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# **NETWORK EVALUATION FROM THE EVERYDAY LIFE PERSPECTIVE – A TOOL FOR CAPACITY BUILDING AND VOICE**

**Liisa Horelli**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Despite the rich literature on networks, publications on the evaluation of networks are scarce. The aim of the article is to present the core concepts of network evaluation in the context of local and regional development, and a case study in Finnish North-Karelia. It is argued that network evaluation from the everyday life perspective (NEELP) is a special case. It requires an integrative design and the building of a collective monitoring and self-evaluation system with a variety of enabling and traditional assessment tools. It contributes to the empowerment and capacity building of individuals and groups of people who are involved in the co-creation of their contexts, while it also strives to recognize the complex systemic aspects of the environment.

*KEYWORDS:* network evaluation, everyday life, social cohesion, enabling tools, participatory planning and development

## **NETWORK EVALUATION UNDER CONSTRUCTION**

Networking is as old as the history of humankind (McNeill and McNeill, 2006). However, only the last decade has disclosed to what degree women and men of the western industrialised world live in so called informational network societies. Castells (1996) and Hardt and Negri (2000) state that the latter are characterised by the spaces of global flows of information, finances and technology that subjugate localities and places. This means that new challenges are posed to urban and rural policies, planning and development included. Localities are seen as part of regions which are forced to compete with one another in order to become an attractive space for desired flows. According to

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Kotler et al. (1999), the competition among urban regions or cities on the world-wide market can be labelled as a global place war.

The response of the European structural policy to this challenging situation has been based on two contradictory ideologies and principles: competitiveness and social cohesion. The construction of network-like structures has been considered vital for both of them which can be seen, for instance, in the cohesion policy instruments, funded by the European Social and Regional Development Funds.

A variety of different types of networks exists, even in the context of local and regional development. The actors in the so called *networks of competitiveness* are usually 'big players', such as enterprises, public institutions, financial agents and universities. They can be regarded as one example of *policy networks*, the purpose of which is to increase the competitiveness of the region by creating innovative milieux (Marsh, 1998; Cook et al. 2000; Kostianen, 2002).

The losers from globalisation tend to be those who are not able to cope with its negative impacts, such as the lack of control and voice in local matters. The negative effects can be felt not only in the developing countries but also in many Western nations, especially in the everyday lives of children, young and elderly people, and many women. However, several citizen groups, especially among the women's movement have striven to create *networks of social cohesion*, by tacitly mainstreaming gender and intergenerational equality in planning and development for the past twenty years (Horelli, 1998; 2002a; 2006). Mainstreaming equality can be defined as the application of a set of gender and age sensitive visions, concepts, strategies, and practices in the different phases and arenas of the development and evaluation cycle (Horelli, 1997).

Women's activities have produced concepts, such as the collaborative creation of a 'supportive infrastructure of everyday life' (Horelli and Vepsä, 1994; Gilroy and Booth, 1999). The theories of everyday life developed by the philosopher Agnes Heller (1984) and the cultural sociologist Birte Bech-Joergensen (1988) allow humanistic and structural approaches to be integrated so that everyday life is a paradigm for understanding the subjectively and inter-subjectively caused

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interventions in a structural context. 'Everyday life as a process' is close to the concept of 'Life world' by Jurgen Habermas (1984).

The most recent strategies for creating the conditions and content of supportive networks in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have been accelerated by a global women's movement concerned with place-based politics that Harcourt and Escobar (2002) define as "place-based but not place-bound". It implies a vision of politics that includes projects that are not only embedded, contextualised and localised but also linked, networked, and meshworked (non-hierarchical, informal networking). According to this movement, networking for social cohesion deals with a politics of becoming which presupposes the application of hybrid strategies and multiple tactics (Horelli et al., 2000; Arquilla and Ronfelt; 2001).

Despite the rich literature on networks, publications on the evaluation of networks are scant (Innes and Booher, 1999; Kickert et al., 1997). The recent *Sage Handbook of Evaluation* (Shaw et al., 2006) does not deal with the subject. Even the European Evaluation Conference in 2006 had very few presentations on network evaluations, other than a special workshop on social network analysis (EES, 2006). It is not surprising that little agreement over the basic concepts of and approaches to network evaluation exists, as no comparative meta-evaluations have been conducted. Consequently, network evaluation is a genre of assessment that is still under construction.

However, the evaluation of networks is critical, because it can lead to greater clarity and agreement on their significance. Some experts think that the networking approach presents nothing new, whereas others claim that networking is a matter of survival ('network or perish'; see Burt, 1992; Demos, 1997; Mikkelsen, 2006). Difficulties concern especially the definition of networks and the explication of impact (Vedung, 2006). Also the distinction of the nature of the network is important, because it sets demands on the characteristics and type of evaluation.

Nevertheless, irrespective of the type of network, a shared prerequisite for successful networking seems to be the application of ongoing monitoring and evaluation. This is more than simply a review of what works, but a vital step for networks that tend to become self-supporting and insulated from commandments from above. Thus, the ongoing

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monitoring might provide the necessary feedback for the coordination and management of the network on both the operational and institutional level (Douthwaite et al., 2003; Kickert et al., 1997).

It is argued here that network evaluation from the everyday life perspective (NEELP) is a special case among the evaluation of networks. It can contribute positively to development work by weak groups and also to network evaluation in general, due to its integrative design and innovative application of diverse methods. The everyday life perspective refers here to an approach in which evaluation is conducted from the viewpoint of ordinary actors involved in a project or a programme, in contrast to the 'system-based players', such as enterprises, public organizations and universities (Habermas, 1984).

The aim of the article is to present the core concepts of network evaluation in the context of local and regional development, and a case study to enable the discussion of the nature and characteristics of network evaluations in general and particularly conducted from the everyday life perspective. The article begins with defining and comparing some of the core concepts of two types of policy networks and their evaluation, and proceeds to a case study on the development networks of young people in Finnish North-Karelia. The article concludes by discussing the characteristics of NEELP.

## **VARYING DEFINITIONS OF NETWORKS**

Although world history and civilisation can be described through the emergence of networks and networking (McKneill and McKneill, 2006), so far no agreement on the definition and types of networks exists. The 'network' as a concept has been utilised in the English speaking countries since the 1500s. The inflation of the word did not break out until the end of the last century. In the present time, the network has become established as a metaphor for the general organisational and technological order which has been created by a variety of interdependent processes characterised by complexity, self-organisation, co-evolution and emergence (Eriksson, 2003; Mitleton-Kelly, 2003).

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Unlike the 'machine', which was the dominant metaphor in the industrial society, the network unfolds in two ways. Firstly, the network refers to the wholeness of communication, i.e. the system of interdependent nodes and links. Secondly, it contains dynamic elements and processes that reject any uniformity. Consequently, the network metaphor allows the examination of a variety of different theories, techniques and practice within the same framework. According to Castells (1996), the network represents a dynamic non-hierarchical form of organisation. On the other hand, Barabasi (2002) claims that it is the continued growth of hierarchical hubs (well-connected nodes) that underpins organisations of scale-free systems, such as the world wide web. Finally, Eriksson (2003) claims that the network is not an analytic tool for the representation of reality, but an ontological category that facilitates reflection on one's relationship with the world. It constitutes meaning rather than represents them. Thus, the network enables us to think holistically in a situation where all borders seem to disappear.

Networks have, however, been applied extensively in a representative way to planning, development, governance, and especially to evaluations that apply social network analysis (Davies, 2004; 2005). Networks can then be defined as "a group of individuals or representatives of organizations who interact face to face and virtually at the local, national, regional or international level in order to influence related policies, programmes or their outcomes" (modified from Longhurst and Wichmand, 2006).

The New Public Management that implies the shift from 'government to governance' (European Commission, 2005), is increasingly implemented through networks of interactive public, semi-public and private stakeholders. These policy networks are stable patterns of social relations between interdependent actors which take shape around policy problems and policy programmes (Kickert et al., 1997). According to Peterson (2003), the concept of policy networks has been developed and refined as a way to try to describe, explain and predict the outcomes of policy-making, but so far there is no agreed, plausible theory of policy networks.

The examples above reveal that different contexts seem to bring forth varying kinds of definitions of what networks are, which in turn have an impact on the object of network evaluation. In addition to the variety of

*Horelli: Network Evaluation from the Everyday Life Perspective* definitions, networks can also be categorised in different ways. Eligible criteria are, for example, the type of community the network represents, its degree of autonomy, the focus or structure (see also Etherington, 2005; Longhurst and Wichmand, 2006).

## **TWO TYPES OF POLICY NETWORKS**

For the purpose of this article, the policy networks in the context of local and regional development have been categorized on the basis of their objectives: as networks of competitiveness and of social cohesion. In order to make the nature and characteristics of NEELP more distinct, the article begins by comparing the two types of networks (Table 1) and then compares the evaluation of each type (Table 2).

### **Comparison of the Two Types of Networks**

According to Marsh (1998: 16) policy networks can be divided into two types: policy communities that are tight and closed and issue networks that are large, open and consultative. Networks of competitiveness are close to policy communities (Kostiainen, 2002; Linnamaa, 2004), whereas networks of social cohesion resemble, to a more limited extent, issue networks. This divergence can be explained by the fact that Marsh's typology comes from policy analysis and not from planning and development.

Within a European policy framework, networks of competitiveness strive for regional economic development (Kostiainen, 2002), whereas networks of social cohesion seek to promote a mixture of youth, social and structural policy. The philosophical basis, conceptual framework and the actors of the two networks are different; so is the orientation to development and management (see Kickert et al., 1997). Market and instrumental orientations dominate networks of competitiveness, whereas networks of social cohesion are less instrumental. The latter also deal with the so-called alternative markets, such as local trading systems, co-op exchange etc. (Gibson, 2002).

*Table 1. Comparison of the Characteristics of Two Types of Policy Networks in the Context of Local and Regional Development*

<i>Characteristics of the network</i>	<i>Networks of competitiveness</i>	<i>Networks of social cohesion</i>
Purpose	The promotion of regional competitiveness	Empowerment of specific groups and the betterment of the communal wellbeing
Philosophical basis	The system	The life world and the system
Conceptual framework of development	Economic development	Gender- and age-sensitive network approach to collaborative planning and co-creation
Actors	Representatives of public, semi-public and private organizations and institutions (mostly middle-aged men)	A variety of individuals and groups, women and men representing associations and public institutions
Orientation to development	(Free)market-oriented network approach, constrained by bureaucracy	Network approach, supported by alternative markets and constrained by bureaucracy
Perspective on network management	Instrumental, institutional and interactive	Interactive and institutional
Strengths	Effectiveness in increasing the competitiveness of certain clusters	Methods and know-how to mobilize people and to balance interrelationships
Weakness	The lack of know-how to involve different types of people and to steer interdependencies	Lack of sustainability, a constant need of public support

The strong point – effectiveness – of networks of competitiveness is the weakness of networks of social cohesion: the latter suffer from poor sustainability and a lack of business partners which means that they are in continuous need of public funding. The strength of social cohesion networks lies in the richness of creative methods and ideas. Networks of competitiveness, however, are in Habermasian terms (1984) system-based, meaning that they mostly deal with public organizations, institutions and enterprises, while their links to the representatives of the life world or everyday life are weak. This decreases their opportunities to unveil what is innovative and significant. Another weakness is the lack of knowledge concerning the building and nurturing of networks by applying creative techniques that nurture interactive processes and balance the interdependences of actors (Kostiainen, 2002).

### **Emergence and Maintenance of Networks**

The conceptual framework that underpins the emergence of ‘networks of competitiveness’ is based on economic theories in which innovations are seen to be key to competitiveness, economic growth and employment. Thus, the networks of competitiveness strive to create platforms for action that eventually become innovative milieux which, in turn, may eventually contribute to the success and creativity of the region (Edquist et al., 2002). The innovative milieu consists of networked actors in different clusters, who share a frame of interpretation, local activities/buzz and global links, supported by institutional, organizational and economic arrangements which are sometimes called innovation systems (Kostiainen, 2002). However, this theoretical approach says little about the emergence and nurturing of networks.

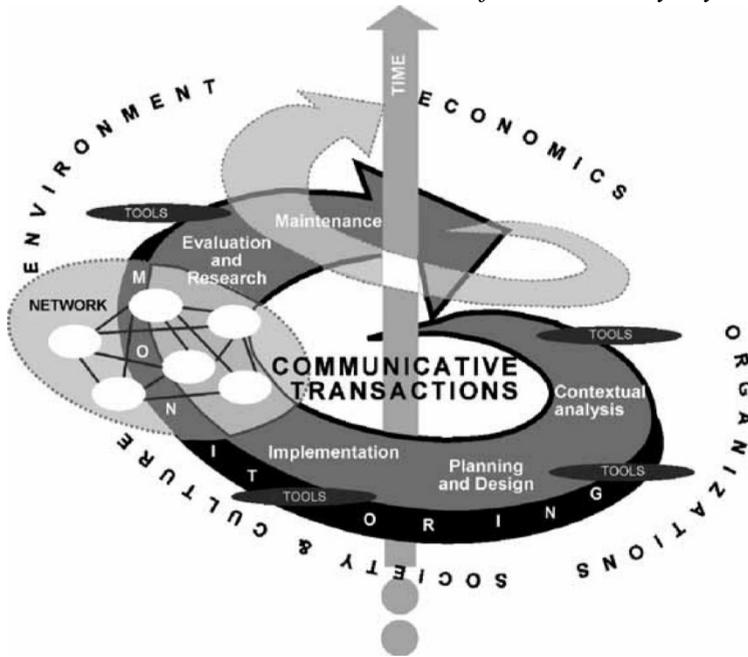
The concepts and models that explore the creation and impact of networks of social cohesion come from the network approach to gender- and age-sensitive communicative planning (Booher and Innes, 2002; Healey, 1997). Citizen groups tend to see participatory planning and development, if it is fairly organized, as a form of empowerment. Participatory planning is defined here as ‘a social, ethical, and political

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practice in which women and men, children, young and elderly people take part in varying degrees in the overlapping phases of the planning and decision-making cycle. This may eventually bring forth outcomes congruent with the participants' interests and intentions' (Horelli, 2002b).

The schema in Figure 1, based on projects with women, children and young people, presents the evolution of a participatory planning process into a network. At the centre of the diagram lie the communicative transactions of the participants in a specific environmental, organizational, economic, cultural and temporal context. This means that the object of planning and development is to support the person–environment transactions that may eventually be organized into networks. The participatory process should, in its ideal form, be enhanced by a multitude of enabling tools during the overlapping and iterative phases of planning and development. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation provides participants with feedback on the quality of the change process and its results. This makes it possible to organize the participation as a cooperative learning process (Johnson and Johnson, 1990) in which monitoring and evaluation can become a knowledge management system in the service of the network and its members (Nonaka et al., 2000; see Figure 2). However, after the initial shaping stage, a network develops its own momentum, which means that it cannot be commanded, only nurtured and lightly directed. For this reason, its non-linear effects are difficult to direct, predict and evaluate.

For the purpose of this article, the policy networks in the context of local and regional development have been categorised on the basis of their objectives, as networks of competitiveness and those of social cohesion. In order to make the nature and characteristics of the NEEL-perspective more distinct, I will first compare the two types of networks (Table 1) and then their evaluations (Table 2).



*Figure 1. A Schema Representing the Evolution of a Participatory Planning Process into a Network*

### **Comparison of the two types of networks**

While the choice of evaluation approach is always dependent on the context and nature of the object, as Table 2 illustrates, the characteristics of the evaluations of these two networks are very different. However, social network analysis (SNA) is a method that can be applied to both types of evaluations. Rick Davies (2004, 2005) has successfully applied SNA over many years: it provides a means to develop, represent and assess different types of change processes and their consequences. Change can be assessed by applying a mixture of qualitative and quantitative forms of description in text, diagrams and matrices. The latter, which show the actors' links with each other, can be statistically analysed and visually illustrated by specialized software (Davies, 2005). The network diagram illustrates the connections, patterns, density and hierarchies of the network. Thus it is fairly easy to distinguish, for example, the elements and connections that are missing, the network as a whole in terms of its potential infrastructure for social

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 capital, or the means of individual members to access other networks  
 and new resources (see the importance of weak ties in Burt, 1992).

*Table 2. The Comparison of the Evaluations of Two Types of Policy  
 Networks in the Context of Local and Regional Development*

<i>Characteristics of the evaluation</i>	<i>Networks of competitiveness</i>	<i>Networks of social cohesion</i>
Type and purpose of the evaluation	Different types of network evaluations for accountability (summative), development (operational), new knowledge (learning)	Network evaluation from the everyday life perspective with features of systemic evaluation for development, new knowledge and accountability
Evaluation approach	Varying kinds of external and consulted evaluations	Consulted and empowering internal evaluation combined with action research
Evaluation stance	Parallel, bolted-on and occasionally integrated	Integrated as part of network creation, management and implementation
Evaluation criteria and indicators	Mainly system-based criteria (effectiveness etc.)	Multidimensional and partly reversible criteria from the life world and the system
Evaluation methods	A variety of traditional evaluation methods; statistical techniques, surveys, cost-benefit analysis, social network analysis	A set of diverse enabling methods. Social network analysis only one technique. The building of a collective monitoring and self-evaluation system
Role of the evaluator	External and consultative	Multiple roles depending on the cycle of development

In order to provide insight into the application of NEELP, a case study on the creation and evaluation of a network of social cohesion is presented in the following section. It illustrates some of the methods that can be applied in NEELP.

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In order to provide insight into the application of the NEEL-perspective a case-study on the creation and evaluation of a network of social cohesion will be presented in the following section. It will illustrate some of the methods that can be applied in the NEELP.

## **AN APPLICATION OF THE NEEL-PERSPECTIVE**

North-Karelia (170,000 residents) is the eastern-most region in Finland, and has a 300 km common border with Russia. The region is sparsely populated, with vast areas of forests and lakes. Currently, the formerly agrarian region has several well-functioning industrial 'clusters' in timber and metal industries, as well as several high-tech centres. Most municipalities provide the residents with free access to internet services and capacity-building for e-citizenship skills. Nevertheless, the unemployment rate is high, around 16 percent in general, but alarmingly higher among women and young people. The latter are increasingly moving out of the region to more prosperous parts of the country. Although the Regional Council had been aware of the youth problem for a long time, it took nearly three years to negotiate a special project that aimed to create supportive local and regional networks for and with young people. In the autumn of 2001, the North-Karelian Youth Forum project (Nufo) was granted 500,000 euros from the European Social Fund and three municipalities (Joensuu, Kitee and Lieksa). This made it possible to employ four young people to coordinate and manage the project for three years.

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The North-Karelian Youth Forum project was also part of a five-year action research project, conducted by the author and funded by the Finnish Academy (Horelli, 2003; Horelli and Sotkasiira, 2003).

The action research design included formative and summative evaluations, the aims being to enrich the development process, to create new knowledge for understanding young people's networking, and to provide a framework for accountability to the funders and stakeholders of the project. The role of the author was also to work as a consultant on the collective self-evaluations of the project members and, in this article, to consider the lessons learned as a reflective practitioner (Schön, 1998). The clients of the evaluation were the young people in charge of the project, who asked to be consulted.

The evaluation questions were the following:

- How were the network(s) mobilized and nurtured?
- How did the cooperative learning take place?
- What were the outcomes of the network?

The summative evaluation aimed to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of NEELP.

### **Constructing the Collective Monitoring and Self-Evaluation System**

The project started with the young project coordinator and local managers beginning to mobilize the network, advised by the author and the steering committee. The latter was made up from a variety of regional actors, such as representatives from the Regional Council, the municipalities, some schools, the business information centre, several citizen organizations, as well as the girls and boys themselves.

The vision of the project, created with the participants, became crystallized as 'A joyful North-Karelia with survival opportunities for young people'. The aim was to create with adolescents and adults a supportive network that would provide arenas of empowerment and opportunities for meeting virtually and face to face. Implicit in the objectives was young people's involvement in local initiatives through their own subprojects, enjoyable events and having a say in the regional development.

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From early on, it was clear that careful monitoring and evaluation was a precondition for the sensitive and flexible coordination of the emerging network and for the capacity-building of participants. Therefore, a collective monitoring and self-evaluation system was gradually built with the actors (see Sabo, 2000). It consisted of three parts: the monitoring of the operational level, the collective assessments of the network as a whole and in-depth thematic and summative evaluations.

*The monitoring of the operational level* comprised:

- a weekly self-assessment sheet for the local project managers;
- a monthly self-assessment sheet for the members of local and thematic teams;
- a monthly self-assessment sheet for the steering committee;
- the monitoring sheet completed by the co-ordinator of the process and outcomes of the workplan;
- the monitoring sheet of the budget also completed by the coordinator.

*The collective self-assessments of the network as a whole* took place through evaluation sessions with the researcher which enhanced the capacity and coevolution of the network. Following one body of systems theory (Mitleton-Kelly, 2003), many parallel and consecutive interactions transform the structure of networks. This means that the trajectory of change can be seen as a series of consecutive states in the network as a whole. Therefore, every three months, the researcher and project managers mapped and discussed the process and outcomes in order to gain more insight in the evolving network patterns and to anticipate future steps. The methods of the collective self-assessments comprised:

- *A structural assessment of the emerging network.* As the supportive network was considered, in the spirit of Latour (1993), to be a hybrid made up of people, activities, technology, services, events, institutional actors, concrete and virtual places, the nature and interconnections of the hybrid's nodes were drawn as diagrams and assessed through critical dialogue.
- *A spatial assessment of the emerging network.* The emerging nodes of the network were pinpointed on local and regional maps, which revealed the scope and distribution of the support system.

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- *A temporal assessment of the emerging network.* A collective recollection of the significant events of the history of the network was organized after every six months. The events were written on stickers, which were arranged in a chronological order on the wall and assessed using the story-line technique (a five-point scale in terms of significance for the progress of the project). The results revealed possible future pathways for the project.
- *Analytic assessment of the learning of the network and the needs for capacity building.* A matrix was constructed of the network actors in terms of their competences which disclosed where and what type of training was needed. The key partners were also invited to discuss the progress of the learning of the network in terms of knowledge creation and its methodological application (Nonaka et al., 2000, and Figure 2).

*In-depth thematic and summative evaluations* were conducted on certain important issues by external researchers and the author, and were discussed with the stakeholders. The methods included surveys (questionnaires and interviews) with young people and adults during various events and meetings, as well as social network analyses (Scott, 2000).

Thus, a set of diverse methods was chosen to enhance the understanding of how the network was evolving and to find solutions for fuzzy problems, such as the nature of network learning. The evaluation sessions revealed, for instance, that the emerging learning of individual participants could be described as the adolescents' increasing knowledge of how to implement their own projects or the adults' awareness of their own competences in terms of how to provide support for the young participants.

### **Assessment of Network Mobilization and Learning**

The mobilization and nurturing of the network followed roughly the pattern illustrated in Figure 1. A variety of enabling methods were applied throughout the various phases of the development cycle (Horelli and Sotkasiira, 2003), some of which are shown in Figure 2. The whole development initiative was organized as a collaborative learning and

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capacity-building process which was carefully assessed every third month. Gustavsen (2001: 186) points out that

... working together in a development program with a broad range of actors has to deal with much more than the achievement of short- or middle-term outcomes. It has to do with certain links, ties and relationships between actors, with developing competence to work across organisational boundaries and with the creation of new arenas where this work can be performed.

Consequently, the evaluation task was to understand not only the actors and their individual learning, but the process, dynamics, and network-based learning. The emergence of the network and the learning that followed were interpreted by applying the theories of organizational learning and knowledge creation of Nonaka and his collaborators (2000).

The application of creative methods and measures, described in Figure 2, enabled the mobilization of hundreds of young people and some adults during various events. Gradually a new local and regional awareness of youth was created. Knowledge is, according to Nonaka et al. (2000: 7), dynamic and context-specific, since it is created through social interactions among individuals and organizations, in particular space and time. Consequently, the knowledge creation and learning process can be intentionally enhanced by constructing different types of knowledge-specific spaces, places or platforms, where people can meet and interact. For example, tacit knowledge emerges in places where people socialize informally, such as workshops or teams (see cell 1 in Figure 2). The sharing of the tacit knowledge and externalizing it into explicit knowledge presuppose spaces for creative interaction and dialogue, such as collective self-assessment sessions (see cell 2 in Figure 2). The systemizing of knowledge and transforming it into guidelines, models or even prototypes requires more stable kinds of arenas, such as youth forums or resource centres (see cell 3 in Figure 2). The last step in the elaboration of knowledge is the turning of knowledge into creative know-how and its application in practice (see cell 4 in Figure 2). After exercising know-how, the spiral of knowledge creation goes on with the nurturing of new tacit knowledge and its externalization.

When the knowledge creation approach was applied as part of the implementation and assessment of the Nufo project, the evaluation question was: *How were the nodes for learning generated, meshed,*

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*systemized, and exercised?* Figure 2 suggests that several types of nodes and modes of learning were originated and made (inter)active during the project with various enabling methods. Some of the nodes were systemized or even institutionalized through organizing the activities into associations (cell 3 in Figure 2). The learning in the network, as illustrated in Figure 2, was discussed with the managers of the project and the key partners. It had an immediate impact on the choice of subsequent interventions and the future of the network. However, the knowledge creation and learning only began to reach the stage of ‘exercising the nodes’ in practice as the project ended (cell 4 in Figure 2).

<p><b>ORIGINATING THE NODES (1)</b>            participatory workshops            events            an interactive website            collaboration with the youth councils            local youth/adult teams</p>	<p><b>INTERACTING THE NODES (2)</b>            self-assessment sessions of the project team            role-playing events with the regional council            follow-up participatory workshops            facilitated web-sessions, www.ponu.netu            use of the media</p>
<p><b>EXERCISING THE NODES (4)</b>            networking with the partners            working patterns of the regional youth-forum            *mentoring the youth-café enterprises            *working models and patterns of the youth competence centre</p>	<p><b>SYSTEMISING THE NODES (3)</b>            action research            founding of the regional youth forum            founding of the youth-housing association            founding of the youth-band association            *networking youth-cafes            *founding of a regional youth competence centre</p>

*Figure 2.* The learning and knowledge creation framework (Nonaka et al., 2000) used to interpret the evaluation of the learning in networks, and the enabling methods and measures utilized during the Nufo-project.

## Assessment of the Results and Impact of the Network

The summative evaluation of the project took place both as:

- a collective self-assessment by the project managers, and
- in-depth thematic evaluations by external researchers who conducted: focus groups with the young participants, surveys with adults and a statistical social network analysis of the adults' network in the project (applying the software Ucinet 6 for Windows).

The project managed to engage new groups of participants of varying age and both sexes. Over 5000 people were involved (Horelli, 2006); 80 percent of them were young people, with slightly more females than males in the age range of 15–25 years. These endeavours led to small improvements in many parts of the region, such as spaces for playing music and drama, motor cycle workshops, internet-cafes, as well as many mobilizing events and other platforms for action. The results of the study revealed that a transition from 'complainers into agents' took place.

*If the Forum had not been constructed, maybe we would still complain here in Lieksa. It [Nufo] has mobilized us.* (Maija, 16 years)

The young people found that the network was, and still is a mediator between the world of adults and the opportunities for action and joy.

*Nufo is to me a kind of catalyst that speeds up issues. I think that it is really cool that it exists. It is a kind of foundation which helps to spur on. And, many towns still lack Nufos. I can't understand how dispersed people who want to have a say can do anything? If somebody gets an idea here, she knows where to find support.* (Sirikka, 18 years)

The results and impact of the Nufo-project were, in addition to the tangible material ones, intrapersonal (attitudinal changes: improved self-esteem and a sense of community; Prezza, 2004), interpersonal (interdependences: social relations, new partnerships), structural (new organizational forms: platforms for empowerment, change in youth work practices), procedural (application of consensus-building methods, capacity-building) and cultural or symbolic (shared images, language: emerging social capital). Social capital refers here to resources or assets that are embedded in networked social relations, which can be accessed and mobilized when needed (Lin, 2001) or connected to the 'networks of the powerful' (Allen, 2004).

Although the evolution of the network was not simple and linear, but complex, iterative and highly interactive (see Davies, 2004), its transformation could be illustrated as a staircase. The illustration was also created to aid better communication among the participants.

Figure 3 indicates how the network began from a situation in which local and regional actors with varying skills existed as *a pool of dispersed actors* (step 0). The *partly visible and interconnected network* that is able to act in terms of organizing events, applying for funding for new projects, organizing around thematic and local teams, emerged after one year (step 1). It was regarded by various groups of young and adult participants as the first step of progress. In fact, two of the three municipalities in the Nufo-project reached this stage. Another year or two usually passes before a more sustainable structure, such as *local or regional platforms for empowerment* (step 2), is attained (Horelli, 2002a). The platforms for empowerment meant in

this case a supportive infrastructure of everyday life that comprises groups of adolescents and adults who are organized into local or thematic teams, physical and virtual meeting places (youth centres, libraries, workshops, schools, websites), ongoing events and projects coordinated by young adults. The infrastructure functions then as a supportive hub.

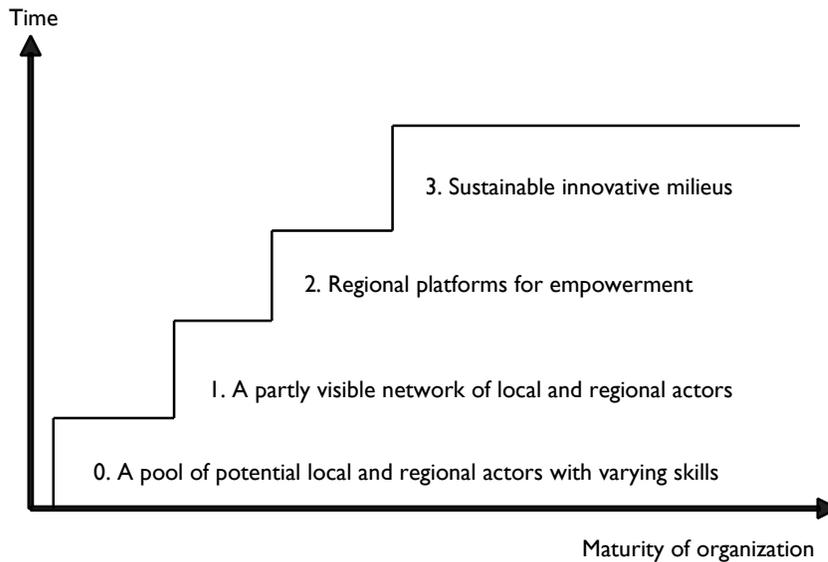


Figure 3. Steps of progress in the co-creation of networks in terms of time and maturity of organization (Horelli, 2003; Horelli and Sotkasiira, 2003)

The platforms for action gradually evolved into political spaces (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991), which enabled young people to articulate their ideas. At the end of the project, the Regional Council decided to create a new structure, a Regional Youth Forum with two representatives from each of the 19 municipalities of North-Karelia, with a yearly budget of 50,000 euros for development projects by young people. According to the external evaluators, one of the municipalities reached step 2. However, the third step, implying the emergence of *sustainable innovative milieus* in the region, was not reached. The attainment of the third level would have required more time, organizational skills and resources than were available during the project or after it.

The criterion of success for the young people was not climbing the steps, but the feeling of being empowered. In fact, the steps of progress in Figure 3 represent the system's approach to development, not that of the life world (Habermas, 1984) or the everyday life perspective. The young coordinator and managers, whose task was to promote networks of social cohesion for and with young people, found it difficult to decide when they should act on behalf of the system and when on behalf of the young people.

In sum, the main objective of the project – the collaborative creation of supportive local and regional networks for and with young people – was reached, but sustainability was only partly secured. The continuation of the network was dependent on the capability of the stakeholders to apply for additional funding and on the readiness of the municipal youth workers to adopt new ways to mainstream the perspective of young people into local and regional development.

## **THE NATURE OF NETWORK EVALUATION FROM THE EVERYDAY LIFE PERSPECTIVE**

Linear evaluation models rarely meet the challenges posed by the complexity of the context around networks (see Rogers, 2008). In addition, as network impacts are often the product of a confluence of events for which no single agency can claim credit, new evaluation methodologies have begun to emerge. For example, *systemic and evolutionary evaluations* are concerned with the assessment of networks, although they are not called network evaluation per se. They focus on the assessment of new practices of cooperation and coordination, on the emerging generative capacities, as well as on the transitional pathways from one stage of development to another (Stern and Valovirta, 2006). Similar approaches can be found among the evaluators who seek to assess networks through cluster, chaos or complexity theories (Innes and Booher, 1999; Stame, 2004).

Network evaluation from the everyday life perspective (NEELP) has also been influenced by the complex adaptive or co-evolving systems theory (Innes and Booher, 1999; Mitleton-Kelly, 2003). An emergent logic model of change was applied in the case study. It implied, in fact, an intervention model that consisted of the core idea of development (the construction of innovative arenas of empowerment), contextual analysis, collective envisioning of the future with the participants, and six principles which gradually crystallized into strategies of implementation (Horelli, 2006). Similar patterns have been described by Patton (1994) and by Eoyang and Berkas (1998, cited in Rogers, 2008).

The comparisons of the characteristics of the two types of policy networks and their evaluations in Tables 1 and 2, as well as the case study, reveal the nature of NEELP. Its philosophical background lies not only in the ‘life world’ but also in the recognition of the System (Habermas, 1984). To remain only in the ‘life world’ might become a trap that undermines the sustainability of the results. Therefore, empowerment evaluation approaches (Fetterman, 2001) need to be complemented by systemic and evolutionary types of evaluation. The latter enable the identification of elements, linkages and patterns of the system, placing them among new policy fora of collective deliberations, which allow assessment of policymaking, operational objectives, results and processes (Stern and Valovirta, 2006).

However, it is the collectively built and applied monitoring and self-evaluation system that is the most distinctive feature of NEELP. Collective self-evaluation implies both direct self-evaluations and the discussions on the results of thematic and summative evaluations by external evaluators. It is an empowering tool for the actors and a driver not only for the coordination of the network but also for capacity building and the emergence of social cohesion. According to Douthwaite et al. (2003: 262, cited in Rogers, 2008): ‘Self-evaluation, and the learning it

engenders, is necessary for successful project management in complex environments.’ The application of the collective monitoring and self-evaluation system sets demands on an integrative design of evaluation in which various enabling methods play a seminal role (see Figures 1 and 2). Methodologically it is not always possible to distinguish the enabling tools from traditional assessment tools, as the two types of methods might serve both development and evaluation.

NEELP, like other participatory evaluations, emphasizes the process influence of evaluation. Sometimes the distinction between the primary and secondary activity, that is, between development and evaluation, tends to become blurred. Although Mark and Henry (2004) encourage a conceptualization of evaluation as an intervention that has outcomes on many levels, participatory evaluations, NEELP included, should not replace primary development work, even if the evaluation is integrated with the development from the very beginning.

The results of networking usually deal with both tangible products, services and innovations, as well as intangible first, second and third order effects reaching many levels and covering several dimensions (Innes and Booher, 1999). Kickert et al. (1997) claim that measuring effectiveness and efficiency is not enough in the evaluation of (policy) networks. Thus, the criteria of NEELP are multidimensional, comprising intrapersonal (attitudinal changes), interpersonal (interdependences), structural (new organizational forms), procedural (new practices), and cultural or symbolic dimensions (shared images, language). This type of evaluation does not match the traditionally agreed criteria of objectivity. However, ‘credibility’, which is a positive criteria in constructive evaluation (Guba and Lincoln, 1989), can be increased by using thematic evaluations as part of the summative reporting. The action research design also plays an important role in NEELP, as it enables in-depth examination of the change mechanisms.

In summary, NEELP is a special case among network evaluations. It contributes to the empowerment of ordinary individuals and groups of people who are involved in the co-creation of their contexts, while it also strives to recognize the complex systemic aspects of the environment. In addition, it requires an integrative design and an application of a variety of enabling and traditional assessment tools. NEELP implies the adoption of multiple evaluator roles depending on the phase of the development and assessment cycle. Particular attention is paid to the issues of learning, capacity-building and the balancing of interdependences, which enhance the voice of the participants. The future challenges are the need for detailed comparisons with other types of network evaluations so that the knowledge of networks and their assessment will cumulate for the benefit of theory and practice.

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