

A Story of Improvement

**Methods and Tools for Qualitative Evaluation of European Projects
Report on the Copenhagen Workshop Feb 1-2 1998**

Summary

This report describes a collaborative effort to find methods and tools useful for qualitative evaluation within the European Social Funds (ESF), developed in the the Employment programme context.

A method for planning, development and evaluation of European projects is described, based upon working with case stories, focusing on comparisons of individual perspectives. The method has been developed, tested and evaluated in a collaborative work between project workers in a transnational partnership, SAFE-M, and action researchers at CAU (Centre for Working Life Research and Development).

The report emphasises the need of development of evaluation theory and practice in building an evaluation culture in Europe.

Key words:

evaluation, methodology, learning, partnership, multicultural, transnationality, action research

Preface

This report is presenting an example of collaboration between a project within the European Union's Employment programme and a research programme financed by the Swedish Council for Work Life Research (Rådet för Arbetslivsforskning) carried out by the Center for Working Life Research and Development (CAU).

CAU is a multidisciplinary research and development center at the University of Halmstad, Sweden. Since 1995 it has been engaged in several development projects financed by European Union programmes such as Employment, Adapt and Leonardo da Vinci. These programmes have all a special construction aiming at the participating parties from different countries to learn from each other both within as well as across nation borders. One consequence of this is a growing need for good and relevant methods for evaluation, comparison of results, investigation of consequences and effects from measures taken in the projects, all in order to develop further the methods used to initiate and operate this kind of projects financed by the European Union. Many of the goals in these projects have a rather "qualitative" character and would be hard to compare to their results using only traditional "hard" methods for evaluation.

The possibility for mutual learning and development of new knowledge, practical as well as scientific, has been an important reason why CAU engaged in this collaborative activity together with five Employment projects from four European countries.

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1. Background

Building an Evaluation Culture in Europe

The principal aim of the European Social Fund (ESF) is to promote investment in human resources. The specific objectives are to combat long-term unemployment, improve the employability of young people and to promote adaptation to industrial change. It also aims at integration of those excluded from the labour market and of promoting the principle of equal opportunities. ESF contributes to the financing of vocational training and employment support measures, and to improvements in education systems.

A part of the budget in the ESF is set aside for so called Community Initiatives; special programmes, where the main features are *innovation*, i.e. to stimulate policy change by supporting innovative activities and the wider dissemination of their results; *transnationality*, i.e. to develop a European response to problems being faced across the Union, *multiplier effect*, i.e. that approaches developed should, in time, become part of the mainstream practices; *bottom-up approach*, i.e. mobilising the expertise and experience of a broad base of players who are active in the field and are well placed to identify local, regional and multi-sectoral problems and needs.

The transnational projects put a high demand on skills, such as knowledge on integration processes, methods for designing and starting new co-operative networks, project management skills, models for how to start development processes with broad participation, models for formative and learning evaluation processes and methods for how development processes can be inter- and intraorganizationally integrated.

The European dimension demands a new way of thinking across borders, stressed in the Community Initiatives by the requirement of transnationality in the projects. Still, the differences in the European regions - such as contrasting history, language and culture - will always prevent total mutual understanding, something we will have to be aware of and accept; the diversity bringing new and exciting dimensions to co-operation.

The multicultural co-operation concept of the Community Initiatives affects the evaluation culture in Europe. Striking departures in this development are

- the wish to speed up the process of learning from one another's practice and
- strong networking component.

Questions regarding evaluation are receiving increased interest in the European dialogue. The discussion stresses how the co-operative constructions with local, regional and transnational partnerships craves for a new methodology.

Rather than mechanically applying the regulatory requirements for evaluation, there is need for adapting the methodology used in relation to the potential value for each partner. Such an approach encourages development of quality evaluation rather than quantity and puts at the same time a limit to the scope of evaluation to the most essential questions. (Pazos, 1996).

Experience within ESF indicates that the 'vertical' type of partnership is at once paradoxical, challenging and innovative; because the evaluative process has to be conducted in co-operation, without either neglecting differences in initial expectations or denying divergence in final judgements. These partnerships constitute a favourable context for the development of evaluation and may also provide the means to carry out quality evaluations within the framework of the so-called "fourth generation"¹ evaluations, since the partnership constructions favour pluralistic approaches. (Monnier 1996)

Usual evaluation methods must be adapted to this specific context. In order to develop practical knowledge about evaluation, the European Commission has initiated the so called MEANS programme (Methods for Evaluating Actions of Structural Nature) with the aim to provide the Commission with a coherent body of evaluation guidelines and methods, particularly adapted to partnership management.

¹ on Fourth Generation Evaluation, see p 12

The Employment Initiative in the Focus for Evaluation

The joint work around process evaluation described in this report is developed within the frames of the Employment programme, one of the Community Initiatives within ESF. This focus actualises many interesting aspects of the new demands on evaluation.

Employment supports training, guidance and counselling systems and the programme acts on the need to adopt a proactive approach to the problems of exclusion. The overall aims are to contribute to the development of human resources, improve the working of the labour market, and promote social solidarity and equal opportunities.

The frames for Employment projects in general are demands for forming of *partnerships*, national and transnational, and for *innovation*, *bottom-up-perspectives*, *documentation*, *evaluation* and *transferability*. Explicitly written into the programme is that the joint work in the partnerships, putting up their own agendas, should lead to innovative learning and "results" transferable to other arenas. The processes on the different levels in the projects - and the interacting between these processes - call for a change of views on evaluation and the methodology applied.

Within the Employment there are different target groups/strands and the projects described in this report represent two of them: NOW (New Opportunities for Women) and Integra.

NOW focuses on improving participation by women in the labour market, reducing unemployment among women and improving the position of women already in the work force. Integra seeks to develop new responses to long-term unemployment, social exclusion and the sense of powerlessness which often accompanies continuing unemployment. Vulnerable groups are targeted, groups who are at a severe disadvantage on the labour market due to a lack of education, training, or sufficient work experience: migrants, refugees, ethnic minorities who requires substantial support in order to get job opportunities. Specific for Integra is a high involvement of NGOs for disadvantaged groups: solidarity organisations/centres for migrants, refugees and ethnic minorities; functional and social rehabilitation centres for disadvantaged groups. Integra offers an opportunity to design and test innovative routes to employment for those most at risk of exclusion from the labour market, and aims at improving the access to the labour market through activities which

- support people-driven local strategies to combat discrimination, combined with job creation initiatives to exploit potential new sources of jobs
- diversify the provision of structured pathways towards reintegration into employment
- promote the empowerment of the target groups
- establish objectives at local level which are coherent with those at regional and national level.

Integra funds projects which explore new ways of meeting its overall aims. The impact of these projects is reinforced by grouping them in transnational partnerships, as learning from others and exchanging ideas reinforces innovation. The Integra method for social change also includes development of model approaches and practices to improve access to quality public services, to develop grass-root capacities and to promote community-based approaches to (re)integration. Concepts like "communication" and "dialogue" are used in connection to the programme aims of finding pathways to the empowerment of the target group.

All projects should promote a more multi-dimensional approach which takes into account the impact on the person, the group or area, of a wide range of problems associated with exclusion from the labour market including housing, health, social protection and mobility. Greater participation and a more multi-dimensional approach can only be achieved through the mobilisation of a wide range of local actors, such as public authorities and their agencies, in partnerships.

The evaluation of NOW and Integra projects on a European level has contained the identification of success factors in the activities and project design - success factors¹ which are "bench marks" for the projects within Integra.

¹ Success factors:

Activities design: Link training to other support actions. Aim for the development of structured pathways towards reintegration. Avoid discrimination at the stage of participant selection. Minimise reference to "problem groups". Harness new communication and information technologies. Direct training and enterprise creation activities towards the improvement of the local environment and services.

Project design: Adopt multiple objectives to match the interrelated issues being tackled. Formalise the extent of cooperation of relevant groups of local public, private, professional and voluntary agencies. Involve members of the target groups in all aspects of the project planning and implementation. Capitalise on pre-existing local

From the practical experiences in the projects, we know that much of the project evaluation is performed as self assessment: of the courses, of the project staff, of the national and transnational networking. For example: as the partnership jointly puts up the project objectives, it also seems natural to make continuous common reflections on how the work proceeds according to those shared objectives. This process evaluation also serves as a continuous project development. We can see a broad practice, but less of know-how of the performance of the qualitative process evaluation going on in the projects.

Evaluation Methodology on the Agenda in a Transnational Network

This report is describing a collaboration on developing tools for European project evaluation, taking its departure in the practical working experiences and reflections in project life. The co-operation is between project workers in a transnational partnership, SAFE-M, and researchers and project leaders from the Centre for Working Life Research and Development (CAU) at Halmstad University, Sweden.

Presentation of the SAFE-M Partnership and CAU

The transnational partnership SAFE-M was formed in November 1995 within the Employment programme, a network operating until the end of the project period in 1997. All projects involved were targeted at immigrants, in the two Employment strands NOW and Integra. The transnational working group in SAFE-M consisted of five projects from four different European countries; Germany, Belgium, Denmark and Sweden. Project workers from those five projects took part in the collaboration presented in this report.

The objectives for the SAFE-M projects within their national context, have been such as "integration on the labour market", "empowerment of the individual" and "influencing structures in society". All projects included some kind of courses; orientation courses and/or specialized ones. During the programme period the project workers have exchanged information, and have met in person at five occasions.

Here follows brief project descriptions¹.

Europe Tells, Kulturkaelderren, Randers, Denmark

Kulturkaelderren, a private organisation, started its work in 1987. Projects are based upon arts, craft and cultural communication providing a practical platform for acquisition of language and technical skills as well as knowledge about the Danish society. The methods used give even priority to the process, product and the structural and personal anchoring of the projects.

Europe Tells, the Integra project in the SAFE-M transnational network, was chosen as a "good model project" in the European Integra evaluation process during 1997. The project contained two courses; namely tapestry weaving and puppet theatre production and performance.

The tapestry weaving course (called *This is my story*) was an educational and cultural exchange project, where participants besides becoming qualified tapestry weavers could discover their own resources and build up self confidence. The participants "told their own story" based on their individual cultural background; traditions, fairy tales, myths and so on. The participants were trained to facilitate workshops for different groups. The puppet theatre was an educational and job creation project with both female and male participants. The project aimed at giving skills to produce and perform puppet theatre shows, challenging the negative attitudes towards migrants and creating a positive dialogue. Participants were active in the whole process from idea to performance.

ALBA, Volkshochschule Göttingen, Germany

Volkshochschule (VHS) Göttingen has been involved in several EU projects. The school has a staff of about 30 persons and about 600 students per term.

The VHS project ALBA was a NOW project. The participants in the courses of the project were immigrant women from different countries. One big group within the target group was the "Aussiedlers", people from the German colonies in former Soviet Union.

strategies for urban renewal, economic development and rural development. Identify one coordinating agency in each partnership. (Employment-INTEGRA 1997)

¹ For a more extensive presentation of the projects and the SAFE-M partnership and their view on transnational exchange, see the transnational evaluation document "1+1=3. Partnership for New Dimensions", Stridh 1997.

The ALBA project run one year long courses: language training, orientation on German society and labour market, including moments for empowerment and improved self confidence. The courses were linked to a individualized practise placement programme, which the project worked out in close co-operation with the local employers.

Social Profit, Brussels, Belgium

The Belgian project Social Profit was a NOW project, targeted at unemployed young immigrant women, with the objective of training them for work in the social sector. Project owner was the Flemish Employment Office, vdab (Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding). The organisation has long practise in leading and participating in EU programmes for the unemployed.

The project Social Profit contained qualification courses for unemployed young immigrant women. The training would prepare them for social work among elderly people. New approaches on recruitment were developed and tested out in this project.

FEM, Göttingen, Germany

The target group of Integra project FEM, at the Refugee Centre in Göttingen, was a big out-group among the Kosovo-Albanian refugees. Project FEM worked in a broad network of authorities and organisations, and was initiated by people working at the Refugee Centre, which provides counselling to refugees, many of them without legal status. The centre is run by voluntary organisations, having about 60 to 80 visitors daily. The FEM project was a structured counselling project, with courses on orientation, language, qualification, for example a start-your-own-company course. The courses were developed in close co-operation with people from the target group.

International Competence, Halmstad, Sweden

The Swedish Integra project Internationell kompetens started out as a co-operation between the Employment Office in Halmstad and CAU, with the objective of finding ways for integration of long time unemployed immigrants to the labour market. One specifically identified target group was refugees with high formal education. The perspective in this project has been outspokenly double: the orientation of the individual immigrant and the influence of key-functions for integration in the surrounding structures in society. One of the aims was to develop pedagogical methods for orientation courses.

Centre for Working Life Research and Development (CAU)

Centre for Working Life Research and Development (Swedish: Centrum för Arbetslivsutveckling, abbreviated CAU) is a multidisciplinary research centre at the University of Halmstad. CAU works within the field of regional development, targeting at business and working life, especially at small and medium enterprises and women as entrepreneurs or inventors. The centre works within a broad network of national and regional authorities, workplaces, enterprises and networks of enterprisers.

Since 1995 - with the Swedish entrance in the European Union - CAU has been involved in many transnational projects within the Employment, Adapt and Leonardo da Vinci programmes, in different roles; such as project owner, national partner, co-ordinator and/or evaluator. In the projects co-funded by the ESF, CAU has developed theory and practice around the processes of project work. The dynamic element in this development has been the research direction at CAU; "development of knowledge based on practise" or "action research"¹. Central in the theoretical discourse at CAU is that meaning and learning are created in a dialogue between practitioners and researchers.

CAU has found a great need for new methods for self evaluation of the work performed in the European projects, methods which could be used for reflection on the own communication skills and supporting the constructive dialogue with the target group.

In the framework of the projects CAU uses a method which has earlier been developed and used in work life research: Search Conference is a method to start changing processes with broad participation

¹ See p 13

and commitment. This method is grounded in scientific research, and a method that can be used to combine evaluation and future planning¹.

CAU also develops new methods from the experiences of project work in reality. One such example is the forming of the evaluation groups UGN (the Swedish acronym stands for Evaluation through Networks). Since autumn 1996 these groups² have been regional fora for joint process evaluation within Employment, Adapt, Leonardo da Vinci and Objective 3 projects. Project leaders exchange experiences, supervised by action researchers to emphasize the joint reflection. This continuous evaluation and project development enhances understanding of the processes at the different levels in the European projects, and builds up new knowledge from within practice.

A Context for Joint Development of Evaluation Methods and Tools

As the projects in the SAFE-M network/partnership all dealt with quality concepts, the partnership has treated evaluation of the project work, like the courses within the project, as well as transnationality, focusing on qualitative aspects. The ideas to develop methods and practical tools for process evaluation were discussed within the transnational partnership in connection with the courses in the projects, but also within other areas in the project work, such as the transnational work.

Within the SAFE-M network, self-assessment has been a recurrent theme on the agenda; both in the transnational work, in the local networks and in the different courses delivered. On the agenda for the transnational work the main topics for evaluation were "guidance: sensitisation, orientation and intake, recruitment", "train the trainer: intercultural problems, lower qualified problems, evaluation/development", "training: qualifying training, key qualification, language training, alternating schemes", "job-placement modules" and "networking".

Evaluations of each project and of the transnational networking have been subject to exchange. To each transnational meeting the partners have written reports on the agenda topics as an in-put for exchange and learning. The hosting partner has provided visits at the courses in the projects and to authorities and organisations in the project network.

Questions raised during the meetings have for example been

- *How does one facilitate the wished-for transfer of the "know-how"?*
- *What is a "good result"?*
- *When is an immigrant "empowered"?*

The discussions occurring within the SAFE-M network on the need for "new" evaluation methods were for CAU an interesting context for further development of *interactive evaluation methods*, matching the demands within the European projects. Together, the project workers in the partnership and the researchers at CAU saw possibilities to try out methods for planning, project development and process evaluation.

The dialogue between the SAFE-M project workers and the action researchers at CAU started at the final transnational meeting in the SAFE-M network in October 1997 in Halmstad. At the meeting a team of action researchers and project leaders from CAU took part, with the objective to study the processes for development of knowledge in a transnational network, and to investigate how a transnational partnership share and exchange experiences.

At the meeting the researchers and practitioners made a common review of the work within the partnership. Out of this dialogue an interest for deepening the reflections around the evaluation emerged. The common aim for project workers and researchers was to create a learning process for innovative development, concept building and identity. One of the issues discussed was the consciousness of the trainers in the projects, regarding how they worked with supporting the individual and the (target) group.

The question raised was

- *What in our project work contribute to the effects we aim for (empowerment of the individual/group)?*

The new partnership, between project workers and researchers formed in October, wanted to investigate further in the direction of the first exchange; to deepen the understanding of specific areas

¹ See Danilda, "GROW - A Guidance to Raise Opportunities for Women. Minutes from Rimini June 4th - 7th 1997" (CAU Report 1997:8)

² See *Rapport om UGN-arbetet* (Report on Evaluation through Networks) CAU 1997

in the project work. There was a wish to go further and develop evaluation methodology that could be useful in the practical reality, and to investigate how reflective dialogue and process supervision could be used to develop instruments for interactive self-assessment. The idea was to develop methods from within practice, from the realities of daily project work. Those methods should be possible to transfer to other projects.

The next step for the researchers was to identify how a common reflection could be designed in order to facilitate the dialogue in a way desired by the researchers on one hand and the practitioners on the other hand. The result of the joint reflections should be fruitful to use in practice in relation to content and work. In the CAU forum the ideas concerning methods for process evaluation were given a concrete form; the points of departure being the work in the SAFE-M partnership and action research approaches.

CAU received the financial support from the Swedish EU Programme Office to develop, test and document methods at a workshop. The project workers invested their working time (outside of the original project budgets, as all projects would be finished when they attended the "Copenhagen workshop"). The workshop was performed in Copenhagen Feb. 1 - 2, 1998.

2. Theoretical Framework

Evaluation Theory

There has been quite a change of the concept of evaluation during the last 25 years. Developing from yesterday's quantitative aspects, nowadays most researchers agree that, from the point of view of method, evaluation holds both quantitative and qualitative aspects. A second method issue is the simultaneous requirement of individual or "case" studies and reviews, and syntheses of these cases.

Evaluation theory today does not prescribe The Method, but discuss the need of groups of methods, a global theoretical view and a synthesis of available knowledge for evaluation in order to become a more vigorous, dynamic and a self-renewing field of knowledge.

The terminology in the field of evaluation is a wild one. We have already used some of the labels used by different authors. One basic distinction could be made between the *summative* and the *formative* evaluation - put simply: the evaluation after the project respectively during the project. While in the restaurant kitchen the chef tastes the soup, adds some salt, tastes again, adds some basil, he is performing a formative evaluation: the action is one of continuous learning, building up new knowledge to be used for development of the process. When the guest at the restaurant gets the soup to his table and tastes it, and expresses his opinion, he makes a summative evaluation, a kind of judgement of the result.

Evaluations conducted after the project has ended, summative, can be seen as performed in order to get knowledge to judge. They are done by an external expert in order to get "objective results", often described in statistics.

Evaluation as a tool for development emphasises the formative aspects of evaluation, and self reflection as a method for project development. The ongoing and growing process of joint learning is the core of what is called formative evaluation, aiming at answering questions in order to get knowledge as a basis for change. It is conducted by someone close to the project, and evaluates the work in the project in the form of a descriptive analysis. These two poles, the summative and the formative evaluation, often use, respectively, *quantitative* and *qualitative* perspectives, but these dichotomies don't equal each other and are not interchangeable.

You could also consider evaluation as divided to three broad types:

- *ex-ante*: this type involves the a priori estimation of what is expected
- *ex-post*: this type involves the estimation of the impacts resulting from the implementation
- *on-going*: involves the estimation of the effects while it is being implemented which facilitate modifications to the implementation process being evaluated if any are necessary (Monnier 1996)

There is also a distinction to be made between *theory-driven* evaluations and *method-driven*. Theory-driven evaluations focus more on a *proactive input*, and emphasizes the information needs of the stakeholders in relation to the monitoring of the project. They seek to provide the stakeholders with

an insight into the implementation of the project at an early stage of the policy process. In contrast the method-driven evaluations, have a one-sided emphasis on the methods and techniques used to measure policy effects. (Chen, 1994)

Some of the most influential evaluation theorists even decline definitions:

"There is no answer to the question, 'But what is evaluation really?', and there is no point in asking it." (Guba&Lincoln 1989, p 21)

In their *Fourth Generation Evaluation*¹ Egon Guba and Yvonne Lincoln work by strategies which could be called process development as likely as process evaluation. It is, they say, not meaningful to distinguish those concepts. Methodologically, they identify the stakeholders in the projects and confront their divergent views to each other in elaborate steps, with the objective of reaching consensus. Their view is that *process evaluation* is

- a *socio-political* process. Social, cultural and political factors are not be seen as disruptive, but as meaningful and integrated parts of the evaluation.
- a *common, collaborative* process. A process aiming at the evaluator and the evaluated together creating the content
- a *learning* process. Both the evaluator and the evaluated are engaged in a process of learning, both learn during the evaluation
- an *ongoing, recursive and much divergent* process. The constructions created through the evaluation continues to be problematic and represents only for the moment the true construction of the reality
- a *growing* process. It is *impossible to design* an evaluation other than in very general methodological terms. Each new step depends on the previous step
- a process with *unforeseeable results*. There is no possibility to know in advance what results the evaluation will give. There can be several different results, without one being more right than the other
- a process which *creates reality*. The evaluation reconstruction is a literary creation by those involved in the evaluation process.

Seen this way, *planning, development and evaluation* are so tightly linked together that it is difficult to say whether we should talk about a planning process, a development process or an evaluation process. *Self-evaluative planning* never starts from zero, but always takes into consideration the things that have been made earlier, utilizes them, learns from experience, modifies, and therefore increases the competence of the people involved. The current planning discussion stresses the importance of learning and communication (Fisher & Forester 1993, Forester 1989, Friedman 1987): planning is seen as learning, and vice versa. Evaluation is examined as a part of organizational learning and therefore as one of the most important questions determining organizations adaptive capabilities.

The evaluation of European projects can be seen in this context of the ongoing development of evaluation theory and practice. There is in evaluation practise as a whole recognized a need for self-assessment, which we also identify in the project realities (courses, networking) and the project praxis of evaluation. We are moving, from designs where external experts evaluate our work, to participative designs where the project leaders are engaged in the process of evaluation.

The Concept of Learning

The project processes within ESF should lead to multicultural learning, implicating that new knowledge will be built up within the joint work. "Learning" and "knowledge" are theoretical fields of large extent, and in this context we just want to hint² at discussions (see for example Toulmin 1996) on the concepts of Aristotle: *phronesis* ("practical wisdom") and *episteme* ("theoretical grasp") and also on the concept *tacit knowledge*.

¹ As Guba&Lincoln labels their own evaluation theory "the fourth generation", the name calls for a definition of the previous three: 1st generation: measuring (for example IQ tests, school tests) 2nd generation: description (for example some formative evaluation) 3rd generation: judgement (according to standards and/or objectives). (Guba&Lincoln 1989, p 22f)

² See also the passage below on Action research.

Episteme is the theoretical understanding (knowing that), and phronetic the practical wisdom (knowing how). When learning is mentioned in the context of European projects, it is understood that the learning aimed for is the practical knowledge, phronetic learning, the knowledge which the individual or group could use.

“Tacit knowledge is all that we know minus all we can say - the latter (all we can say) is propositional knowledge, which /.../ represents the limits of what can be studied within the conventional paradigm.” (Guba&Lincoln 1989, p 176).

How do we find means to communicate this tacit knowledge of a participant, a project worker or of a partnership? And how do we achieve practical learning?

Action Research

Action research and the projects within Employment, share some central issues:

- action as a direction and the objective for the engagement
- differences and multiculturalism as dynamic components in the developing of the partners of the dialogue and of their concepts of the reality around them
- the interest for language and learning in dialogue

Action research¹, as a practical way of dealing with organizational problems by means of mobilizing and involving social science in a specific manner, started to emerge in the 1940's with the work of the Tavistock Group in the British Army and with the experiments and ideas of Kurt Lewin in USA (Trist and Murray 1990, Lewin 1948).

Action research refers to a specific way of understanding and managing the relationship between theory and practice, between the researcher and the researched, the “other”. That relationship should be understood as one of dialogue. Thus, when one engages in action research, one is engaged in a dialogue, although a very special one. In action research one recognizes the empirical object as subject; hence the relationship between researcher and 'researched' (the other) is seen as an intersubjective, interactive relationship characterized by joint action, joint involvement and shared responsibility.

“Both researcher and researched are social actors; they are purposeful, capable and knowledgeable beings – capable in the sense that the agent 'could have acted otherwise', and knowledgeable with regard to all those things the members of a society know about that society. They are both the product and the producer of history. Recognizing the empirical object first and foremost as subject has ethical as well as epistemological implications.” (van Beinum et al. 1996, p 181)

Consequently, within the context of joint action, there are in action research three interdependent, though different, main sources of new knowledge:

- The practical work and the dialogues among the actors of the field.
- The dialogues between the researchers and the local actor.
- The dialogues between the researchers.

In action research the question presented, the object of study is jointly addressed by the researcher and the researched. The objective of action research is not just to describe or understand or to explain social reality. Action research wants to improve a situation. In action research the researcher is confronted with a problem or a question of the other which is of such a nature that it requires research (new knowledge). Action research is a process in which the researcher is not solving a problem *for* the other but *with* the other. The learning is in the joint action, a process of joint learning. If successful, this learning will at the same time and in the same act make a contribution to clarifying the "question", or solving the problem, as well as generate knowledge, that is, in the first instant local, contextual and historical knowledge. Action research is characterized by this mutuality in which the knowledge is in the action.

¹ This passage on action research is mainly based upon a paper written by professor Hans van Beinum, CAU, for an international seminar on action research in Meissen, September 1997 (entitled 'Zur Praxis der Arbeitsforschung', 1997, in: "Aktionsforschung und industrielle Demokratie", ed. Werner Fricke. Bonn, Fried-Ebert Stiftung.) See also further references on action research.

Fifth Generation Evaluation

The Employment projects are in different and innovative ways targeted at unemployed persons from disadvantaged groups. With the project objectives often formulated "soft", there is in the project evaluation praxis a strongly felt dissatisfaction with quantitative evaluation. On the other hand qualitative perspectives on evaluation provides a methodologically complicated task to perform:

How do the projects evaluate "empowerment" or "networking"?

Another most interesting condition, affecting the issue of evaluation, we find in the construction of these projects: the request of national and the transnational partnerships for joint planning and doing the task. Here the multicultural aspects are outspoken; most obvious perhaps in the transnational partnerships, but also a fact when it comes to the different local organisational cultures of a local partnership. And the supposition is that this diversity should stimulate creativity in finding new solutions to unemployment.

Here we see a new kind of setting, not much investigated in traditional evaluation theory and practice, be it even of the fourth generation. The traditional evaluator is contacted by a project responsible and sets up an agreement with him. The evaluator is the "outside expert" for this stakeholder. This set up can be compared to the structure of the ESF projects, where the action is (at least ideally) taken on by a partnership, often partners who have not worked together before, supposingly taking part in the multicultural project work to learn from each other. This partnership holds a shared responsibility, and the partners have formulated joint objectives for the whole project, often in quite general terms to be further developed during the project. This network within itself needs tools for self-assessment, and those tools must be developed within the project context.

A process evaluation in a national partnership, in a transnational partnership, in a project course or in other project activities together with the target group, could be decided upon, designed and performed by the partners themselves. Methods within these new frames calls for further development.

Significant in the ESF project evaluation context is the high degree of commitment with the stakeholders involved, which calls for new views on the evaluand, but also of the evaluator - and of evaluation. As the relationship between the "project responsible" and the outside expert is broken up, we would say that we are fostering the fifth generation evaluation: the European project evaluation. We are "Building an Evaluation Culture in Europe".

Evaluation of Social Work as a Point of Departure

Working within the Integra programme resembles social work in the sense that the project workers meet socially excluded groups. There is a strong emphasis on innovation, on new ways of dealing with problems for the target groups. The non-traditional ways of working requires non-traditional ways of evaluation.

Change within an individual, whether it is a participant or a project worker, is nothing you can achieve through strict "planning", since change always has to come from within the individual. Social work can only to some extent be understood as "problem solving" in terms of a chain "problem-analyse-judgment-measure-result", since behind this chain lies an assumption that all change can be planned and that knowledge is instrumental (Morén 1996).

The participant and the project workers do not always know the "real problem", and in order to meet the needs of the target group the project worker sometimes has to leave their "role" and meet the participant on "equal terms" in an situation where it is not possible for the project worker to dictate the rules. The project workers are working in a border country, between being a project worker delivering guidance/training/services and being unaware of the "problem" together with the participant. The personal relationship between the project worker and the participant is crucial, since the project worker to some extent must "walk along" with the participants on their road trying to find new routes/paths.

The meeting with socially excluded gives a special knowledge about the structural power relations which generates the exclusion. To increase quality in the project work, we must focus the project workers ability to see in what way the society as a whole has an impact on the target group. Evaluation in social work is not restricted to describing the situation for a certain individual, but shall give a picture of the situation for the socially excluded. It is a tool for giving the target groups a voice in society.

Evaluation criteria can for example be whether the target groups have broadened their opportunities and are able to make "new" choices, whether the participant has changed the perception of the self, and whether the project worker and the whole project have been able to learn through the meetings with the participants. This requires a continuous evaluation without a beginning or end, methods for increasing quality and stimulating an ongoing learning process. Through working in another way with the target group, acting in another way, the project workers can change the organisation instead of vice versa: changing the organisation due to an evaluation and then work in another way (Morén 1996).

3. Methodology

Story Telling - a Method for Reflection

The Copenhagen workshop was arranged in order to enable the members of the SAFE-M network to go a few steps further in learning with and from each other about the meaning of their experiences. The aim of the workshop was twofold:

- *to develop methodology for evaluative work and*
- *to train process leaders*

For the purpose of the workshop, it was essential to identify some practical common ground to work with. In order to focus on dialogue in a realistic manner in a meeting which would (by definition) be cross cultural and transnational (in other words: complex), it was important to identify a method which would be both simple and effective. Two questions were raised:

- *What are the features in a dialogue which can be used as common points of departure for the partners in SAFE-M, which will enable them to engage in joint learning?*
- *Are there common points of reference we can use when we try to learn from each other?*

The common component found was that all project workers are involved in meetings. These meetings with different cultures put high demands on the project workers ability to manage diversity, a multicultural context. The point of departure for designing the methodology was these "meetings" and CAU:s experience of the dynamics in the exchange of knowledge in guided process.

The researchers tried, against the background given, to identify some kind of method which would enable reflections on the project processes, reflections which would help the project worker to understand what is going on, give ideas on how to develop the project, how to manage their difficult and often isolated task and how to deal with failure as well as success.

The methodology designed for the workshop was based on a method called "The Interpersonal Perception Method" (IPM) developed in the sixties by Laing, Phillipson and Lee (1966) at the Tavistock Institute. Their method is based on psychodynamic theory and on the knowledge about dyadic, triadic and larger social systems, focusing on comparisons of perspectives. The central theme is the experiences, perceptions and actions which occurs when people are engaged in a meaningful encounters, i.e. meetings. The assumption is that there is no norm for interpersonal encounters, but if you are aware of your own experience in relation to others, this will create opportunities for learning. The logical structure is applicable to different situations. In our figuring out what the other think of us, the method creates an opportunity for getting both sided at once, through the interplay of two perspectives. An interesting fact is that in the first description of IPM the author brought up the relevance of the method for the international sphere, discussing the East-West relationship and mistrust.

At the workshop the SAFE-M participants worked with their experiences of meetings. Each project worker, eight persons in total, had brought to the workshop a case, a story of a real meeting they had been involved in, carefully selected from their professional experience. Focusing on these meaningful meetings, the stories, the project workers together with the researchers created a situation with opportunities to compare experiences between different groups, people, countries and approaches with all its diversity. Each one of the workshop participants told their own story out of the life of as

project worker, thereby acting as creator of the story and at the same time as created by the story and the exchange in the dialogue:

" The double role of the Self as creator and created is beautifully rendered in the notion of the Self as storyteller "
(Czarniawska 1997, p 44)

Preparing for the workshop

In order to prepare for the workshop the researchers and project leaders at CAU sent a letter to the participants in the SAFE-M network:

"As key-words for our discussions in the Copenhagen workshop we have used concepts such as the *developing of self assurance and self confidence*, the *strengthening of the identity* within disadvantaged target groups, the *empowering* of the individual and the target group and the enhanced *consciousness with the trainers* on how to work with the processes supporting the individual and the (target) group.

And we ask ourselves: *what in our project work contribute to these effects?*

As these themes have been focused in the ongoing discussions in the SAFE-M network, we see it as fruitful to concentrate on these kind of issues. The many discussions show that these concepts are important in the practical project work.

How to prepare for the workshop

At the workshop we are going to use our joint experiences. In order to be able to do so in a concrete and effective manner, we ask you for a bit of preparation. We want each one of you to bring to the workshop a case-story of about 2 - 3 pages.

This contribution should be about a situation, a meeting you were involved in, selected from your SAFE-M project experience. As each situation has its own unique characteristics, no general formula can be offered. Think of a meeting between you and another person (or persons), a meeting that was very meaningful to you, and in some way relating to the concepts above.

Write down your recollection of that particular situation. It should be about the things that struck you. You could tell about why it was the kind of meeting it was, the context of the meeting, organisational or personal frames, how the dialogue was performed, of feelings involved, roles, relations, what it meant to the other, what it meant to you, and so on.

It is really important that you bring this written text for two reasons:

- (a) *generally: by writing you start to articulate, organize and conceptualize your experience which will help you to reflect on it, and*
- (b) *specifically: by bringing a write up of the meaningful meeting to the workshop you will facilitate the actual process as well as the recording of the proceedings."*

Cases presented in written contributed to the documentation of the workshop dialogues. The methodology of using case studies for the write up is supported by Guba&Lincoln (1989), as in this passage on the documentation of the evaluation process:

" The report cannot simply be about the evaluated and its context, but must enable readers to see how the constructor make sense of it, and why. The best way to do that, we feel, is via the case study report, which provides a vicarious experience of the situation, allowing the readers to 'walk in the shoes' of the local actor."

(p 223)

Workshop Procedure

A final fine tuning in planning of the workshop procedure was done jointly at the workshop. The workshop was distributed over two full days, in four work sessions, 9 - 13 and 16 - 20 both days, the long lunch to provide real breaks in an exhausting and intense work.

The case-stories were put into the workshop and through scheduled processes used for reflections and learning. The procedure was supervised by the research team, and performed in six stages:

Step 1: (plenary session)

The participants presented their own stories. They also explained why the story was significant to themselves. This presentation session in plenum was not a forum for discussion, but questions for clarification could be asked.

Step 2: (small teams)

In the next two steps (2 and 3) the whole group was divided randomly into four small groups/teams (two persons in each). The representatives from the research team joined one group each and their main task was to help the group to be task oriented, but they were not suppose to comment. Each small group focused on the stories of two others, which could be described in the following scheme:

<i>Participants</i>	<i>focused on the stories presented by participants</i>
1A and 1B	2A and 2B
2A and 2B	1A and 1B
4A and 4B	3A and 3B
3A and 3B	4A and 4B

Each group/team discussed and reflected upon on what they had heard and learned, and to what extent and in what way they could have used what they had heard in their own cases. The purpose was to see what one can do with the approaches, perspectives and experiences of another situation. The groups started with oneself (themselves) reflecting on the story of the other(s) and the questions raised were

- *can I do anything with the story?*
- *does the story trigger an idea?*
- *what is striking, what hits us? (something funny, something I/we would like to remember, something I/we should keep in mind)*

Step 3: (same small teams)

Still in the same small teams, the participants discussed and imagined what the other teams would think they could have done with their experience. The perspective is of the other, and the questions raised were

- *what in our stories maybe relevant?*
- *what in our stories could be taken into account?*

Step 4: (plenary session)

The whole group came together and each team reported

- (a) on how they could have used the experience of the others
- (b) on the way they thought the other team could have mobilized their own experiences

All groups had prepared flip charts with keywords of their dialogue, which they hang up around the room. The stories and reflections was grouped into two clusters (1 and 2 AB and 3 and 4 AB). The participants looked upon their work to create an opportunity to see things differently, describing "how the other stories had some relevance for us", and "how our own stories could have relevance for others" and "what does it mean?"

Step 5: (plenary session)

The group started to compare (step 5) the different stories and the different emphasises. The discussion was on what kind of learning that had taken place, and how the stories could be relevant in practice, in real life. Additional light was put on certain elements and why the element was relevant in

the way the participants perceived it. The dialogue around certain elements was deepened and themes emerged, reflecting the broad arena of project work.

Step 6: (plenary session)

In the last step the whole group evaluated the meaning of the approach of the workshop and discussed how the approach could be further developed. The group discussed and agreed upon on the reporting and write up of the workshop.

As is the case in transnational groups, language skills sometimes put obstacles to the individual participant to fully follow and perform all communication in the working language, here English. Practically, in this meeting, we solved the problem by simultaneous translating, when called for, during plenary sessions, and by mixing the smaller groups considering that the two participants should be able to find a joint communication language, here also German.

4. Realisation of the Workshop

Describing the Multiplicity of Project Work

The eight cases presented described a *wide range of meetings*, significant to the individual project worker: with *participants in the courses*, with the *target group*, with *staff* within the project and with a *training organisation* (conducting courses on behalf of the project as well as guidance for project workers). The simple design of the question to the project workers ("write about a meeting, significant to you as a project leader") resulted in a cluster of cases, covering a broad view of the conditions for the project workers in the Employment programme.

Here we could see that the people defining themselves as project workers/ leaders do not only work with individual participants, but also - to different extent - with working out the concept, doing the European paperwork, organising of the partnership and co-ordination of their project.

Due to reasons of secrecy we will not be able to go into detail in the cases presented, but will describe their focus and general themes.

Case A: The Eye Witness

The project leader Anna was invited to a social event outside of work, where she also could identify a new participant in the project. Anna knew the name of the participant, but they had not met, so the participant did not recognise her. Anna could hear that the new participant talked about the project with the people sitting next to him. He was enthusiastic and proud of his work within the project. He had been unemployed for many years and had participated in many projects, but never been satisfied. One of the things he mentioned was that on his first visit to the project he had realized that the people worked even though the project leader was not there, which he had not experienced in any other projects. He said: "After one hour I was convinced, so I decided to go back to my apartment to get my cigarettes, and then I started working in the project the very same day."

Anna comments: "The different explanations and statements that the participant presented was for me an evaluation of high credibility, because it came from his heart, there was nothing for him to live up to."

Case B: A Meeting with an Organisation Delivering Training

In an initial phase of the project the project leader Beryl had a meeting with an organisation in order to find a partner who could deliver the training within the project. Beryl was exposed to a conflict, of two opposite agendas of the two representatives from the training organisation, the director and the trainer. The director wanted the money for the training and the possibility to recruit trainees. The trainer wanted to talk about how to organise the staff and the course, and was worried about whether there was enough staff resources.

"The director told the trainer that her staff was big enough that there was very little extra work. It was clear that he had few intentions to spend the money on the project itself." Beryl was awed by this attitude, including the bossy attitude of the director towards his employee, and would have used

another organisation for the training if she had been able to after this first meeting. But there were no alternatives at the time.

Case C: The Failure of a Successful Guidance

The project leader Cyril told a story of several meetings with one of the participants in an orientation course. During the time of the guidance they put together a plan for the participant, including practise placement. Cyril felt that the participant was very content and committed with the plan and their joint work. So when he knew that an external evaluator a year afterwards had contacted the participant, Cyril was curious to know about her situation. He learnt that the participant just had been doing three months practice and after that nothing else. When the interviewer had asked the participant how she conceived her future, the participant had answered that she saw no future whatsoever.

Cyril says: "I was very taken aback. I was so sure that this participant was on a clear way of her own, and that the guidance had been successful."

Case D: Destroying the Concept

David's story was based on several meetings with the target group. One of his points was to discuss "how to get in contact with the group to work together, combining the possibilities we have and the wish to take care of the interests of the target group and to respect their situation".

The project leaders had offered assistance in organising a qualification course suggested by people in the target group, a course "combining the interests of the target group with the experiences they had made in their home country and the circumstances they now live in". David described the complicated procedures of getting planning meetings for the course to take place, to get the right persons involved in the decisions, and to get commitment to the joint decisions - participation in the course developed.

One vivid scene in David's case described a turbulent meeting at an arena chosen by the representatives for the target group, a billiard saloon. "Even if I had often before the feeling of being a seller of a product, in this atmosphere I could feel a big pressure to be successful. It was not only the pressure of the project to develop a new course, also the atmosphere of electronic games and of billiard was part of the pressure. In this way the localisation for this meeting really destroyed my concept."

Case E: Development of a Participant in a Course

Eva had chosen to tell a success story. Over the time in the course, one of the participants could find a rewarding job in another field of action than her formal education and former profession. From being very depressed and undecided at the beginning of the orientation course, seeing her future in black, the participant got a good job and a positive outlook to her situation.

One of the key factors leading to this, was that Eva as a trainer had got to know the participant, and then discovered personal skills and experiences of the participant which she could use in a new professional field. During the course time the participant both could identify a new work field, and also test it out in a practise placement.

Eva was satisfied with her own part in this development, and happy for the well-being of the participant. "I had the feeling that I had helped her, and knew that the time with the course was well spent for her."

Case F: A Pedagogical Conflict

Project worker Filip described a series of meetings on the conflict between "the ordinary teacher's views compared to the project leader's perspective". One of the teachers at the course was unable to grasp the pedagogical concept of the course, which led to conflicts with the participants. Filip had to make the teacher and the participants to come to terms with each other, and to take on responsibility for seeing to that the course content should be within the objectives of the project.

Says Filip: "For me this situation involved many of the key questions in our project, like attitudes to immigrants, the essential trust in the group process, where is the problem in the class room, the teacher as an expert or as a guide. It also dealt with the responsibilities of the staff and of the participants."

Case G: The Troublesome Participant I

The project worker Gaby told a story about her relation to a participant, about the “development of emotions during my engagement, my work for and with this client Mrs K”. This participant got a lot of guidance from Helena, who in a series of efforts tried to support Mrs K to suitable practise placements. There were continuous problems with Mrs K at the jobs, she could not hold on to them. “Continuously I felt myself being in conflict with rejecting and refusing managers/employers and with my task to find some suitable job for her”.

In the beginning Gaby felt sorry for Mrs K, but her feelings changed. “Increasingly she caused bad conscience - maybe I could and should have done more for her.” Gaby described her heavy involvement with Mrs K, the late night telephone calls and the accusations.

“Finally, at the end of the course, she ran amok. She ran around complaining about me outside our department, to the organisation management, to the different people and agencies in our surroundings. I felt threatened by her uncontrolled actions.”

Gaby saw her case as a story on the difficult balance between involvement and detachment: “I have been annoyed by myself not having been able to react in time and handle her suitable, reasonable and to delimit myself from her in respect of efficiency and time in doing my job - as well as emotionally.”

Case H: The Troublesome Participant II

Project leader Helena also told a story about a troublesome participant, but from another angle than Gaby: the one of the team leader, dealing both with the discontent of a explicitly dissatisfied participant, but also with the problems of the staff involved with the participant.

Helena had to handle a difficult situation where the participant was embittered and her team members and the other participants in the course were having problems with the situation. “The course tutors did not know how to handle her any more. On the one hand the teachers were upset by the participant’s complaining attitude, on the other hand they were full of sympathy for her, because she was sick and ‘ill-fated’.”

When the question of a prolongation of the course time was raised by the participant, Helena discussed this with the participant, who started the session crying. In the end “she accused me that I was on the teacher’s side and she would not get her rights. Finally she threatened to turn to the municipal authority and tell them how bad our work was. She then also did this. Since then I have not heard anything of her.”

Learning from the Multiplicity

In the first step the stories was shortly presented by using keywords, and each participant reflected upon his or her own learning from their own story. Already in this first step common themes emerged, focusing both on interactions with participants, interactions with other organisations, and interactions between project leaders and project workers. The material of the stories was collected from a broad and complex reality within the Employment projects.

Interactions with Participants

The main motive in the stories presented was the interactions with participants in the project. The theme of several stories was the prerequisites for "empowering" the target group; the need of understanding for the specific target group, the working culture of the project which must be engaging and inspiring, the emphasis on the quality of the products being made within a project and how this stimulates motivation and satisfaction. The necessity of preparing meetings with participants and the importance of how people are met and introduced to a project were other areas reflected in several stories. Often the participants have limited knowledge of the situation on the labour market and not until the training ends, they see the chances. Keeping both distance and closeness to the participants was a theme in the stories presented. In order to support the participant you have to be both close and keep distance.

Questions raised were mainly the following

- *how can you give the participants in a project a vision of what they can gain from their participation?*

- *how do we reach the participants at a earlier stage, so that they are able to use the chances within the framework of the course?*
- *how do you manage a situation when you loose your distance? In what way does it influence the climate in the project/course ?*

Interactions with Other Organisations

All project workers co-operate with other organisations, local partners, and sometimes there is a conflict between the demands from the participants and the demands from other organisations, other stake holders. The experience was that it is not possible to organise everything beforehand in a project. But the importance of preparing meetings with other organisations, solving internal problems and anchoring the project was brought up in some of the stories presented. And how can the project investigate whether another organisation, delivering for example the training in the project, has the ability to meet the specific demands in the project? The question raised was

- *how can a project leader/worker handle different demands from the local partners?*

Interaction between Project Leaders and Project Workers

Problems encountered in the interaction between project leaders and staff (project workers) was brought up as a theme in one story, reflecting on how this influences the interaction with participants. What happens when there are different perspectives on learning? Does the project worker focus on problem based learning, taking practice and the participants own knowledge as the point of departure in order to empower the target group? Or does the project worker use more traditional ways of "teaching", not adapted to the target group? The importance of an ongoing dialogue, the necessity and the strength of being able to discuss everything in the staff and to see the project workers as a team were ways presented as solutions for solving part of the problems. The question raised was

- *how do we get staff into the project, and getting them to share the vision of the project?*

Recurrent Themes within Project Work

Recurrent motives discussed during the workshop can be treated as telling about some main themes: *learning culture (trainee), working culture (trainer), lack of success provides learning, dealing with inner feelings, project objectives and planning.*

Learning Culture (trainee)

The need for developing the pedagogy within the project had been on the agenda within the SAFE-M network, and at the workshop the dialogue around pedagogical issues was frequent. In order to work with the target groups in question the project workers concluded that it is essential to understand the culture and conditions of the participants. Another key issue is to be able to give trust and responsibility to the participants in the project, to give up the responsibility for the participant instead of *taking the responsibility* from the participant. Another one is *involving* the participant, the target group, in designing the courses delivered and to create an environment stimulating an open dialogue. Several of the stories highlighted the importance of not focusing only on the formal merits of the participants, but rather to see informal learning as a platform for individual development.

Working Culture (trainer)

The transformation of the pedagogical objectives into action in the projects is largely dependent on the project working culture. A mixture of personal and technical problems occurs, and have to be solved. It is important with experience from this kind of work, where one problem can be staff with "loose" relations to the project and their difficulties in feeling themselves as a part of the working culture. Another problem presented in several stories is the pressure in this kind of job. The stress on the project workers puts high demands on the project and the creation of a favourable working climate. The project workers must be able to identify "the golden nuggets" in their work in order to be stimulated and enthusiastic. The limited opportunities for guidance and supervision for the project workers became obvious during the workshop, and the participants concluded that guidance for the project workers would be an essential component in order to be able to further develop the content in the projects.

Lack of Success Provides Learning

Dissemination of best practices is often the focus within the Employment programme and other programmes within ESF, i.e. the transfer of best practice from one region to another, from one context to another. Few reports are written about "*the lack of success*" (we have not seen any organised transfer of worst practices), which could contribute to learning within the European framework.

During the workshop it became clear that the lack of success really provided opportunities for learning. The participants discussed the importance of having the chance to talk about their failures and being able to reflect upon them, an act of self assessment. One remark was that in contacts with organisations (authorities) providing funding, it is often necessary to highlight the success stories in order to be able to get more funding. Another point was that focusing only on positive examples causes stress within a partnership: if someone has a better (the best) project, tool, methodology and so on. This creates a distance between project workers since all projects are not perceived as successful. Discussing the lack of success also highlighted the fact that there is a limit to what you actually can achieve as a project worker, especially when you work with difficult target groups. Sometimes there is nothing you can do, even if you have the best of intentions and a good approach. The workshop participants concluded that there must be a clear distinction between the project work and for example psychotherapy, which might be needed for some participants.

Dealing with Inner Feelings

The discussions about the needs of the participants and what the project actually can offer deepened the dialogue about how to deal with inner feelings. Working with socially excluded, traumatised refugees and long term unemployed put high demands on the psychological strength of the project worker. Even with the best intentions, the project worker can not think for another person, and each individual is responsible for his or her choices. In some cases there can be a hidden agenda, a communication on different levels, where the participant (and the target groups) put forward only one problem, but either is unaware of other problems or choose not to present them. It is essential for the project workers to be able to trust their own feelings, not to be defensive and feeling guilty when they are attacked, by participants or stakeholders. The ability of each project worker and the whole organisation to deal with frustration is crucial for reaching the objectives in these projects. In order to deal with frustration is essential to build an identity of the project, and see to that both participant and staff are clear and familiar with the conditions in and objectives of the project.

Project Objectives

Within the projects the participants, the stakeholders and the project worker might have different goals which could be opposite and in conflict. Within the workshop this was shortly discussed. In what way is it possible to combine different goals? Different goals effects the evaluation conducted within the projects, one example being that regional funders are mostly interested in results measured in the number of participants who actually gets a job in connection with the project, while the focus for project workers might be evaluation of the pedagogical tools and methods used and what activities contribute to empowerment. Considering the groups targeted in all projects within the SAFE-M network, measuring the number of participants who got a job was not the most relevant criteria for evaluation. In fact, the participants concluded that in these kinds of projects there is no guarantee of success in terms of that every participant gets a job. Different conditions affecting the situation for the target group are out of the control for both the participant and the project workers.

Planning

Planning was another recurrent theme, both planning of training and guidance for the participants in the courses, and staff planning. Planning was seen as a way of preparing for insecure situations in the projects.

The overall impression from the project workers was that in most projects you have to apply a long term perspective. You can not find easy solutions to complex problems and in order to empower the target groups, you must have the possibility to offer support for long periods and also guidance after the courses.

In order to avoid going into a "therapeutic" relation with participants, trying to solve all their problems it is crucial that the relationship between the participant and the project worker is as clear as

possible from the beginning. It is important to clarify the mutual duties and rights at the start of project.

Some projects within SAFE-M made "contracts" with their participants from the beginning, and this could be one way of dealing with this issue. But on the other hand some of the project workers thought that it would be more fruitful to make contracts when the participant had been in the course for a while and could take a decision on the basis of knowledge about the project.

A more systematic follow-up of the participants in the projects was presented as one way for creating long term support when it is needed and to collect data for evaluative work.

5. Evaluation of the Methodology

Participants' Evaluation of the Workshop

The participating project workers were interested and curious as the workshop started. What would come out of this? Anyhow, participants seemed to feel that just being together for a reflective intermission in ordinary work would be rewarding enough. If there were further gains, that would be extra:

"I feel both relaxed and intensive. This morning I got up with the same feeling of being relaxed. My question is: What will be the product? But it does not matter, since we are getting deeper into the subjects. I wanted to say that I appreciated this workshop, since I have rational stress at home. When you can take your time and you have this open communication you can do a lot of work."

There were extras; new learning and experiences possible to use for the participants in their new projects, and the first steps of the workshop got positive evaluation. All participants agreed that through this method of organising of the exchange they reached so much further than they had done before. Concentrating on one case was very fruitful, and already writing them down contributed to learning a bit on how to handle - or not handle - certain key questions. The focus on cases opened up and gave a deeper insight to the understanding of the other projects, according to the participants:

"The most impressive fact was the use of the tool, to have big results, changing the perspectives between different partners. Because of the method it was possible to have a wide view to all of the projects, even if all the projects had told only one case-story."

"The way we performed this workshop were in many ways similar to what we have used to do in our network: to tell each other stories, to compare our experiences and to be very honest about our own uncertainties. What struck me as one of the most sympathetic things with this workshop was that I felt familiar with what was going on. But we have not before in our network put so much time to exchange of single cases: and that have been very unorganized discussions at breaks or in the evening social sessions."

"It was as if I had the frames, and now I also got a content to fill those frames."

"It was perhaps the most intensive meeting of the whole partnership."

The first step in the discussions in the small groups after the presentation in plenum was rewarding according to the participants, but the step of trying to adapt to the thinking of the other they saw as difficult. Many had saved that moment until time was out, or were in other ways avoiding the question:

"To try to adapt the other person's point of view was not easy, and as far as I could see, it seemed like we all tried to avoid that for reasons it could be interesting to speculate further in. Perhaps one of the easiest explanations could be that this was the one moment we were not familiar with, we have not used this change of perspectives in our group by ourselves - it was totally new for us."

Explanation's given by the participants was both that knew each other too much and also too little to be at ease with this shift of perspectives.

That the method required time and commitment of the participants was also mentioned in the evaluation:

"It was very important to have a lot of time to dive into the cases to be able to change the perspective."

"The big question is if it will be possible to do this method with persons not being as interested in new methods as we were. For example, in meetings of only one day with groups who have to participate in the meeting, and come with the interest of hard facts."

Project Leaders' Evaluation of the Workshop

As it was, we could use "The Interpersonal Perception Method" (IPM) up to the second twisting of perspectives, so there is still to be seen if and how the further steps can enhance learning and understanding in a larger system. IPM is scheduled mainly for dyads, which means that just the number of story versions could quickly expand to an amount too hard to handle in a larger group of people. The methodology is preferable used in small groups, in which the dialogue can be enhanced.

So if we concentrate on what we really did at the workshop, we could say that we came up with a test of a modified method of IPM, put in use in a group of people instead of the dyad. Used in this way, also the modified method seems as an interesting path to use and further develop with the aim of working with project planning, development and evaluations.

The method is parallel to the usual transnational exchange in European projects; but it also differs, since here the project workers had the opportunity to meet and reflect upon certain areas together with researchers/evaluators not having the stress from producing transnational documents etc, which usually is on the agenda of a transnational meeting.

The methodology was tested in the difficult setting of a transnational group with cultural differences, with communication in both English and German. On the other hand, the project workers had established a working relation based on trust, which clearly facilitated the process. Our experience from the Copenhagen workshop is that the methodology, if further developed, could be a part of evaluative work in different contexts within the European project work. Using the methodology will require preparation in terms of choosing a case story topic and of writing it down, as well as joint work for approximately two days. Since the aim is to deepen the dialogue around the question raised, it is crucial for the process, that there is enough time and that the participants are not disturbed by their regular work.

The methodology needs further development, especially since the third step was not conducted as planned. The workshop made a "halt" and there were obstacles in going further with the dialogue. All participants thought that it was extremely difficult to shift and look at their own story with someone else's glasses, taking the "role of the other". There are several possible explanations to this, amongst them the ones presented by the participants at the Copenhagen workshop: the network knew each other too well or too little. Another explanation is that this was the last meeting in the SAFE-M network, and the process of separation from each other interfered. This methodology would preferable be used during the phases when the project and/or program is operational instead of as an ex-post model.

The Dynamic Narrative

Most important in this evaluation of the workshop would be to say that the approach of using case stories for exchange has been interesting to investigate, as there are links to both project exchange praxis, and to influential trends in the scientific writing.

For the participants this case story approach was a clearly understandable and relevant method to use, well linked to project practice. Story telling is of course always a part of the agenda of a transnational exchange, and has the function for the project worker to build identity and to get reference holdings:

"Comparing our practise, I think we have found that we all should be proud of ourselves doing a tough job. It is not so easy to reach this target group, we could see that in all our projects. We have noticed the never-ending-story theme in all our projects."

"For me it is interesting to discuss what is happening within these organisations, what their national policies are about, how they stand today, what questions they think are important and how they try to handle them."
(1+1=3, Stridh 1997, p 11)

In this meaning conversations usually held during conference pauses, restaurant sessions and other informal arenas could now be put on the meeting agenda. In this way a network can handle the epistemological problems (on learning and knowledge) sketched in the theoretical background of this report. An example from another network in another area (of managers in SMEs) studied at CAU shows how phronetic learning is one of the "things" in networking:

"The series of meetings of the organizational network produced many examples of problem solving and knowledge generation. These were not always dramatic of an earth shattering significance. However, they were always meaningful for the participants, managers of small businesses, in the context of their world."
(Lundberg/Tell 1998, p 1:9)

The positive climate, the democratic praxis and the open dialogue made it possible to open up, to tell about the project and the difficulties in handling participants. It became, in other words, possible to get a truer evaluation of the project work than if someone would be looking at the project from outside. This is evaluation with the *project worker* to get an understanding of the project processes instead of evaluation *on the project work*.

What makes the story telling so easy and dynamic at the same time? In her *Narrating the Organisation* (1997), Barbara Czarniawska wants to tell us how we could use the literature genres for story telling (such as autobiography, or drama) for our purpose to understand and document what is going on in individuals and organisations:

"It is useful to treat identity as a narrative, or, more properly speaking, as a continuous process of narration where both the narrator and the audience are involved in formulating, editing, applauding, and refusing various elements of the ever-produced narrative." (p 49)

The story telling in scientific write ups is not a new phenomena. What if Sigmund Freud had not been a true story teller: how would that lack of story telling skill have influenced the impact of his revolutionary theories? Would he even had come to think of the Oedipus trauma without his interest for the narratives? Story telling is not only a production of readable texts, but also more and more wider accepted in scientific writing, not only in disciplines like psychoanalyses and medicine, sociology and anthropology.

The narrative set up of the workshop in Copenhagen bear many similarities to the classical set up for the "well made play" in theatre, the chamber play with the strict demands for the unity of time, room and content¹. Continuity has been mentioned in the participants evaluation of the networking in SAFE-M, talking about factors improving good quality:

"And then to have continuity, same people at the meetings, and regular meetings." (1+1=3, Stridh 1997, p 17)

Narratives produced in the theatre chamber play tradition have provided us with understanding going far out from the small room and the few persons involved. One example could be August Strindberg's *Miss Julie*, where we meet just two persons in a kitchen one summer night: Miss Julie and her valet Jean (the third role of the play, the maid Kristin, is really a minor one). But their intense dialogue have bearings to our understanding of grand societal issues as gender roles, sexuality, power balance in relations, class struggle and class circulation.

Methodologically we can learn from Strindberg's clever use of the small details for enhancing our deep understanding: when Jean chooses wine for drinking and Julie chooses beer, that is a signal, a symbol loaded with meaning, giving us a hint of the coming change of balance in their relation, interpersonal in their private struggle, but also between the two seen as social phenomena: Jean is the

¹ The rules for the well made play specifies unity regarding time, room and content. The play time shall be near real time, the narrative shall not swift locations, and the story told should have just one basic theme.

middle class rising, and Julie is the noble class declining. So the small details in the chamber play make us understand the big world around us - if we take them seriously and interpret them wisely.

Evaluative Guidance

Methods for developing self-esteem and identity within different target groups were the core issue at the Copenhagen workshop. The workshop aimed at within a transnational partnership deepen the understanding for which processes which strengthen the both the identity of the participant, the project worker and the project. Through guidance the project workers raised their consciousness on how they can support each participant and the target group as a whole with the aim of decreasing feelings of powerlessness. The methods discussed focused on empowering the individual and strengthening groups on local level working together for their integration on the labour market.

As a project worker you need a forum outside the project to meet, talk and reflect with other people who are interested in helping you to develop your project and your professional role. The limited opportunities for guidance became obvious during the workshop. All project workers described a situation with restricted opportunities for supervision in their work, although they work within a framework which resembles social work.

In order to develop new projects within ESF for the groups targeted in the SAFE-M network and other similar projects, it is essential to have a built in function of guidance as a process of continuous evaluation. Otherwise there is a great risk for numerous project workers being burnt out and also disappointing projects results. Regular opportunities for guidance would be an extremely useful tool for planning, developing and evaluation of the project work. A parallel between evaluation and guidance can be seen in the evaluation methodology in social work and in the work within health services, where you often bring cases to a supervisor and/or to a group of colleagues.

6. Concluding Remarks

A Useful Bottom-Up Approach

In a recently presented doctoral dissertation at the Department of Sociology at Göteborg University, Sweden, by Dr Jan-Olof Åberg (1997), he concludes that

"In sum, the thesis proposes that evaluation practice cannot be full understood as a series of rational activities, but it is better understood in terms of the construction and manipulation of social reality. /.../ In practice, evaluation designs are products of the necessity to combine rational inquiry with the participation of internal actors." (p 303)

Although there is an increasing interest of evaluation in Europe, it is pointed out that the practical functions of evaluations for decision making seem to be insignificant. In this debate different explanations to this situation is put forward, for example problems with methods, design feasibility and/or the role of the evaluators. Other explanations presented are the lack of competence within organisations in making evaluations useful (Åberg 1997). The conclusion that can be drawn is that we are only in the beginning of developing evaluative methodology; which is not surprising, since "evaluation" is a fairly new concept applied within science.

One methodology developed within the European Union which can be seen as an evaluative tool is the use of "thematic working groups" in different programmes. The thematic working groups are a more direct way of disseminating good practice and contributing with experiences for the new programmes initiated.

This paper describes the first step in the creation of an interactive evaluation method which responds to the bottom-up demands in the European projects, a methodology which makes it possible to evaluate processes which has been initiated and developed within a project, both in relation to the participants, the target group and the local community. Our framework is the increasing interest for the theory-driven and constructivist approach to evaluation, where evaluation is seen as a useful tool for learning, change and development and as an integrated part of the project work; an actor-oriented approach. Evaluation is seen as a part of a development process, rather than an instrument for control. By focusing on the processes, on the conditions in which the project operates and on the importance of

engaging the participants in the evaluation, we get evaluation results not for the files, but for the project development.

Methodology to be Handled with Care

Before the final discussion of how and if the methodology tested at the Copenhagen workshop could be transferred to other contexts, we would like to highlight some of its central aspects.

Although this method at first glance could seem "easy" to use, this kind of workshop could not be conducted without a trained guide, a process leader. It must be noticed that it requires specific training and practise to become an effective group facilitator. The fact that each participant presents his or her own case story, a written material from their own work, which will be "judged" in some way by themselves and/or by the other participants, causes stress. The process leader has to focus on creating an open atmosphere and basic trust in the group. He or she must have the ability to use the "judgement" in a positive way, facilitating a creative learning process.

The environment offered and the open climate of the Copenhagen workshop made it possible for the participants to open up and describe both failures and successes in their work. In this way the method offered opportunities for giving a deeper evaluation of the projects as well as of the transnational co-operation. The participants did not feel threatened by an external evaluator, which is often the case.

As pointed out by several researchers, there is a need of different methodologies for evaluating the projects within the ESF. The methodology presented in this paper would preferably be used in conjunction with other methods.

Another issue brought up within the framework of evaluation research is the criticism regarding the focus on methodology, especially in connection with using evaluation as a tool for empowerment (VanderPlaat 1995):

"The arguments put forward that the tension between the aspirations of empowerment-oriented interventions and traditional evaluation practices need to be examined from the perspective of discourse rather than methodology or technique"(page 67)

"How the social problem is articulated and how one describes or measures what occurs within an interventionary site is shaped and constrained by the capacities of the evaluative discourse being used (page 82)

If we only focus on evaluation methods without reflecting upon the basis for these methods, there is a risk that we are searching for *"the right answer to the wrong questions"*. There is a need for development of evaluation models containing a critical reflective potential in relationship to the context.

Application in Other Contexts

The workshop was an attempt to take a step toward developing a prototype of cross cultural learning about what happens in a dialogue and in particular (in this case) what the defining elements are in such a process which makes it an effective encounter between staff and participants, project leader and staff and project leaders and stakeholders. This was also exemplified during the workshop due to the different case stories presented; the stories focusing dialogues between project workers and individual participants, with the target group, with the project staff and in collaborating with other regional partners.

In terms of the methodology presented at the workshop, the model with case stories seems to be transferable to other contexts. In terms of learning from the stories, both learning from one's own story, by writing it down and reflecting upon it, it became clear that this could be a method for self-assessment as well as a methodology used together with an external evaluator close to the project.

The methodology could be used within different kinds of partnerships, and we would like to especially highlight three areas; decision groups for European programmes, transnational and local partnerships.

Decision Groups for European Programmes

To select projects, in the framework of transnational programmes such as Employment or in regional programmes such as Objective 6, puts high demands on the different decision groups. How can these groups evaluate the innovation, the bottom-up perspective, the partnership and so on in these projects? Gathering people from different decision groups, letting them present stories from their own work and reflect upon them, both describing successes and failures to make the "right" judgement, would increase their knowledge and their ability to evaluate both current and new projects within respective programme. Using the methodology described would create a forum for bringing up for difficult judgement, cases and difficult meetings with project promotor.

Transnational Partnerships

In the Copenhagen workshop the project workers brought stories describing meetings linked to their own project rather than meetings within the transnational networking. And already at the workshop some of the participants was interested in conducting a similar activity bringing to the workshop cases from their transnational work. That would mean planning, developing and evaluating the work within transnational partnerships by describing different stories from the transnational arena. This would lead to a better understanding of the multicultural aspects and the conditions in different countries participating. It would enable promotors to be able to make better use of the "transnational" content of the project work. The transfer of methods and results from one partner to another would be facilitated. Using this methodology within these partnerships could also prepare project workers, especially new ones, for "relationships" on the transnational arena.

Local Partnerships

The evaluation of the first round of Employment projects showed that it is necessary to focus on the local partnerships and empowerment of the target group (Employment/Integra April 1997). Using the methodology for evaluating the work within a local partnership connected to a transnational project would lead to several positive effects: development of a common view on the project where all partners are committed to the project and where they share responsibilities and a better anchoring of the project locally. The representatives of the local partnerships could bring stories describing meetings both with other stakeholders, project leaders and participants within the local project work.

Further Development of the Methodology

The methodology used at the workshop in Copenhagen is one example of a way to pinpointing the central themes for evaluation within a project and a programme. Further development of this method and others is called for, methods where the participants have the opportunity to put their own words and meaning to the objectives of their projects as well as to the Employment programme. Through the dialogue at the workshop, participants found common approaches, a common framework, which could be transferred to the program level of Employment.

A network of experienced project workers, who have been trained on the methodology developed, should be able to conduct similar workshops, which seems the natural way of transferring the methodology to other European projects.

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