks. This also helps in the recognition of the specific contribution of one's own network to the relevant subjects and in putting it in perspective.

Wikis

From: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog [28.8.2006].

Joint products are developed in almost all networks. Wikis are good instruments for the promotion of collaborative writing. Wikis appear in connection with issues requiring the development of new questions. They are suitable for emergent writing. They may also be used as a tool for knowledge management of a network, and also during the development phase. Weblogs and wikis require a network culture of their own. This code of conduct is also known as *netiquette* and has to be defined and promoted within the network. This code is mostly realised not only through the dispatch of a link but should be jointly developed in a face-to-face meeting.

9. To implement activities which have an impact in the field

9.1. Preconditions of shaping practices or policies

As pointed out in a previous chapter of this publication, the European funding programmes expect the networks to become *key players* in the field at European level. This involves networks in having a major impact on the field concerned. We stressed previously that making sure that provision for effective networking within the network are established and maintained is already a huge task to accomplish. So networks should be realistic about what they can achieve on top of that, given their limited resources and funding period. Nevertheless networks should have some kind of impact beyond their immediate environments, they should strive in one way or

other to shape their thematic area. The focus can be either on practice – to make innovative tools or services available to practitioners – or on policy – to reach decision-makers and advocate their cause. This choice of focus determines the network typology.

Each European network is different with regard to its aims, activities and desired impact. This makes it difficult to give management recommendations how having an impact can be ensured. The most important factors have to do with network promotion, dissemination, and sustainability. These issues will be discussed in the last chapter of this publication.

Here it may suffice to point some general prerequisites for achieving any kind of impact. A network manager ought to make sure that the network

- becomes visible in the field;
- has a clear strategy how to identify and address the key players;
- informs the field regularly about the network activities and other relevant developments;
- offers services with a clear added value.

This last point was formulated succinctly by a network coordinator we interviewed:
A network is a service operator for the thematic field and for new projects.
Only if this service-character is evident will the network be taken seriously by practitioners and/or policy-makers. It should be very visible in any of the concrete activities which the EU programme documents explicitly expect networks to implement:

Types of activities expected of networks by the funding programmes

Mechanisms for evaluation and dissemination	
Network website	Annual report on the state of the art
Types of activities expected	
Information of the relevant players	Annual meeting of projects and other players
Strategy for sustainability beyond funding period	

Based on information fiches (on-line Guide for Applicants) on Grundtvig and Comenius networks published on http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/index_en.html , version January 2007.

In the following paragraphs two of these core network activities are discussed: the provision of a network website and the organisation of an annual network conference.

9.2. The network web site

The network website is the central means of communication of a network:

For internal purposes it normally has a common work space which the diverse sub-groups use for communication, exchange, and learning. It is also the place for an extensive library of reference documents.

Perhaps even more important is the function of the network website as the main window to the world outside the inner circle of the partnership. In many cases the website is the first and perhaps only chance a network gets to attract the interest of important players in the field. If this first contact is not convincing, the network might not get a second chance. It should therefore make an effort to provide a website which generates an immediately recognizable added value to the visitors.

On their web sites networks should offer not only information on the network, its aims, activities and partners, but also clearly useful services:

An example of a good, service-oriented network website is the site of IRE (http://www.innovating-regions.org/ireservices/sec_services/index.cfm).
A range of services is available for IRE member regions, and other regional stakeholders engaged in the development and implementation of regional innovation strategies and schemes. The aim of these services, which are provided by the IRE Secretariat, is to facilitate the collaboration and exchange of experience between regions, to disseminate good practice and to offer meeting opportunities.

The available services include:
– Finding information
– Finding an Expert
– Opportunities to participate in a study visit
– Partner search facility
– Subscription to periodicals
– Ordering publications
– Downloads
– Registration for conferences and workshops
– Support to projects
– Collection of relevant links

9.3. The annual network conference

A network is expected to stage one larger conference per year which is often combined with a plenary meeting. The annual conference is the main occasion when the network meets a larger public. This opportunity should be used for promoting the network and establishing it as a focal point of the field concerned.

In order to make the annual conference an occasion for intensive networking and learning it should not be a traditional series of presentations, but apply interactive methodologies like the Open Space method.

Long breaks, plenty of social events, European evenings with food and drinks form all countries attending, mini-fairs, or cocktail receptions instead of set dinners are programme elements which entice networking among participants. Another successful strategy is to include visits to local education institutions, as this is a good counterpart to the more theoretical parts and gives the chance to meet local stakeholders.

An annual conference is also an excellent opportunity to invite policy-makers and make them interested in the network.

The already quoted study *How networking works* uses a very expressive metaphor for network conferences: the metaphor of the medieval market square.

The annual network conference – a medieval market square

Meetings can be likened to a medieval market square where rare and exotic goods could be found alongside the common, all of which was destined for perusal by travellers, jugglers, artisans and soldiers alike. Transactions among individuals dealt not only with goods to be sold or purchased; the square was not a supermarket. It was a meeting point, a point of discovery of new streets, new cities, and strange customs. It was a place to be married, to hear about the unicorn and learn from others' gestures. Items were bought and items were sold, of course. But above all, the squares were the place for participation in civil life.

From: IETM (2001): How Networking Works. IETM Study on the Effects of Networking, p.21.

If networks manage to turn their annual conference into such a thriving point of interest and focal point of life like the medieval market they have managed to become what the ambitious programme documents wish them to be: *key players* in the field.

Chapter 5:
Evaluating the network

How good is your network? This question expresses a concern about quality and is the starting point for the network evaluation process. In order to assure the quality of what networks do, how they do it and what they achieve, they need to evaluate. Evaluation is a process, supporting the network, with the intention of checking whether or not the objectives are being met, of bringing the achievements more into the open, to identify areas for improvement and to simplify decision making for change. You question your activities, methods and outcomes and you act according to the standards set by yourself and/or others.

1. The role of evaluation in European networks

The quality of outputs and outcomes is a prerequisite for their future use. You can only deliver quality if you work efficiently, you can only work efficiently if you evaluate this process. Networks are very complex, outcomes can be very varied and are not even always tangible. In networks, the evaluation of social processes plays a much more important role

than in projects. Therefore we will not be dealing with the basics of project evaluation here, other works have already addressed these aspects. In this chapter we will focus on the self-evaluation of network-specific elements, or elements that are very important in networks.
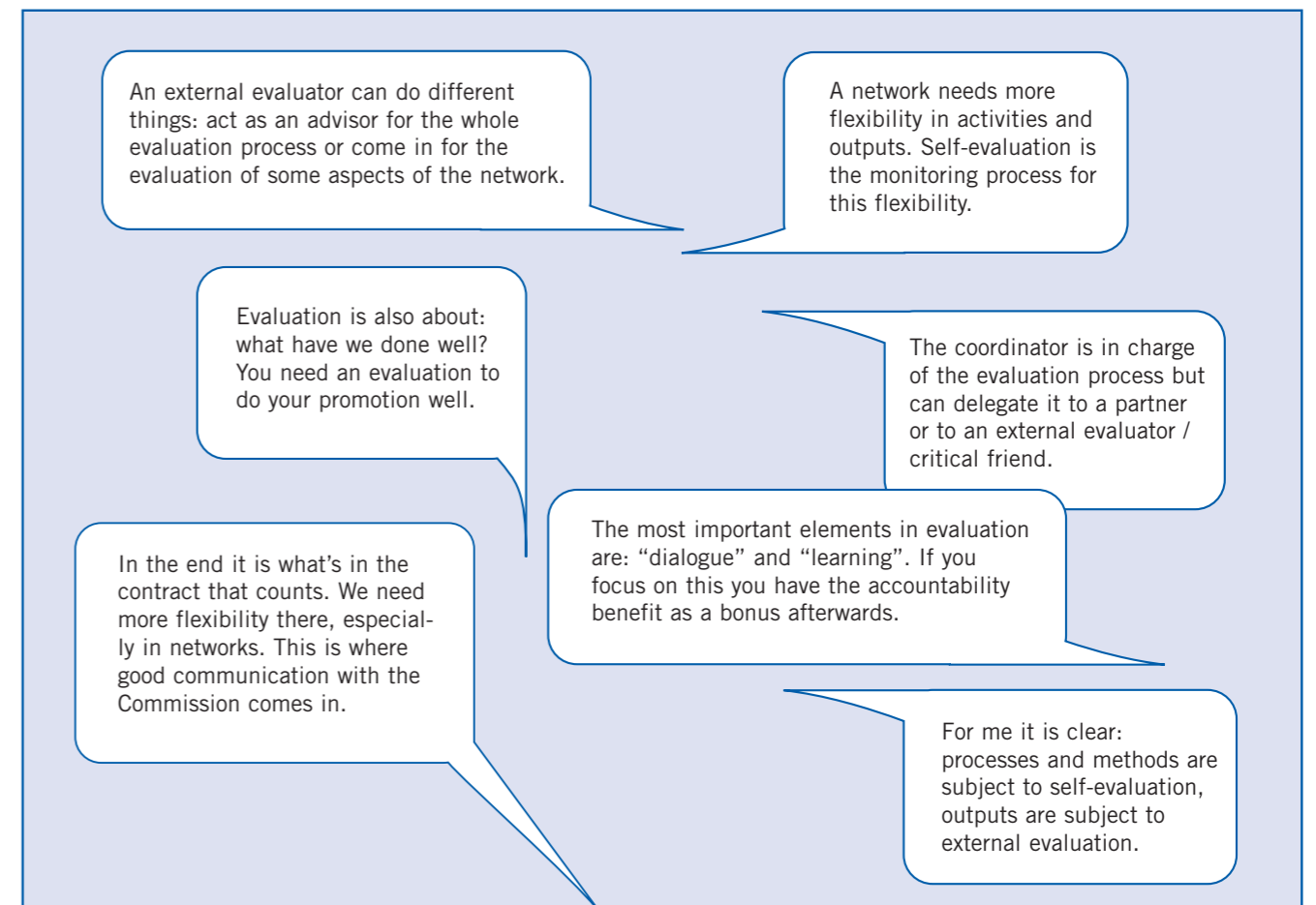
An evaluation can have different perspectives: it can be a normative evaluation (quality check in reference to external criteria or earlier commitments) or a formative evaluation (examining, learning, revising and improving). European networks in education are partnerships with a limited time span and clearly defined goals, activities and outcomes. On the one hand it is imperative that the partners in this partnership learn to cooperate efficiently as an organisation and that processes, outcomes and activities are examined 'on the road' in order to learn from, and improve them. This part of the evaluation will steer the development of the network and can accompany the monitoring process. The outputs on the other hand can be assessed in reference to criteria set by the European Commission, the target groups or the sector. This means that the evaluation of networks will always be a combination of normative and formative evaluation. It is very important though, to keep in mind that the European network is commissioned by DG Education and Culture of the European Commission. Therefore the final accountability of the network is to the Commission. The commitments made in the

application should always be used as the baseline for evaluation. Another important thing to keep in mind is that the Commission uses standard evaluation criteria like: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability.

It should be clear that in the centralised funding systems of the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP), the coordinator (beneficiary) has ultimate responsibility for all outcomes and results. He/she is in charge of the management of quality, even if this management is partly delegated to an external body. This is why we are mainly considering self-evaluation processes in this chapter. Self-evaluation is seen to be self-initiated, internally organised and self-regulated. It should aim at the professionalisation of decision-making, and improving the realisation of the network's own objectives and the quality of the work done. The main questions are: Do we work efficiently together? Are we doing the right things in order to achieve what we want? Do our outcomes meet the standards set by target groups and stakeholders?

What network coordinators say about evaluation

An external evaluator can do different things: act as an advisor for the whole evaluation process or come in for the evaluation of some aspects of the network.

A network needs more flexibility in activities and outputs. Self-evaluation is the monitoring process for this flexibility.

Evaluation is also about: what have we done well? You need an evaluation to do your promotion well.

The coordinator is in charge of the evaluation process but can delegate it to a partner or to an external evaluator / critical friend.

The most important elements in evaluation are: "dialogue" and "learning". If you focus on this you have the accountability benefit as a bonus afterwards.

In the end it is what's in the contract that counts. We need more flexibility there, especially in networks. This is where good communication with the Commission comes in.

For me it is clear: processes and methods are subject to self-evaluation, outputs are subject to external evaluation.

2. Why? The purpose of network evaluation

Quality assurance is the main aim of evaluation, but this is too general as a starting point. An evaluation process should be focussed and prioritised. There can be many reasons to evaluate the network. It is important to know from the beginning what one wants to achieve through this evaluation. Why is the partnership evaluating, and to whom is this evaluation addressed? The *what* and *how* of the evaluation will depend on the *why*.

One can evaluate a network for

■ Management reasons:
  – to improve the composition of the partnership;
  – to improve the cooperation and performance of the partners;
  – to improve the allocation of financial resources;
  – to check what objectives have been met and to what extent;
  – to reveal strong and weak points, to identify the obstacles;
  – to be able to give advice for the next year;
  – to professionalise decision-making;
  – to improve the team spirit within the partnership.

■ Dissemination reasons:
  – to make the network activities more visible.
■ Accountability reasons:
  – to assess the quality of the products;
  – to measure the relevance of the outputs;
  – to create a portfolio for reporting back;
  – to measure the impact on the target groups.
■ Sustainability reasons:
  – to check how the network activities link with the partner institutions' missions;
  – to check how the network outcomes link with local policy;
  – to prove the European added value.
■ …

It is clear that decisions have to be taken here. The aim of the evaluation is an important starting point and priorities should be set before taking the next step.

3. What? The subject areas of network evaluation

Many elements of a network can be evaluated. In the table below these are grouped under four headings: organisational matters, processes and methods, outputs & products and valorisation and sustainability.

Potential subjects of evaluation in a networkties

Organisation & management	Process & methods	Outputs & products	Valorisation & sustainability
Planning and management	Objectives	Website & internet tools	Commercialisation & further funding
Partnership composition	Monitoring & evaluation	Manual & guidelines	Mainstreaming & embeddedness
Commitment & ownership	Working methods	Conferences & training	Adopted in local and/or European policy
Co-ordination & leadership	Innovation	Network & Relationship fabric	The network as a key player (local, national or European wide)
Cooperation & communication	Dissemination	Visibility & dissemination events	Transferability & multiple use
Organisational learning	Thematic learning European added value	Policy position papers, advocacy & lobbying	Impact on stakeholders & end users
Relationship management	Flexibility	Research products	Stability of relationships, owner ship & membership enlargement

Under *organisation* can be found all those elements which deal with the partnership: its composition, partners' commitment, co-operation, communication, organisational learning …

The *process* refers to the cooperation and production processes and activities within the group while *methods* refers to the quality of the content, didactic approach and the methods the group proposes in this network.

The *outputs & products* heading covers the assessment of all types of outputs. Under the *valorisation & sustainability* heading are measured the outcomes, effects, impact and use of products and methods by the stakeholders and end users, and the way the network and its outcomes are established in the sector.

It is impossible to evaluate everything. The fields above should be prioritised. The columns are also ordered in chronological order: in the first year(s), organisation and methods should be examined. Valorisation, products and impact are usually left for the last year(s). Still there are important choices to be made in each column, depending on the needs of the partnership, the type of network (dissemination network, resource network, policy network), the motives for evaluating and how things operate in the network. Flexibility will also be needed.

In the *How?* section of this chapter, we will go more deeply into the fields that are particularly important in networks. For these fields, we will look at the performance indicators and suggest some evaluation instruments.

4. Who? The actors of network evaluation

A network is usually an extended group with many partners who do not know each other well and haven't worked together in the past.

There is a lot to learn from each other in terms of content and in terms of international cooperation. Therefore the formative (self-evaluation & learning) aspect of the evaluation is very important.

The process of evaluation is so intensely linked to the development process of the network that it is impossible to leave this evaluation completely in the hands of an external evaluator. Every partnership should be in charge of its own evaluation, which of course does not imply that all the work has to be done by the partnership.

First, it is for the coordinator to check what competences concerning evaluation and quality assurance there are in the partnership. Then the group should consider the role of an external evaluator. This external evaluator should complement the experience of the partnership in this respect and can enter the evaluation process at several points and with different roles. Should he/she be a specialist in organisational (management) matters or in the theme (topic) of the network? Should he/she give guidance to the whole evaluation process or should he/she only come in to evaluate special elements (the micro-politics within the group, a conference, a method, a product …)? Should this person create the appropriate instruments and do the analysis or could he/she be asked to monitor the processes of change?

A coordinator can appoint a partner-specialist or an internal review group to be responsible for the evaluation, in combination with an external expert. All these elements should be worked out in an evaluation plan with, since it is a learning process, with a lot of flexibility built in. The table on page 101 presents a possible division of evaluation tasks.

5. When? The timing of network evaluation

A good network application requires a good evaluation plan, indicating key moments and the timing of the evaluation. In the application it is important to prove that the applicant has thoroughly thought through the evaluation. For many networks and themes, a needs analysis or a diagnosis of the current situation in the field also provides a good start for the rationale and design of the network-work to be undertaken. Thinking about the evaluation, therefore, starts at the application stage and the evaluation itself should be launched together with the start of the network activities.

It is important that during all meetings and events, attention is paid to the evaluation and its results. Results should be disseminated as soon as possible. Since it is a learning process, a special meeting could be dedicated to the evaluation and its consequences.

6. How? The instruments of network evaluation

Once the elements to be evaluated are prioritised, the next step will be identifying key indicators.

Possible division of evaluation tasks in a network

Topic	Role of internal review group	Role of the external evaluator
Whole evaluation process	Coordinator and dedicated (or specialised) partner in charge of the process.	Is an evaluation specialist: Can advise on the general evaluation process, co-create the evaluation plan.
Organisational matters	Coordinator and dedicated (or specialised) partner & whole partnership indicate needs	Is a consultant / evaluator / experienced (peer) coordinator. Can advise on the evaluation process, decide on indicators, create the necessary instruments, gather data, analyse the data, consult on change processes, communicate with partnership, create reports
Processes, methods	Specialised partners (topic, didactic processes, learning processes …)	Is an evaluator / specialist in the theme (topic, didactic processes, learning processes …). Can be the coordinator of the evaluation by the partners, set quality criteria, create instruments, evaluate some elements, gather and analyse data, give feedback to partners
Outcomes, Products	Specialised partners (topic, didactic material, seminar, website …). Target group(s), end users, stakeholders	Is a stakeholder / product specialist / curriculum developer. Can be the coordinator of the evaluation by stakeholders or end users, can create instruments, can evaluate some elements, activities, outcomes, gather and analyse data, give feedback to partners.
Sustainability & ongoing relevance	Coordinator and dedicated partner & partnership Organisations / end users	Is a stakeholder / policy maker / curriculum developer / marketeer. Can decide on indicators, create instruments, gather and analyse data, give feedback.

Indicators are observable and measurable characteristics, actions, or conditions revealing whether an achievement or change has occurred. Indicators must be concrete, well-defined, and observable.

The answer to the questions: *How do you know you have achieved something? What would indicate you have reached the aim? What facts would reveal what you need to know?* will lead to concrete indicators.

One can distinguish between:
- Risk / enabling indicators: these relate to the external conditions of your action
- Input indicators: relate to human, material and financial resources
- Process indicators: relate to operational processes and management
- Output indicators: relate to products, results and immediate effects
- Outcome indicators: relate to long-term effects and impact.

Indicators can be qualitative (rely on less formal methodologies, such as people's opinions and perceptions, attitudinal change etc.) as well as quantitative (rely on more formal survey data and numerical measurements).

These indicators can be made visible through evaluation instruments such as:
questionnaires, interviews (bee-reporter), observation, participation figures, document-analysis, group discussion, presentations, diary, graphs etc.

Therefore, the steps to be taken should be:
- Define performance indicators
- Gather data through evaluation instruments
- Analyse the data
- Communicate the findings

7. Examples of indicators and evaluation instruments

Since the position of this publication is that networks are about learning, networking and shaping policies and practices, we will suggest examples of indicators and evaluation instruments for these sections. On each occasion we will also pay attention to the European added value.

7.1. Evaluating organisational learning

Organisational learning in the partnership is evidenced by a change in culture and behaviour of the group of partners in terms of cooperation and sharing knowledge.

Indicators for organisational learning
- Improved clarity of roles and tasks
- Flexibility in the allocation of roles, and the final settling of roles
- Complementarity of roles and functions
- Improved internal communication & dialogue
- Improved intercultural communication & cooperation
- Improved relevance in the allocation of tasks
- Efficient sharing of knowledge and experience
- Openness in professional matters
- Openness in matters of self-evaluation
- Clear training needs of partners, filling the gaps
- Efficient cooperation and production
- Good conflict management
- Increased trust between partners
- Lifting of organisational barriers for cooperation and learning

7.2. Evaluating partner involvement and roles

The following evaluation sheet attempts to measure the involvement of the partners in the different network tasks. It offers a clear overview of network tasks and makes the partners reflect not only on what they have done, but also on what they should have done and still can do. For many partners the role of the network is still vague. Within the partnership the tasks and roles must become clear and must be shared. This is a process that has to be monitored. This sheet and the following

one (on roles) offer a learning tool for organisational learning. As a coordinator you can see which tasks are undervalued and neglected by comparing the figures in column 1 and 2.

Through calculations you can even make a balance-sheet of neglected tasks which is useful for the whole partnership.

🔷 Evaluation sheet: Clarity of involvement

Involvement:
Please circle in column 1 the level of involvement you should have (according to your agreement with the coordinator) in each network activity below and circle

in column 2 the level you actually have.
Scale: 0 = none, 1 = very low, 2 = low, 3 = moderate, 4 = high, 5 = very high.

Overview of typical network activities	1: Should have	2: Actually have
Collection of relevant materials	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
Evaluation / assessment of relevant materials	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
Production / writing of reference materials	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
Doing research in this field	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
Piloting / testing methods / material	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
Organising conferences	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
Organising training days	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
Being a speaker, giving presentations	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
Sharing experience within the network partnership	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
Communicating within the network	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
Working with specific target groups	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
Training of network actors (partners, members, target groups)	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
Passing on information in your own institution	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
Providing support to other projects in this thematic field	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
Creating visibility of the network beyond its participants	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
Awareness raising, campaigns in the field	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
Representing interests and advocacy	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
Contacting policy makers	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
Dissemination / valorisation	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
Policy development	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
Validation, recognition, integration of innovation into existing systems	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
Curriculum development	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
Creation of a European added value	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
Calling upon your own (existing) networks	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
Developing and extending the network	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
Interacting with other projects and networks	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
Generating new projects	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
Mainstreaming: integrating outcomes in regular curricula:	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
Creating a network culture	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5

Evaluation sheet: Clarity of role

Role:
I consider myself (or my institution) in this network more as a:
circle a figure from 0 (not at all) to 10 (very much so) in column 1.

I would be better placed in this network as a: circle a figure from 0 (not at all) to 10 (most appropriate) in column 2

Role	1: I consider myself	2: I would rather be
A content provider	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
A content tester:	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
A disseminator / promoter	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
A policy maker	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
A trainer / speaker	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
A net-worker	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
A learner	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
An organiser	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
A group manager	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
A relationship manager:	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
A marketeer:	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
An evaluator:	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

7.3. Evaluating individual learning

The partnership as an organisation is supposed to learn, but one of the main aims of the network is that its partners and members learn. What evidence is there for learning in a European context? It involves changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviour.

Indicators for individual learning in a network
- Increase in the sharing of professional knowledge
- Adopting new methods, using new material
- Adopting innovation, diversification in daily practice
- Awareness of the European level of your work
- Broader European scope on theme, on applications
- Better connected, easy access to people, to material
- Better internationally connected
- Improved presentation and communication skills
- Improved networking skills
- Improved intercultural skills

The following checklist gives a network partner the opportunity to measure his/her capacity to share and adopt knowledge with the partners and other actors in the network.

Checklist: Sharing and exchange

|	Yes	No
Have you already introduced your work to the partnership in a plenary session?		
Did you bring in extra material to share with the partners?		
Your approach (or method) to the theme of the network is a special one, not shared by many partners in the network		
From how many partners do you know what they professionally stand for, what they do in daily practice?		
With how many partners did you have a thorough discussion on professional matters?		
From how many partners did you accept material which you think you will use in you work?		
To how many partners did you offer material you think they may use in their work?		
Have you already adopted some material in our work offered by network partners?		
Is the European context of this network offering you content you normally would not be able to access?		

A good way to learn about network actors' professional activities, background and vision is to implement an evaluation workshop.

Group acitivity: Evaluation workshop

Divide the partners from the partnership into groups of four partners. Discuss and try to visualise what you professionally share and don't share (vision, approach, methods …), using the diagram below (enlarged on A3 pages)

On the diagram indicate who shares what with whom, using the circles and overlaps. All groups should report back in a plenary session. The aim is to have an overview of the scope of approaches, visions etc., to find out what binds the group, what is shared, what is common, what is unique and not common…

The European added value is not to find out what is in the middle, but to find out what is on the periphery and worth being brought into the middle.

Partner 1
Partner 2
Partner 3
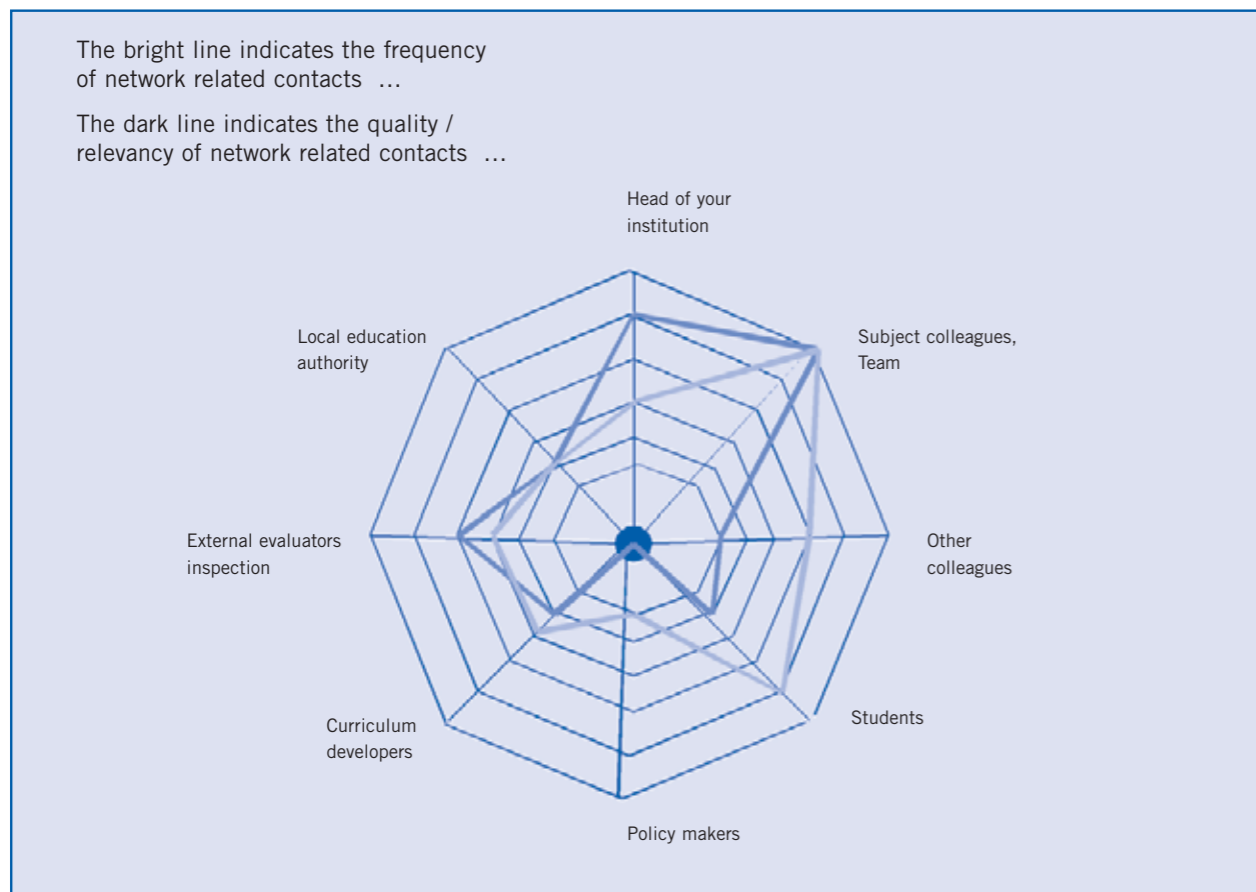Partner 4
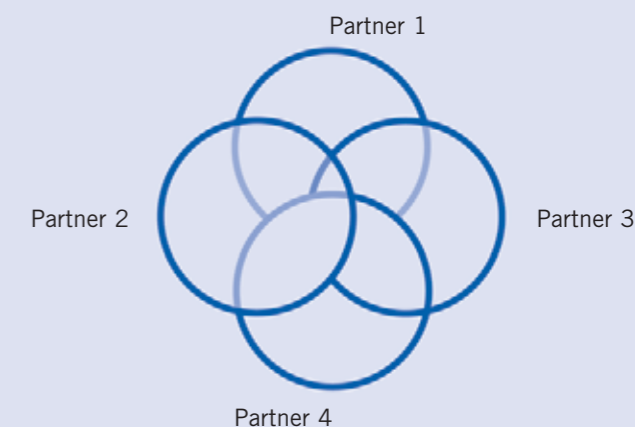
7.4. Evaluating personal networks

One of the outcomes of being in a network is a network of personal contacts and relationships with people who have a shared interest. How is it possible to measure the quality, typology or intensity of contacts? These contacts and relationships may be internal (within your own institution), local (locality, region, country) or international (European network).

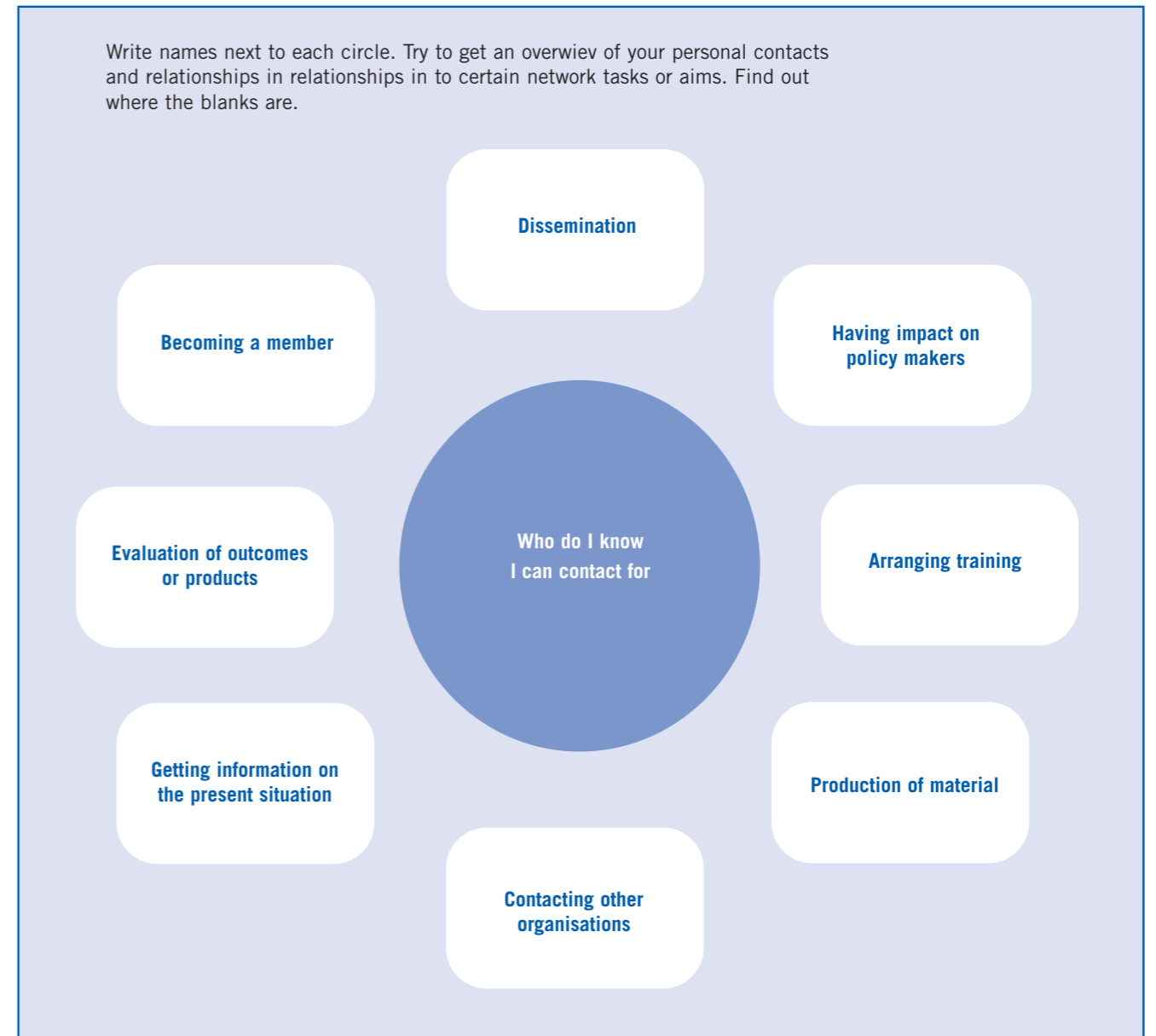### Indicators for personal network evaluation

- Variety / typology of contacts and relations
- European level of contacts and relationships
- Quality of contacts and relationships
- Frequency of contact
- Relevance of content transferred and shared
- Variety / typology of content transferred
- Reciprocity of contacts and needs
- Awareness of weak and strong links

The following tools may be useful to map and evaluate personal networks at local and international levels.

Your local network

The bright line indicates the frequency of network related contacts …

The dark line indicates the quality / relevancy of network related contacts …

- Head of your institution
- Subject colleagues, Team
- Other colleagues
- Students
- Policy makers
- Curriculum developers
- External evaluators inspection
- Local education authority

How good is your local network?

Write names next to each circle. Try to get an overwiev of your personal contacts and relationships in relationships in to certain network tasks or aims. Find out where the blanks are.

- Dissemination
- Becoming a member
- Having impact on policy makers
- Evaluation of outcomes or products
- Who do I know I can contact for
- Arranging training
- Getting information on the present situation
- Production of material
- Contacting other organisations

How can you fill in the missing parts? In the following diagram you can try to find out how many steps you are away from the right person to help you solve your problem.

The person
I need to know

ME

A person
he / she
knows

A person
I know
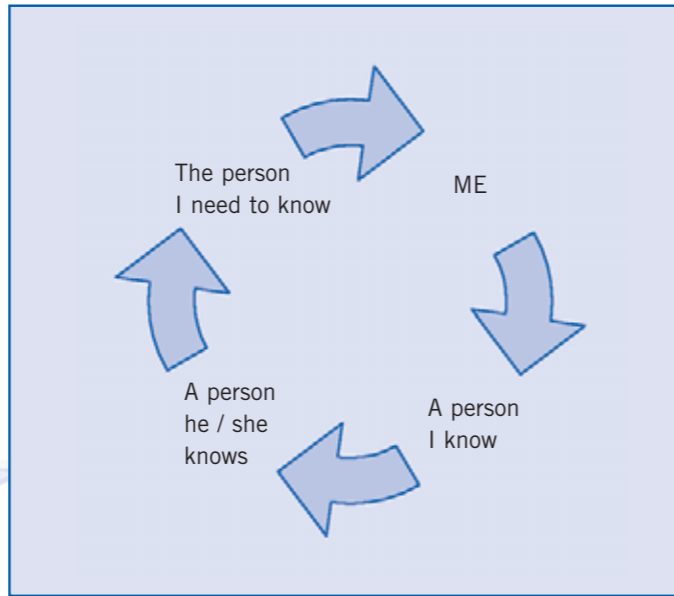
Indicate on the map of Europe below (with coloured dots or symbols) in the countries outside your country of residence:

- the foreign colleagues you contact on a regular basis,
- the origin of methods / examples you have found to be relevant for your work,
- the foreign colleagues you share practice with,
- the foreign institutions you have visited for your work,
- the key institutions in your sector,
- the partners or other actors of the network you regularly contact.

7.5. Evaluating adoption in local policy

In order to have network outputs applied to local practice (curricula, programmes …) it is important that they are adopted in local policy. Is the network an important player in the field? Is the network one which cannot be ignored? How can this be made visible?

### Indicators of being adopted in local policy

- Local policy makers take part in your activities
- Local policy makers promote your activities & methods
- Policy documents mention your methods and approach
- Network partners are asked to take part in promotion / information activities organised by local education authorities
- Network partners are asked to participate in decision makingat local level
- Network partners are consulted by policy makers
- Local policy makers and network partners cooperate in reshaping the material in order to meet local community needs
- Local goals are adapted following network advice
- Network material & goals are integrated into local action plans
- Policy makers use the network for establishing relevant contacts and relationships
- Policy makers are members of the network

These elements can be evaluated through document analysis and listings of contacts and meetings.

How far are you from the decision makers?

List the meetings you (or a person advocating your case) have on the relevant levels.

TOP

Three levels up:
meetings

Two levels up:
meetings

One level up:
meetings

Your level:
meetings
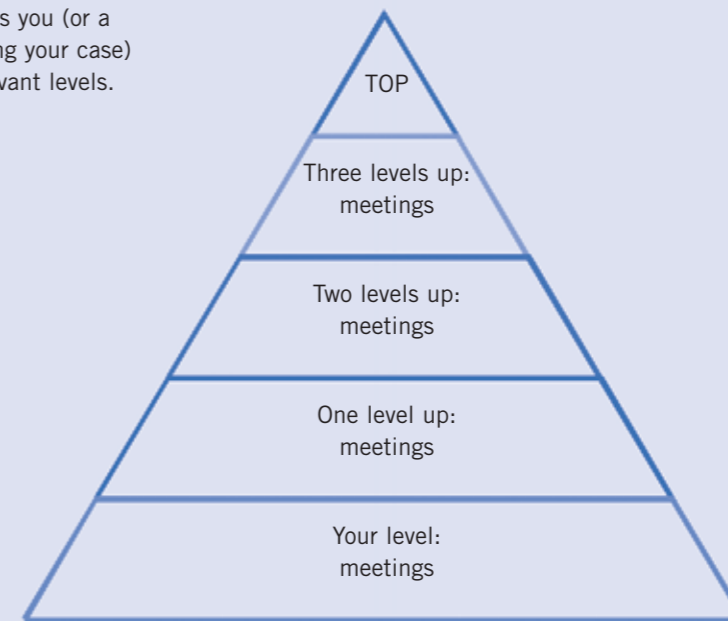
7.6. Evaluating the mainstreaming of network results

A network usually is not a permanent structure. It advocates products, methods and approaches acquired via international cooperation. The sustainability of these outcomes is only guaranteed if they are integrated into the curriculum and or regular practice of relevant organisations and institutions. Evaluating this aspect is an important step in the monitoring of sustainability.

Indicators for mainstreaming & embeddedness:

- Network material or methods are integrated in the curriculum or programme of relevant organisations.
- Network material or methods are part of initial or in-service (teacher) training.
- Local trainers cooperate with network partners.
- Network methods or approaches are included in the policy statements of relevant organisations.
- Organisations send their staff to the training sessions the network organises.
- You, as a network partner, are regularly invited by local organisations to give information or training.
- Local organisations consult you regularly.

These elements could be measured by the listing of contacts, lists of participants, document analysis of curricula or programmes etc. Which indicators can be measured by pupils,

students, teachers, partners and members, institutions in the respective thematic field?

8. Managing change

Many evaluations are stuck in the phase of gathering information and the results are rarely communicated to the partners. Thus the implications of evaluation never are absorbed. Good evaluation needs the trust of all the people involved. There should be open communication on the evaluation and its results. The partners and all those involved should be informed from the start about the evaluation and its possible implications about who is responsible and where the results will be taken or presented. A dedicated partner could be the communicator regarding the evaluation, a special room in the virtual learning environment could be used for the evaluation. Here are some concluding recommendations which may contribute to effectively using the network evaluation activities for decision-making and change management:

- Analyse and interpret the collected data individually and with the team
- Arrange a review team meeting: what does this mean for us?
- Also pay attention to the positive elements.
- Adapt, if necessary, the objectives, the work plan, activities, products, means of communication, management structure.
- Give it time.
- Create a portfolio of evidence.
- Include the relevant elements in the evaluation report.

Chapter 6: Making the network sustainable

> **Whatever is done or produced, make sure that the world knows about it, that products and outcomes are used in a broad context and that they last as long as needed.**
> **The new word for this is: Valorisation.**
> **Valorisation is originally a French term which has become anglicised and accepted in the context of the European education and training community as a complex concept containing elements such as: dissemination, sustainability, exploiting and mainstreaming. Valorisation has to do with visibility, communication, contacts, relationships, impact, policy making, integration … and as such is the core business of networking. In this chapter we will deal with the dissemination and sustainability of networks and their outcomes as key elements of valorisation.**

1. Valorisation in the context of European funding programmes

Valorisation is becoming more and more important. It is clear that the impact of EU funded educational programmes and project results needs to be improved. The valorisation

of project results in the sense of dissemination, adding European added value and the mainstreaming of these results is one of the key tasks of networks. The network's own valorisation must guarantee the quality and continuation of this valuable task.

In the future, all funded projects and networks will have to include a valorisation plan in their application. It will have to be part of the work plan, with the allocation of tasks to partners and subcontractors. The idea is that between ten and twenty percent of the budget should go towards valorisation. This valorisation plan will form an important selection criterion in the future.

The European Commission defines *valorisation* can be defined as the process of exploiting project learning and outcomes (training products and processes, methodology, course materials etc) with a view to optimizing their value and impact in new contexts (target groups, companies, sectors, training institutions and systems etc.)
To be effective, the process requires:

- a focus on end user/target group needs from the inception of the project
- the dissemination of innovative training products and results
- an analysis of their suitability for the transfer to meet identified new needs
- the ability to translate and adapt to targeted new contexts
- piloting and experimentation
- the leading to full integration into the new context

This process can take place at the micro project level or at a macro level, with the aim of achieving full and sustainable integration into local, regional, national and/or European training systems and practices, including through the formal certification of qualifications.
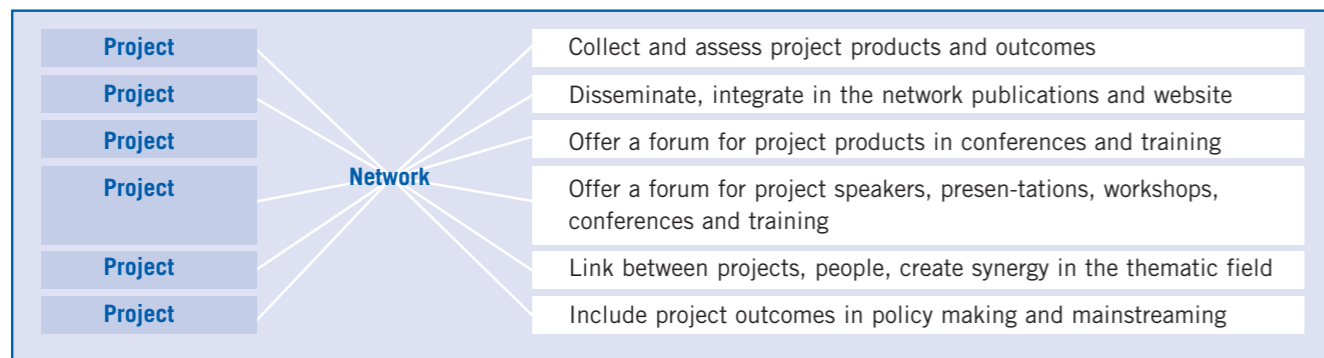
The valorisation of educational programmes and the outcomes of their projects have both a macro level and a micro level. At the macro level, there have been several calls for specific dissemination and valorisation projects and there have been many web-based dissemination initiatives. Actions for synergy between programmes also have contributed to valorisation.

Networks play a key role here. Networks have been taken on board by the European education programmes in order to collect and dis-seminate project results, to mainstream innovative practice, to enhance quality assurance, to promote the European dimension and to become a key player in policy making etc. These are all core activities for valorisation. Therefore, the very existence of networks in the education programme of the Commission is the macro response to the need for the valorisation of programme and project outcomes and innovation.

At the micro (project) level it has become imperative – and part of the selection criteria – that projects focus on valorisation and include a valorisation plan in their application. Here networks play an important complementary role: It is one of their main tasks to help valorise the outcomes of projects in their thematic field.

Network activities for valoristion of outcomes of projects in the field

Project		
Project		Collect and assess project products and outcomes
Project		Disseminate, integrate in the network publications and website
Project		Offer a forum for project products in conferences and training
Project	Network	Offer a forum for project speakers, presen-tations, workshops, conferences and training
Project		Link between projects, people, create synergy in the thematic field
Project		Include project outcomes in policy making and mainstreaming

But networks also have to focus on their own valorisation. Is there life for the network after the funding period? Will outputs be used and mainstreamed? Did innovation and expertise from other countries find their way into local policy and practice, and will it last?

The dissemination and sustainability of networks means the dissemination and sustainability of project outcomes and as such are key elements in the valorisation of the European programmes and their outcomes.

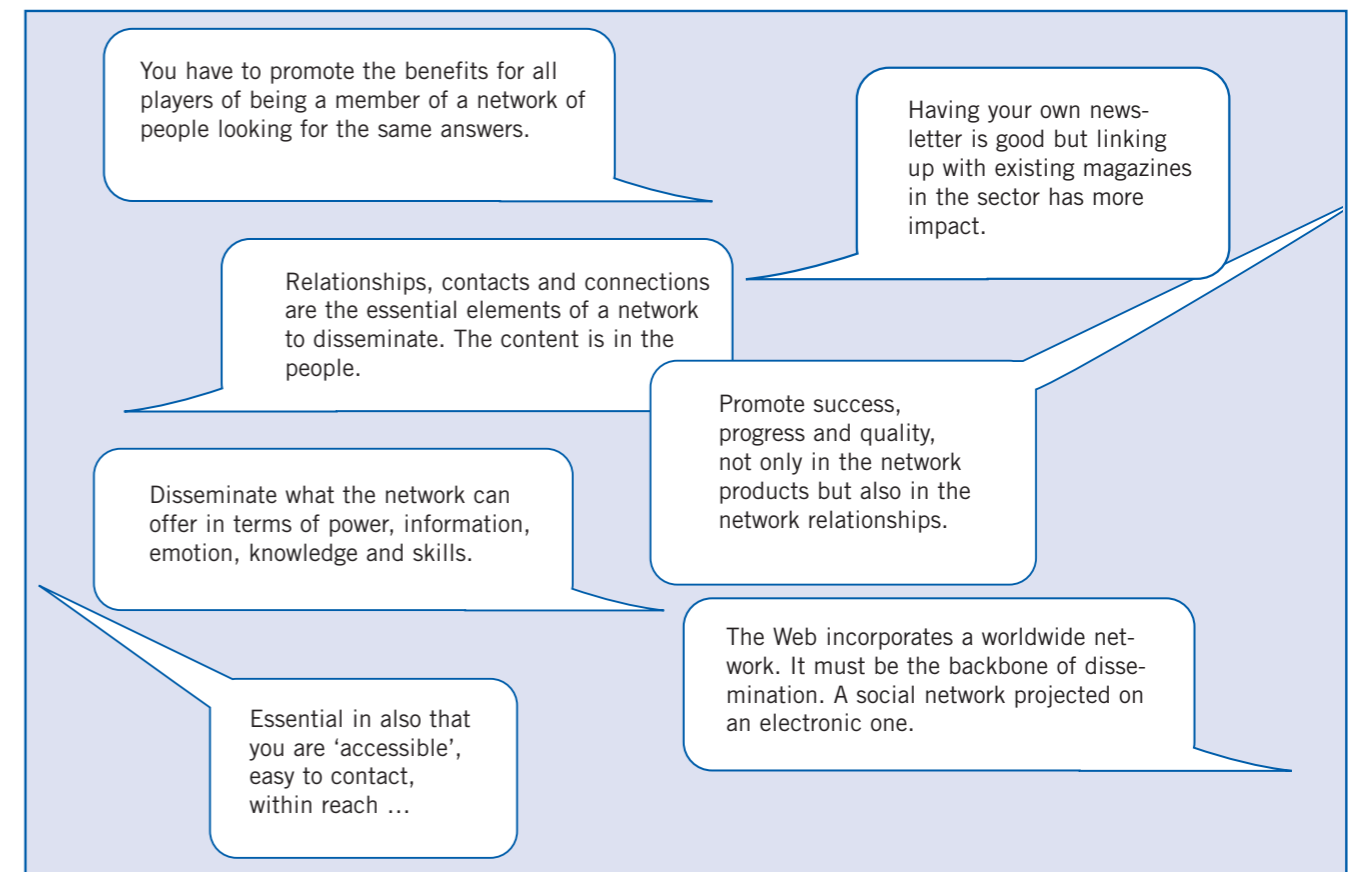## 2. Dissemination: promoting the network and spreading good practice

2.1. The role of dissemination in European networks

Dissemination is the process of spreading information and promoting the network and its outcomes to a well targeted wider audience. It is not, as it sometimes was, sending out leaflets about products and outcomes when the funding period has ended. Dissemination, especially with networks, is an ongoing process, starting from the beginning of year one, involving the visibility of all activities, (partial) products and outcomes. It should be the key element in a strategy of visibility, impact and sustainability.

Dissemination should start from a coherent plan. The main questions in the plan are: why do you disseminate, what do you disseminate, to whom, how and when? There is no general answer to these questions. Do not send everything to everyone. For each *why* (aim), there is a *what* (output), and a specific target group and timing. With a good dissemination plan you send the right things to the right people at the right time.

What coordinators say about dissemination

You have to promote the benefits for all players of being a member of a network of people looking for the same answers.

Having your own news-letter is good but linking up with existing magazines in the sector has more impact.

Relationships, contacts and connections are the essential elements of a network to disseminate. The content is in the people.

Promote success, progress and quality, not only in the network products but also in the network relationships.

Disseminate what the network can offer in terms of power, information, emotion, knowledge and skills.

The Web incorporates a worldwide network. It must be the backbone of dissemination. A social network projected on an electronic one.

Essential in also that you are 'accessible', easy to contact, within reach …

The first question to be asked is: *What do we want to achieve?*

There are many reasons for networks to disseminate their outcomes:

- For promotion and publicity reasons:
  - to promote your work, your institution, the partnership, the network;
  - to improve the visibility of the network;
  - to spread information to a large European audience.
- For monitoring and management reasons:
  - to get feedback from the field;
- For process reasons
  - to act as a clearing house for other projects;
  - to inform specific target groups and stakeholders;
  - to network: build contacts between interested people;
  - to identify interested people or relevant target groups;
  - to build a database of relevant target groups;
  - to spread results, outcomes, products and have them used;
  - to gain impact, weight on policy makers;
  - to advocate, to lobby;
  - to become a player in the field;
  - to mainstream your method, approach, product;
  - to link up with other initiatives in the sector;
  - …

The question of *What do we want to achieve?* determines the other elements: if we want, for example *to mainstream our method and outcomes* what information do we need to send and to whom do we send it?

2.2. What can be disseminated?

It is very important in dissemination that you demonstrate success. Only then will end users and policy makers pay attention. The first thing to do is to send out the message: *We exist, this is who we are, this is where we are and this is our mission!* Also send out 'service oriented messages': *This is what we can do/mean for you.* Next, disseminate news and information about upcoming activities and events, opportunities for people to participate, material they can use. The next step is to demonstrate success and quality, promote achievements, outcomes and activities of all kinds: products, training, materials, conferences, milestones in the networks' life span, success events …

It is also important that the network as a network becomes visible and known. Most of the outcomes mentioned so far are tangible products but networks in particular also have other, less tangible outcomes: the network of contacts, people linked through their interest in the theme, their influence or impact as a group, relationships, European synergy, innovative impetus, a common vision … these elements should also be made visible, available and be valued. It is important to see in what format these elements can be disseminated. In what way can they be adapted to this aim? Who is interested in this social capital?

2.3. Who is to be addressed?

It is important to define the stakeholders in your thematic field and their relevance in rela-

tion to your aims. What can the network do/mean for them, what can they do/mean for the network? What information would be relevant for whom?

Target groups can be internal and external:

- Target groups in your own institution
  - Colleagues, end-users, policy makers, curriculum developers …
- General audience, national or international

- Stakeholders in the thematic field
  - Politicians, policy makers and curriculum developers at all levels (regional, national, European)
  - Researchers, trainers, NGOs, training institutions …
  - Other projects, associations and networks
  - End users
  - Local networks

The Sustain checklist of outcomes and addressees

Outcomes	Primary target users	Secondary target users
A	1	1
	2	2
	3	3
B	1	1
	2	2
	3	3
C	1	1
	2	2
	3	3
D	1	1
	2	2
	3	3
E	1	1
	2	2
	3	3

From: www.sustain.odl.org.

The *Sustain* project created a checklist starting from the outcomes: They recommend creating a list of outcomes, defining target users for each outcome, and then discussing the relevance of outcomes to types of stakeholders. Network specific outcomes to take on board here would include: a database of people interested in the theme, a list of relevant stakeholders for policy-making (at different levels), an overview of projects, products, methods and activities related to the theme, an overview of policy trends, a state of the art statement on the theme, etc.

2.4 What are the appropriate means of dissemination?

All means of communication and presentation should be taken into consideration; ICT based, hard copy based or simple talking to people: website, leaflets, newsletters, e-mail-lists, articles, press releases, presentations, lectures, conferences, training seminars, networking, contacts, targeted campaigns, poster sessions, exhibitions …

It should be clear that nowadays the Internet is the backbone of all good dissemination. Whatever other dissemination means you use, they should always also refer to Internet based information and communication about your network. Websites are accessible worldwide and easy to update. Virtual learning environments contain all kinds of archiving, communication and collaboration tools. Weblogs offer instant publishing and communication opportunities, e-mail-lists provide instant worldwide mailings etc.

Strategic partnership planning is significant here: network and umbrella organisations should be included at national and European level. They will naturally reach their partners at member state level.

2.5. The timing of dissemination activities

Dissemination should begin from the outset. This doesn't mean you need a leaflet from day one, but it does mean that you start talking to the right people, even from the day that you get the news of approval of your funding. There should be a timetable and deadlines for partial products and outcomes to be ready for dissemination. But there should also be a time-table of key events (conferences, meetings, deadlines of reports) with stakeholders and policy makers, organised by other organisations but which are relevant to the network. A good network is present at the right place and right time.

3.   A checklist for planning dissemination activities

The following checklist looks at dissemination starting from the aims: What do we want to achieve, who are we going to address and what outcomes/sub products do we have or need in order to achieve it?

Network dissemination checklist

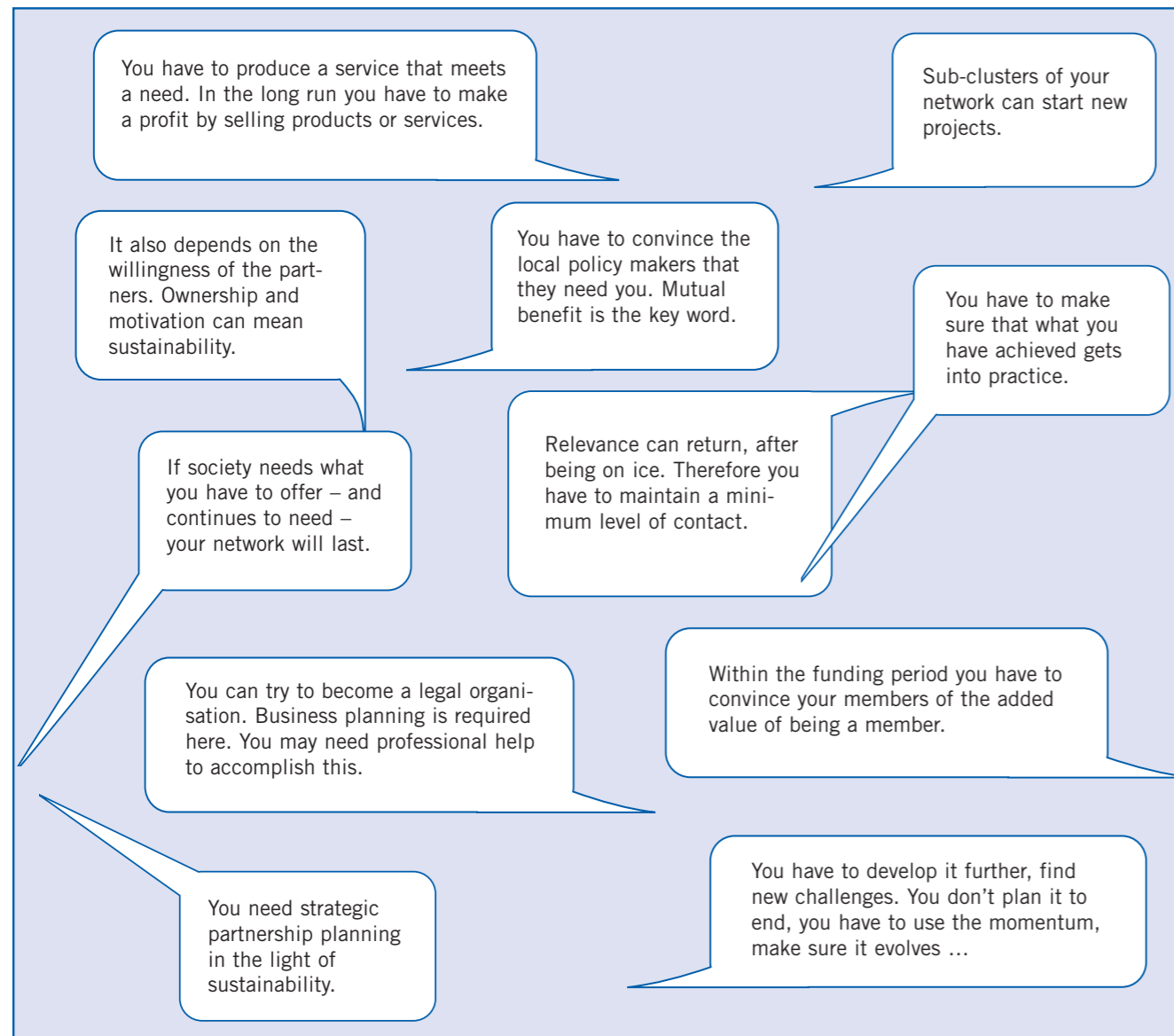| Aims of dissemination	Target group(s)		Outputs available and/or needed	
Promote network activities				
	1		1	
	2		2	
	3		3	
	1		1	
	2		2	
	3		3	
Spread products and have them used				
	1		1	
	2		2	
	3		3	
	1		1	
	2		2	
	3		3	
Contact people, create a database				
	1		1	
	2		2	
	3		3	
	1		1	
	2		2	
	3		3	

4. Sustainability: developing strategies to make the network last

4.1. About sustainability of European networks in education

A second key element in valorisation is sustainability. The response to this question in your grant application is NOT that you will look for additional grants. A dependence on grants does not show sustainability, because getting the next grant is beyond the control of the applicant. Moreover, showing that you have enough food is not proof of being healthy. Therefore it is important to understand the difference between sustainability and funding.

You have to produce a service that meets a need. In the long run you have to make a profit by selling products or services.

Sub-clusters of your network can start new projects.

It also depends on the willingness of the partners. Ownership and motivation can mean sustainability.

You have to convince the local policy makers that they need you. Mutual benefit is the key word.

You have to make sure that what you have achieved gets into practice.

If society needs what you have to offer – and continues to need – your network will last.

Relevance can return, after being on ice. Therefore you have to maintain a minimum level of contact.

You can try to become a legal organisation. Business planning is required here. You may need professional help to accomplish this.

Within the funding period you have to convince your members of the added value of being a member.

You need strategic partnership planning in the light of sustainability.

You have to develop it further, find new challenges. You don't plan it to end, you have to use the momentum, make sure it evolves …

Grants are usually *start-up funds* or *seed money* for creating and establishing a sustainable network. One can argue about the duration of this initial phase. In view of all the tasks allocated to network partnerships and taking the sustainability requirement into account, the authors of this publication believe it is impossible to accomplish all this in a three-year funding period Networks should be allowed to focus on certain aspects of their work and the renewal of funding for at least six years should be standard. Only then can real sustainability and mainstreaming be realised.

Networks can differ a great deal as well. Some networks start from scratch or from a previous project with an extension and with new partners. Other networks already existed before they were funded by the EU, as an association, an international group of volunteers or as a network of contacts in another context. The starting situation clearly has an effect on the sustainability potential of the network. These elements should be taken into consideration.

Also the theme plays a role. Some thematic areas are closer to daily life than others – with a clearer impact. In some areas differences between countries are bigger, policies and trends can work for or against your 'innovation'. It is hard to estimate the potential of sustainability in some sectors and it certainly is not correct to assume that all situations require the same length of time to accomplish a form of sustainability.
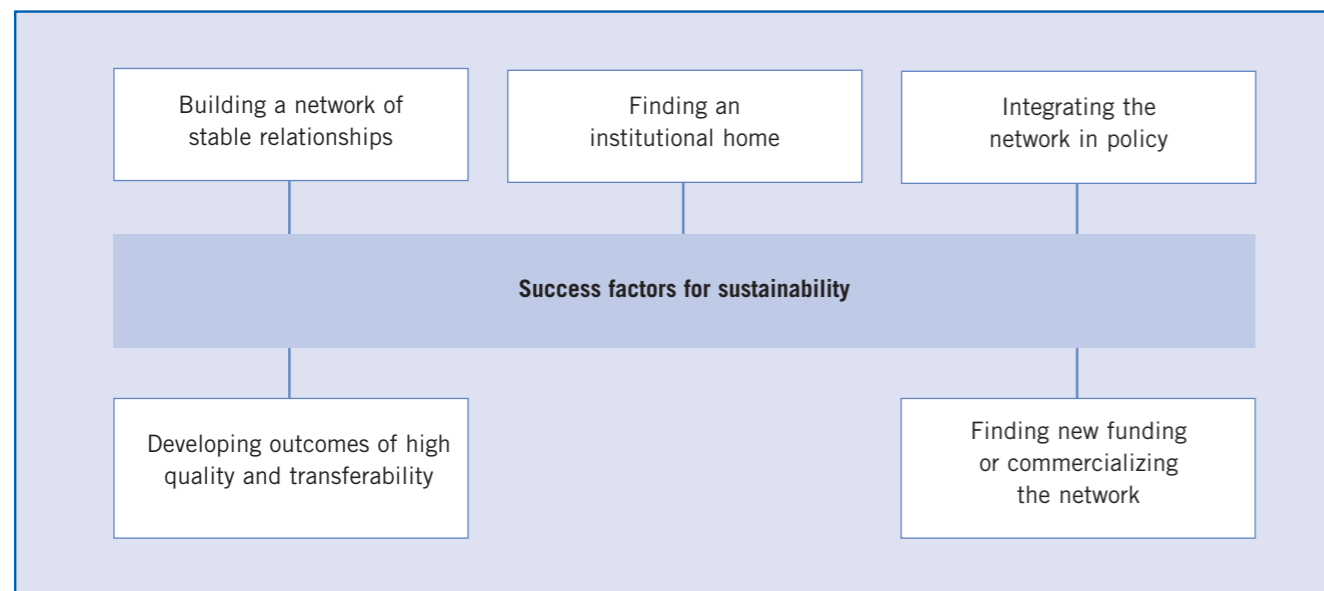
Some people see sustainability only in terms of finding funds for the future survival of the existing partnership, but sustainability is a much broader concept that reaches beyond getting new funds for extending the life span of the initial partnership. Valorisation has to do with the impact and exploiting of outcomes. In this chapter we want to focus clearly on the sustainability of outcomes. Particularly in networks, with more policy-impact-contact oriented outcomes, sustainability takes many forms.

In this publication sustainability is defined as the creation of the conditions necessary to establish a lasting realisation of the network's aims and the use of its outcomes beyond the initial partnership funding period.

The main aims of networks are to bring together expertise, improve visibility and disseminate project results, create a forum for exchange, set up a network of contacts, generate innovation, gain impact on policy making … A network should focus on the sustainability of activities and outcomes related to these aims, and to create the conditions for a lasting impact. It is therefore important to identify the requirements needed to continue key activities. The partnership needs to decide what these requirements are: the sustainability of the partnership or of the network structure, lasting contacts and relationships, the transferability of methods or products, becoming embedded in local curricula, adoption by established institutions, integration in local policy …

The conditions for lasting outcomes of networks can be grouped under five headings:

◉ Factors which may lead to sustainability of networks

Building a network of stable relationships	Finding an institutional home	Integrating the network in policy

Success factors for sustainability

Developing outcomes of high quality and transferability		Finding new funding or commercializing the network

4.2. Building a network of stable relationships

A well established network of contacts and relationships is the best guarantee of sustainability. It is important that the coordinator and partners have good connections and are prepared to engage in communication with stakeholders and target groups. A network is maintained by people knowing about it, supporting it, using it. Therefore all relevant levels of actors/institutions should be present in the partnership and in the network.

This means that you have to plan your partnership carefully in the light of sustainability. Do

you have the right balance of content providers, disseminators, networkers and policy makers in your partnership? Are your partners key players in their country? Do they have contacts at all levels? The identification of relevant stakeholders, organisations and key people in every partner country is very important. You cannot include all types of institutions and stakeholders from all partner countries in your partnership. Therefore it is important to find out who or what is missing in each country and to find ways to involve those missing elements in the network. You can take them on board as network members, a speaker, a

critical friend, an observer, a co-organiser of an event, or you can simply keep them informed, feed into their work, programme etc.

4.3. Finding an institutional home

The adoption and appropriation of network activities and outcomes by relevant organisations in the thematic sector is the ultimate goal of a network. Are the partners in your partnership – as individuals – well linked in their institution? Is there a mutual interest for the network and the partner institution? Do the network priorities meet the priorities of the partner institutions involved? Is the work for the network your partners do, integrated into their work in their institution or is it extra work? Would it be possible for partner institutions to consider a future lasting commitment (funding or staffing) for the network activities? If not, are there other organisations or structures well placed and who may be interested in taking over (parts of) the network activities or outcomes? Are their organisations or institutions willing to patronise the network: adding their quality label to it, act as a protector or advocate, giving the work of the network more weight. To look for these institutions and opportunities should be part of the sustainability plan.

The following elements play an important role in the institutionalisation of network activities:
- key people in the institutions are aware of the relevance and quality of the outcomes of the network for their organisation,

- the outcomes respond to a need of the institution or its end users,
- activities are integrated into or synchronised with local curriculum/programmes,
- network activities or methods improve the quality of the regular programme of the institution,
- there is appropriate certification for end users,
- there is the possibility of gaining revenue (marketing products, participation fees …),
- the network shares ownership with and recognises the talent of local stakeholders,
- the transfer of knowledge and staff development in the institution is taken into account,
- information and the training of stakeholders is in the network programme,
- the network helps the institutional collaborators integrate the innovation into the programme and lets them take the credit for it.

4.4. Integrating the network in policy

Policy makers and decision makers are key people in networks. They will decide whether or not the network outcomes can be integrated into the local regular curricula or activities. It is very important that partners and members are aware of local or national trends or policies in the thematic field of the network. An analysis of the current situation relating to the theme of the network and a 'network needs analysis' prior to the application must demonstrate the need and relevance of the future network's activities and its links with local or

national policies in the sector. It is imperative that the network's outcomes match community needs and/or national/local policy priorities and that network activities are integrated or synchronised with other national or regional initiatives.

A European network is, of course, also supposed to be a player in the field. The link with local/national policy makers is a two-way communication. The network introduces innovation and internationally shared expertise, the local decision makers bring in local needs, local vision and opportunities.

If the network outcomes match the local policy strategies it is of course much easier for (local) organisations and institutions to mainstream these outcomes.

4.5. Developing outcomes of high quality and transferability

The intrinsic qualities of the outcomes obviously play a role in their sustainability. The network programme needs to develop a level of trust in order to gain political credibility and the interest of stakeholders.

It is therefore important to measure the quality of the network's outcomes and to communicate this quality. This involves (self-) evaluation and dissemination. Policy makers, stakeholders and end users need to be convinced of the quality and necessity of the network's outcomes. Therefore: measure progress, disseminate evidence of value, success and assets.

The transferability of the outcomes is also an important factor. Can products, activities, methods, approaches be easily adapted for

use in other sectors? Are there strategies to take the network activities into other actions? Does the network use replicable programme models? The broader the application field of an outcome, the bigger its impact.

Do the network outcomes respond to a need and do they fit into present local policy, and will they still do so in the future? The ongoing relevance of the network activities and outcomes also depends on the level of innovation of the underlying projects and activities gathered and promoted by the network. Are your partners still on the ball? Are they still in the forefront of the action? In what ways do the network outcomes anticipate changes in the thematic field? In what ways are the outcomes adaptable to future trends? A network needs a constant or an updated needs analysis. Relevance can even return after a latent period.

4.6. Finding new funding or commercializing the network

Mainstreaming and institutionalising are important ways to get network outcomes under a permanent roof. Still, it is important to consider extra funding in order to continue development or promotion, to undertake extra activities that are difficult to allocate to one institution.

Perhaps your network needs a permanent steering group that cannot be incorporated into an existing organisation or needs to be independent. In that case funding is needed. Single source funding always is a risk and will

most likely dry up after a while. Therefore it is important to use diverse resources, if possible, and to look for multiple funding streams. Are there any marketable products and outcomes (material, courses, contacts …)? Are there any products or services to sell? Is it possible to shift tactics and goals to match new funding sources? Would there be any organisation willing to sponsor you? Sponsorship does not necessarily mean giving money, it could also mean offering services or goods for free by an institution or company.

Can the network be turned into an association with membership fees, into a movement, a lobby group …? Perhaps some sub-groups in your network can initiate further projects which are linked to your network?

🌐 blinc eG: A cooperative as the institutional body for a network

The cooperative was developed in the framework of *eL3*, a network-type project funded by the eLearning programme. *blinc* (www.blinc-eu.org) is the umbrella organisation of a European network of developers, experts and users of blended learning products and services from twelve countries.

The legal form of a cooperative was chosen to support the participative character of the network of equal partners. Each member organisation and individual has one vote in the general assembly.

The cooperative members share knowledge, experiences and products to achieve synergy effects and to promote new ventures. As special service for the partners *blinc* offers European-wide dissemination and valorisation of their project results and an organisational and technological platform for exchange.

As in the well-known agricultural cooperatives, each partner becomes a shareholder by purchasing a certain amount of shares (in relation to the economic strength of its institution). Also individuals (for instance learners) can apply for admission. The costs for the shares will be paid back when leaving the organisation.

Legally, a cooperative is situated between a ltd. company, an association and a shareholder company. It is especially suitable for non-commercial and commercial networks that represent a wide range of different organisations and that work in a more decentralised way. Compared with a ltd. company it gives more space to the individual development of the member organisations as well as for a sustainable development of the network and its sub-activities.

Compared with a (non-profit-making) organisation, it offers more commitment by members and coordinators, mirrored for instance in the duty of balancing. All necessary specific regulations (e.g. concerning admission, cooperation and competition) should be clarified and fixed in the legal statutes.

In order to get funding or to commercialise outcomes a network needs to:

- sell quality products or deliver services that are needed in the sector,
- coincide with local policy and feed into their needs,
- fit into institutional priorities and curricular requirements,
- make sure it is visible and well known.

A network might need a special support group in order to get a business plan ready, comprising professional marketing people, local policy makers, representatives of relevant organisations, representatives of the target groups, professional associations, an editor etc.

5. Checklists for developing sustainability strategies

Checklist of events

For sustainability, it would be very useful to feed into existing activities, training events, conferences. Create a list for each partner country of all events, organised by other organisations, where the network could cooperate or be present with some input.		
Country Organisation	**Activity type & dates**	**Network input and relevance**

Target groups and outcomes needed for specific sustainability strategies

Sustainability strategy	Target group(s)	Outputs available and/or needed	Timing
Finding institutions willing to take over parts of the work/outcomes	Institution types		
e.g. administration distribution hosting & keeping website updated	1	1	
	2	2	
	3	3	
e.g. organise next conference	1	1	
	2	2	
	3	3	
Influencing policy making	Target groups		
e.g. advocacy patronage relationship building	1	1	
	2	2	
	3	3	
	1	1	
	2	2	
	3	3	
Mainstreaming products or methods	Organisations		
e.g. applying material or methods in regular courses	1	1	
	2	2	
	3	3	
e.g. end users using the material in organisations in your region	1	1	
	2	2	
	3	3	

Checklist on commercialisation and further funding opportunities

Outcomes suitable for commercialisation	Outcomes available and/or needed	Target groups
Services e.g. giving lectures & presentations running workshops advocacy offering contacts & European links to good practice etc.	1	1
	2	2
	3	3
Products e.g. books guidelines conferences newsletter web support	1	1
	2	2
	3	3
Activities suitable for funding in other programmes	**Activities**	**Funding programme, action or project**
e.g. for other target groups	1	1
	2	2
	3	3
Local funding sources for activities in the network thematic area	**Authority or organisation**	**Network activity**
e.g. local authorities advocacy group movement	1	1
	2	2
	3	3

6. Conclusion

The valorisation of networks needs to be taken into account from the beginning. The first step is strategic partnership planning in the light of dissemination, contacts, decision and policy making, mainstreaming, commercialisation …
To guarantee relevance and to meet the needs of target groups and stakeholders in the different countries is the next step towards valorisation. Networks cover a kind of meta-level. The (European) added value and ongoing relevance is provided, partly through the quality and innovation of the underlying projects that the network links, and partly through the activities and relations within the network itself. At all levels this relevance and mutual benefit is crucial for *having a value*.
One only can appreciate what one knows. Effective dissemination should take care of visibility, name, reputation … as a condition for being appreciated and valued.
Outcomes need to be established through becoming embedded in local policy, steering local policy and mainstreaming and implementation at the institutional level.
A final step could be the commercialisation of services and/or products through fees or revenues.
All this planning for sustainability needs to be focused in a special organisational form: Some network partnerships have a mainstreaming special interest group, some have a sustainability working group, or a sub-group on policy in order to guarantee that special attention goes to these elements from the beginning.

Partnership planning, a valorisation plan, a dissemination plan, a business plan … these already represent a huge workload, without even touching on the content, relationship and production aspects of networking. It is clear that the one is of no use without the other. With good reason the European Commission has put the valorisation of project outcomes at the centre of focus in the new programme. Networks are vital in this process. This must be a primary consideration in setting up a network.
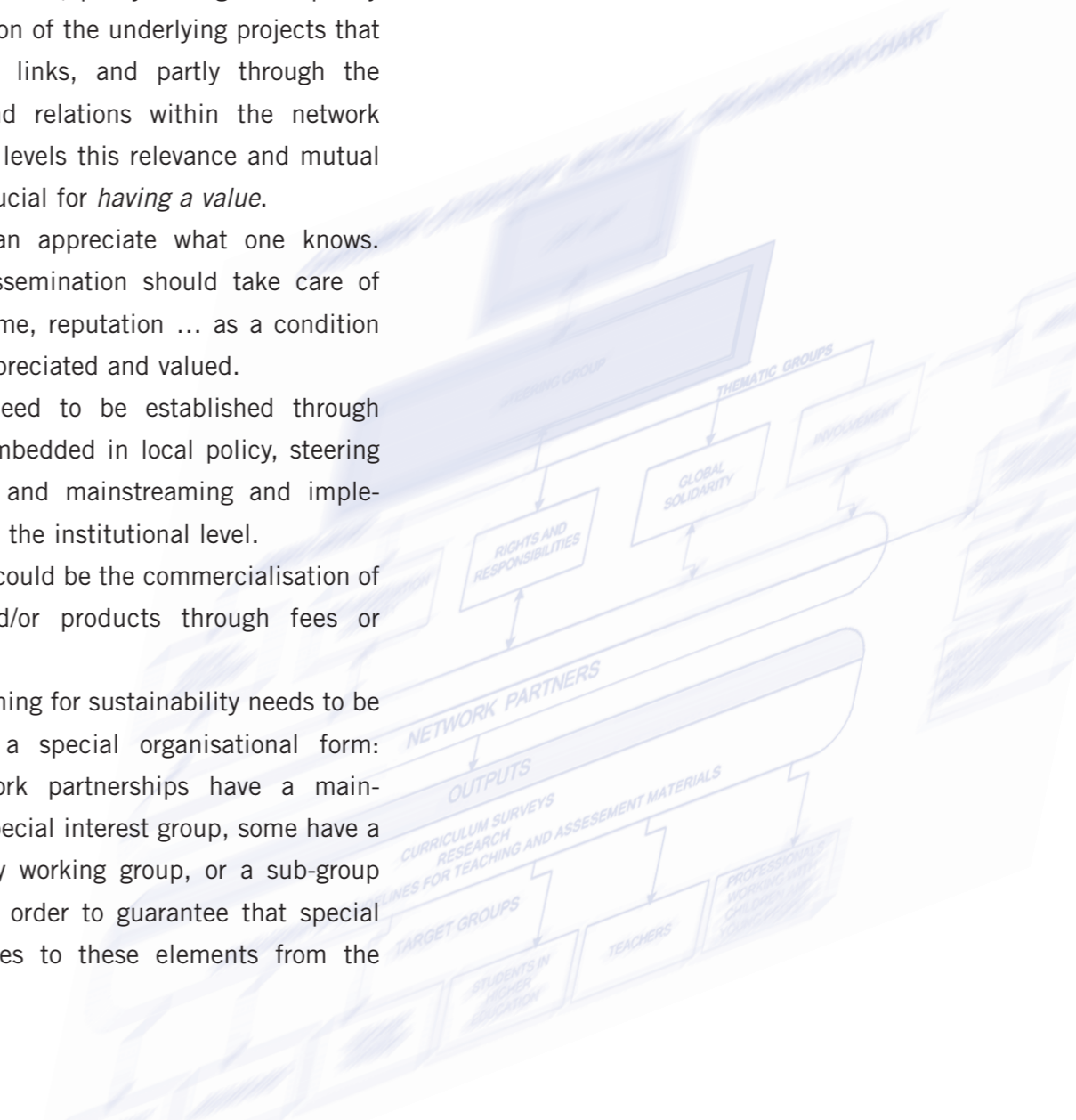
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Acknowledgements

Networking is a key competence of practitioners in education, and networks are considered to have high potential for solving structural problems. The Art of Networking deals with planning and implementing a particular type of educational network: European networks in the framework of the EU funding programmes for lifelong learning.

The publication addresses professionals in education – teachers, trainers, programme developers, managers, researchers and evaluators – who are already involved in networks or may wish to be so in the future.