



FinD It

Transnational Cooperation

PENTOS - Italy

PeB – Germany

Adaptor - Finland

Evaluation Report

October 2007



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION - THE OBJECTIVES OF TRANSNATIONAL EVALUATION.....	2
1. CONTEXT.....	4
1.1 COMMUNITY INITIATIVE PROGRAMME EQUAL	4
1.2 FIND IT TRANSNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP	5
2. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY.....	9
3. THE TCA.....	11
3.1 RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVES	15
3.2 WORK PROGRAMME AND WORKING METHODOLOGY.....	17
4. THE MANAGEMENT PROCESS	21
5. TYPOLOGY AND DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES	25
5.1 WORKSHOPS AND CONFERENCES.....	25
5.2 STAFF EXCHANGES	40
6. COMMUNICATION AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES.....	44
7. CONCLUSIONS.....	49
7.1 LESSONS LEARNT – IT TAKES TIME TO FIND A COMMON BASIS TO WORK ON	50
7.2 WEAKNESSES AND STRENGTHS OF FIND IT – DIVERSITY IS THE KEY.....	51
7.3 DREAMS AND IDEAS FOR FUTURE COOPERATION – LEARNING TOGETHER	52

ANNEXES

1. MONITORING QUESTIONNAIRE FOR WORKSHOPS (1)
2. MONITORING QUESTIONNAIRE FOR WORKSHOPS (2)
3. EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE (WG)
4. EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE (MG)
5. LOGICAL FRAMEWORK
6. TCA

Introduction - The objectives of transnational evaluation¹

The European Union has been promoting social inclusion in the European labour markets through the Community Initiative Programme EQUAL, which has been designed to help development and testing of new ways of tackling discrimination and inequality. EQUAL is funded by the European Social Fund and is implemented in the Member States in 2001-2006.

FinD It was a transnational development partnership, which was established by three national Development Partnerships belonging to Finland, Germany and Italy. The general objective of the partnership was defined to be development of new and innovative ways of supporting social inclusion and empowerment of marginalised groups.

The monitoring and evaluation of FinD It transnational cooperation was a great occasion to get deeply into the project through the analysis of data collected during the cooperation process, and an opportunity to share with all the participants fruitful information and ideas for updating work programme and methodology. It has been a governing instrument of the project, really useful for the identification of successes and problems met during project implementation.

This report deals with the evaluation of the process, activities and outcomes of the transnational partnership FinD It. The aim of this work is to make an assessment, as systematic and objective as possible, of FinD It project, in order to determine how and to which extent the results of transnational cooperation were achieved and the objectives fulfilled, and to measure the effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact of the project.

The report consists of 7 chapters. The first introduces shortly data on Equal programme and FinD It partnership, thus presenting the context to be evaluated. The second describes the evaluation methodology. The third chapter introduces data on the Transnational Cooperation Agreement and its evaluation. The fourth and fifth chapters are concerned with the description of the organization and operative setting and managing of FinD It cooperation process, and gives details on how the project was perceived among its participants. The sixth illustrates communication's outputs and means and the seventh is related to the conclusions.

¹ Principles from "EQUAL Guide on Transnationality". Chapter 9 (Monitoring & Evaluating Transnationality). Pages 38-42. European Commission (2001).

1. Context

This chapter introduces shortly the context of evaluation. It starts with the background and objectives of the Community Initiative Programme EQUAL and turns then to the transnational partnership FinD It.

1.1 Community Initiative Programme EQUAL

EQUAL Community Initiative is a laboratory for new ideas and an experimental programme aimed to foster the European Employment Strategy (EES) and the Social inclusion process. Its mission is to promote a more inclusive work life through fighting discrimination and exclusion based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. It works along nine different themes directly related to the 10 guidelines of the European Employment Strategy, acting on:

- encouraging innovation / demonstration / validation of new approaches and policy delivery mechanisms;
- facilitating sharing of good practice and transferring lessons learnt to decision makers and practitioners;
- supporting transnational collaboration and exchange of experience thereby strengthening the European dimension of employment and inclusion;
- supporting collaboration of key actors and stakeholders around a common strategy and action plan that empowers them.

EQUAL is implemented in and between Member States and is funded through the European Social Fund. It runs from 2001 to 2006 and it exists in order to create and fund **innovative approaches** to local, national and European labour market policy issues. The main point is to develop and test ideas, and then to transfer innovation and useful experiences into policy and practice. This includes transferring solutions, methodologies or approaches from one setting to another and to improve the effectiveness of policy or practice.

EQUAL is different from other current programmes and initiatives because it integrates national-level innovation with transnational collaboration and exchange of good practice through its Development Partnerships (DPs). These are new strategic partnerships with wide representation of organizations from all sectors interested in DPs aims and objectives. This kind of partnership undertakes further innovation, joint development work and targeted dissemination with other partners in Europe.² EQUAL programme is divided into three actions: Action 1 is developmental; Action 2 is the programme delivery phase; and Action 3 concentrates on mainstreaming the experiences of Action 1 and 2. Each DP is a member of a Transnational Co-operation Partnership formed with DPs from other EU Member States. Transnational partnerships are created during Action 1 and develop an additional work plan of transnational activities that takes place during Action 2. This is supported by a common Transnational Cooperation Agreement (TCA) signed by all partners concerned.

1.2 **FinD It Transnational Partnership**

FinD It is the acronym of the Transnational Partnership created by three EQUAL Development Partnerships (DP) operating in Mikkeli (**Finland**), Hildesheim (**Deutschland**) and Sassari (**Italy**) under the EQUAL Initiative. All of them dealt with the theme of “employability”. German and Finnish DPs operated mostly on a municipal level, while Italian DP was working on a widely provincial area. FinD It transnational cooperation was mainly meant to find out new ways to fight social and working exclusion, fostering the exchange of best practices among the three countries involved.

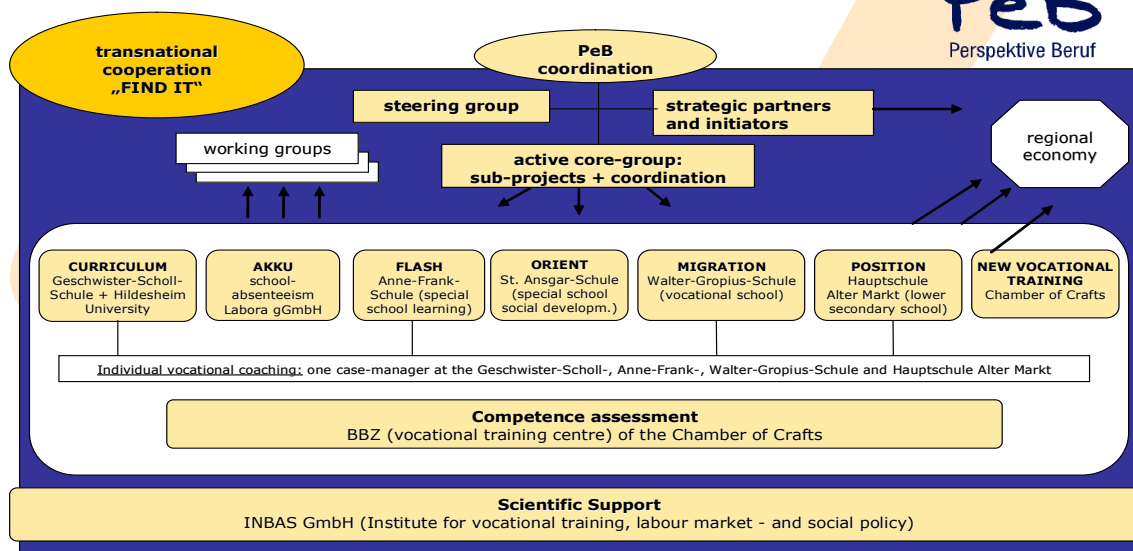
FinD It transnational cooperation was made by three projects:

- **PeB – Perspektive Beruf**, Hildesheim – Germany
- **ADAPTOR**, Mikkeli – Finland
- **PENTOS**, Sassari – Italy

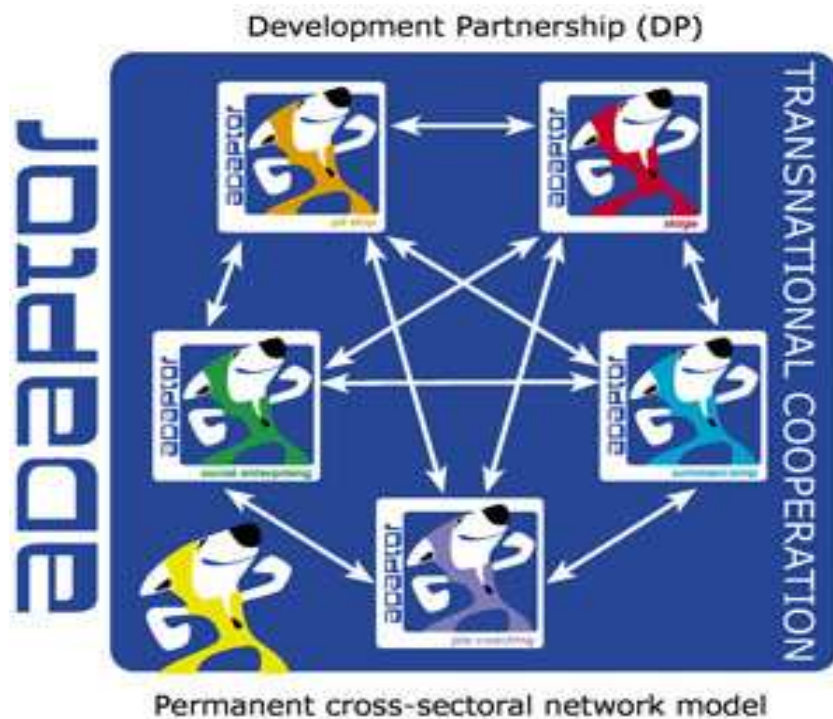
² See *EQUAL Guide on Transnational Cooperation 2004 -2008*, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg 2005 – p. 7.

PeB - The development partnership *PeB* is a network of nine projects. Target groups are young people studying in the German lower secondary education schools, who are at risk of exclusion from vocational education and training systems, and who are disadvantaged both socially and educationally. The objectives of PeB DP were to increase the educational opportunities available, and to decrease youth unemployment through a preventive approach of vocational preparation at schools, as well as to harmonise the operations of different institutions and authorities in the Hildesheim region. A special focus lied also on the social and vocational integration of young people with migration background.

PeB - organisation chart



ADAPTOR - *Adaptor* is a project, made of 5 subprojects, aimed to develop a model for labour force service centres and a service network. Through development and trials, Adaptor produced a permanent cross-sectoral network model which combines sharing customers, resources and objectives. *Adaptor's* intent was to facilitate access to labour market for those people having difficulties in finding their place on the labour market by strengthening their competences and life management skills.



PENTOS - The project has been operative in the northern area of Sardinia, characterized by a remarkable problem of unemployment. Strategic long-term actions were meant to develop a permanent system for preventing exclusion by acting on the territory and building local development agencies. PENTOS project - whose partnership was composed by local Public Administrations, no-profit organizations and trade associations - focused on monitoring social disadvantages and developing strategies of social inclusion, by fostering system-building in the fields of coaching and vocational training. The most relevant activity consisted in the organization of vocational courses and stages for persons risking social exclusion.



2. Evaluation methodology

Monitoring and evaluation processes have an essential role in granting an efficacious management of the partnership, possible results, and the improvement of practices to adopt in the future. They are necessary tools ensuring quality and effectiveness for both national strategies and activities and for the transnational cooperation. They also help to assess the benefits of transnational partnership as it develops, and to support planned dissemination activities and their impacts. Evaluation's activities are really important, especially if we consider the innovative and experimental feature of EQUAL initiative, aimed to single out operative models transferable in other contexts.

Project's evaluation is usually made through a process of acquiring elements that permit to test - on the basis of indicators, questionnaires and interviews with individuals involved in the project - the achievement of goals and the effectiveness of actions brought ahead. In general terms, evaluation is concerned with assessing:

- **the quality** - planning, management and execution of the activities
- **the value** - the cooperation and the transnational programme contributed to local or regional policies and practices, which is to say, it had generated an added value
- **the importance of the activity** - the transnational partnership has been successful and significant, both in terms of making a substantial contribution to DP's overall strategy, and in terms of delivering positive impacts

The methodology applied for the evaluation of FinD It partnership was agreed within the Management Group³. The process of evaluation was meant to provide instruments for analysis, monitoring and evaluation of methodologies, actions and products useful to fight social exclusion and to promote the integration of disadvantaged people.

Monitoring instruments used within FinD It partnership are mostly of quantitative type (recording of numerical data relating to realized initiatives, grade and size of participation to different actions and events by beneficiaries). Submission of questionnaires is the most

³ For the organization of FinD It Partnership see p. 16-17.

important instrument of evaluation, or at least the most direct, which grants anonymity and provides immediate answers. Reports focus particularly on the evaluation of the activities made by the actors of the project and on FinD It logical framework (see annexe).

The evaluation criteria used are those suggested by the European Commission, to whom the current report is partly addressed. The interest of this work lies mainly in the detailed description of the issues at the basis of the project logical framework and, consequently, of its evaluation. The main points to be analysed, in order to evaluate FinD It cooperation, are concerning:

- **Relevance** – It is important to estimate if FinD It objectives were appropriate to the problems that it was supposed to address, and to the geographical and cultural environments within which it operated. The need of the present work is to evaluate if the planning process and the logic and coherence of the project design were suitable and complete.
- **Efficiency** – It is relevant to evaluate if the project results were achieved at reasonable costs and to define how well working means have been transformed into activities. It would be useful to consider alternative approaches in order to achieve the same results, so to see whether the most efficient process has been adopted.
- **Effectiveness** – This evaluation criterion is referring to the benefits effectively felt by the beneficiaries of the activities. FinD It transnational cooperation is in fact meant to increase the possibilities for target groups of entering into the labour market.
- **Impact** – This point focuses on the evaluation of the possible and measurable impact of the project on its wider environment and its contribution to the development of policies for the inclusion of disadvantaged people and the creation of network services and support system.
- **Sustainability** – This evaluation criterion is really important to assess the likelihood of benefits produced by the project to continue after the end of FinD It life-cycle.

3. The TCA

The **TCA** (Transnational Cooperation Agreement)⁴ was the result of the successful research of partners, made through the help of the EQUAL Common Database (**ECDB**) and the establishment of contacts during Action 1. It was the time when the ground was set for reciprocal trust and overall purpose sharing and when the task and role of each partner was defined. TCA, which is still the most relevant document concerning transnational cooperation, committed partners to collaborate in areas of common interests, to share resources and know-how and disseminate results. Moreover, it defined partnership's structure, strategy and activities and formed a basis for resolving potential problems and conflicts among partners. It was signed on the 17th of March 2005, and is divided into:

I. Rationale and Objectives

- Common interests, methodology and underlying problems
- Lessons learned from previous relevant actions
- Common objectives of the DPs
- Products/deliverable foreseen
- Added value on the strategy and intended results of each of the DPs involved

II. Work Programme & Working Methodology

- Transnational activities foreseen (**a.** Overall transnational strategy; **b.** Typology of activities; **c.** Description of the activities/tasks)
- Methodology for sharing information, results, working tools and their description
- Time schedule for milestones, outcomes and events

III. Financial Provisions

- Breakdown of budget for each activity
- Arrangements for cost sharing and avoiding double funding

IV. Organisational and Decision Making Arrangements

- Contribution and responsibility of each DP
- Role and tasks of the Transnational Secretariat and external expertise
- Arrangements for decision-making

V. Monitoring and Evaluation Procedures

- Mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating of transnational experience and results
- Mechanisms for updating work programme, working methodology and organisational arrangements

⁴ See annexe 6

During the whole process of transnational cooperation there has been an underlying relevant question concerning the TCA: was it made – and was it possible to make a TCA at that time - taking into right consideration the differences of each DP, differences related to financial provisions, DP structures, target groups? Looking at the index of the TCA it is evident that there are all the elements that must be evaluated in order to measure the real impact and success of FinD It project.

Breakdown of budget⁵

	FINLAND	ITALY	GERMANY
1. Conferences	62.000,- €	24.000,- €	43.000,- €
2. Workshops	41.000,- €	15.000,- €	22.000,- €
3. Exchange of staff, experts and trainees/	119.000,- €	7.000,- €	10.000,- €
4. Administration	72.000,- €	20.000,- €	20.000,- €
5. Dissemination	36.000,- €	0	0
6. Evaluation	0	6.483,- €	0
7. Transnational Secretariat	0	0	30.000,- €
TOTAL	330.000,- €	72.483,- €	125.000,- €

Another issue was strictly related to financial provisions attributed to each national DP. A question related to the correspondence between costs and efforts spent on Find It partnership was included in the Evaluation Questionnaire addressed to the Management Group. The following table (Table 1) shows how this matter was perceived:

Table 1 – How do you rate cost/effort compared with usefulness of transnational cooperation?

	Very high	High	Normal	Low	Very low
Cost/effort vs usefulness of transnational cooperation		5	2		

⁵ The financial provision firstly accorded to the Italian DP was of € 55.000,00, but considered the larger need of resources in order to fulfil the scheduled objectives, the budget was revised in August 2007.

As it is clear, for most of the members of the Management Group the cost and effort of FinD It cooperation - which is to say not only the amount of money spent, but also working hours or communication requirements - was felt to be quite high compared to its usefulness. This is probably due to the fact that processes involving transnationality's issues are really expensive from a cost-oriented perspective, even if they are fruitful as for their outcomes.

The following table (Table 2) partly shows how the TCA, and its making process, was perceived among members of the Management Group towards the end of FinD It project⁶. It is evident that all partners were quite disappointed with the preliminary "getting ready" actions - required in order to apply in time for EQUAL funding - that led to the creation of FinD It partnership, while they were rather satisfied with the development and management of working plans, events and meetings, which are to be considered as factors directly developed by DPs "at work".

Table 2 - Starting from your experience within FIND IT steering and organizational process, evaluate the following topics related to the whole management system, from the writing of the TCA to now.

	Very good	Good	Sufficient	Middling	Insufficient
Identification and selection of partners	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	2	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
Negotiation of the TCA among partner	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	3	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
Development and management of working plans	1	5	1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Monitoring and evaluation of transnational activities	1	3	3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Organization and management of events and meetings	1	6	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Organization and management of communication	2	3	2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The comparably low mark assigned to the points strictly relating to the TCA is partly explained by the following comments:

- *“Language difficulties caused some misunderstandings in the beginning, which became clear only during the process of cooperating. There is not much time for selection of*

⁶ This table is included in the Evaluation Questionnaire (See annexe 4) submitted towards the end of the cooperation process to the members of the Management Group of FinD It Partnership (See following p. 16). One of its seven members didn't answer to the first two questions because during the phases asked about she wasn't working within FinD It yet.

partners and the selection is based on very general and sometimes not understandable information in the ECDB (Equal Common Data Base)“

- *“Choosing partners’ phase was too short. You need a longer time to find and get to know suitable partners”*
- *“Organizational and budget arrangements were not equate with each DP’s different allocation of funds and availability of working persons”*

The following table (Table 3) highlights the divergence of perception of the TCA among partners. Even if on the whole they were quite satisfied with the cooperation process and its results, some of them noticed that financial disparities were affecting particularly their DP’s performances and joint transnational activities. Participation to staff exchanges, considered the positive learning effect widely felt by FinD It participants, was the kind of activity more negatively influenced by the lack of funds.

Table 3 - There were disparities in transnational budgets. To which extent did this affect...

	Very much	Much	Enough	A little	Not at all
...your DP performances?	3	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
...joint transnational activities?	1	4	2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
...organization of workshops and conferences?	1	2	2	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
...involvement of each DP’s working groups?	2	2	1	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
...participation to staff exchanges?	7	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
...promotional activities?	2	2	3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Anyway all DPs were strongly committed with the achievement of FinD It goals. The TCA, in its part referring to *Common interests, methodology and underlying problem*, says that “the common plan is to build up networks that remove disparities and disadvantages in educational processes and thus establishes new forms of cooperation, coordination and partnership between the relevant institutions”. In this sentence is summarised the overall objective of FinD It.

3.1 Rationale and Objectives

According to the TCA *“the common interest of the partnership lies in the target group of young people who are at risk of social exclusion and who have difficulties integrating in educational processes and – as consequence of that – in the labour market. Especially disadvantaged target groups are to be supported and (re)integrated in educational processes by the implementation of innovative concepts”*⁷.

Therefore the common objective of the partnership was to develop sustainable service network structures and support systems while preventing school absenteeism, enhancing transition from school to vocational training and finally to the labour market. Concepts that pay attention to the situation of people with special needs were part of each partner’s activities. Furthermore measures to promote EQUAL opportunities and diversity were emphasized.

To provide this kind of support and ensure its quality it has been necessary to bring together all relevant authorities and organizations that work with the target groups. All the DPs had learnt from previous experiences that project partners who work together in multidisciplinary teams on fundamental problems can use synergies and arise a richer pattern of knowledge. The exchange of information, experiences, methods and concepts, at a European level, was by the way helped by the multidisciplinary character of each DP.

Nonetheless doubts were raised regarding mostly the question of how and to which extent the structural diversity of DPs involved in FinD It cooperation process might have affected the latter. The Italian DP was made by a large partnership - involving the *no profit* sector (the organization leading the DP is a consortium of social cooperatives), local authorities, and trade associations – cooperating as a network on each single phase of PENTOS project. PeB and ADAPTOR DPs were both organized as network of subprojects, mostly involving educational and vocational public and private services, all contributing, with different tasks, to the same overall objective.

⁷ See annexe 6

When asked about DPs structures and management, and specifically if they were suitable to the attainments of transnational cooperation, Management Group's members answered in different or opposite ways:

- *"Yes, they were absolutely suitable! Subprojects weren't a problem"*
- *"I didn't see any problem there. The idea of transnational coordinators for each subproject was good for the beginning and also our own management guideline to try and have mainly the same persons in working groups was very helpful. Otherwise a real process isn't possible"*
- *"No, they weren't suitable. Italian DP has at its disposal limited human and financial resources to be able to manage the process at its best. Others DPs are surely helped also by the subdivision of their project into subprojects"*
- *"FinD It Partnership was made by too strongly different DPs. Italian DP was "crowded" with local authorities while guided by a no-profit organization, and German and Finnish DPs were more ready to give immediate answers and/or solutions thanks to a "lighter" organization"*
- *"No, it wasn't suitable. It was difficult for involved persons to participate at all meetings, also because their role and their work in PENTOS and FinD It was neither clear enough, nor defined or paid"*

As for different target groups to whom each national DP was addressed, and to which extent these differences might have affected the transnational process, various opinions have been also recorded:

- *"I think that all projects have the same problem to solve. If we deeply think about entering working life and education, all the target groups meet the same problems. Personalisation and individual support are needed, as we noticed in our transnational cooperation"*
- *"Differences have not affected too much the process, because of the kind of working groups. Most of the developing methods are useful for each target group"*

- *“Other kinds of development work and better involvement of other practitioners would have been possible, if target groups had been more similar. But on the whole I think the exchange worked very well on a higher level even with different target groups”*
- *“Differences have been overwhelmed by the good will of members of working groups”*
- *“Differences recorded as for the age or the social and cultural backgrounds of the target groups made difficult to find common criteria and concepts that should inform policies, methods and supporting measures”*
- *“The process was focused on activities with very different target groups”*

The following table shows to which extent, for the members of the Management Group, target groups differences may have affected the transnational process, and confirms the different feelings towards diversities registered within the three DPs.

0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
□	1	1	2	1	□	□	1	1	□	□

3.2 Work Programme and Working Methodology

The length of FinD It partnership has been of 30 months, from March 2005 to September 2007, but the time schedule for milestones, outcomes and events was regarding a period from November 2005 – when the starter conference was held in Hildesheim - and September 2007, when the Final Conference was held in Mikkeli. Working activities were so organized:

- **Management Group** - Each DP had 2 or 3 representatives within FinD It Management Group, who were transnational coordinators. The Management Group acted as a “steering committee”, monitoring the implementation of the transnational working plan, the use of common budget. Transnational coordinators had also the responsibility to inform the members of national partnerships on transnational activities.

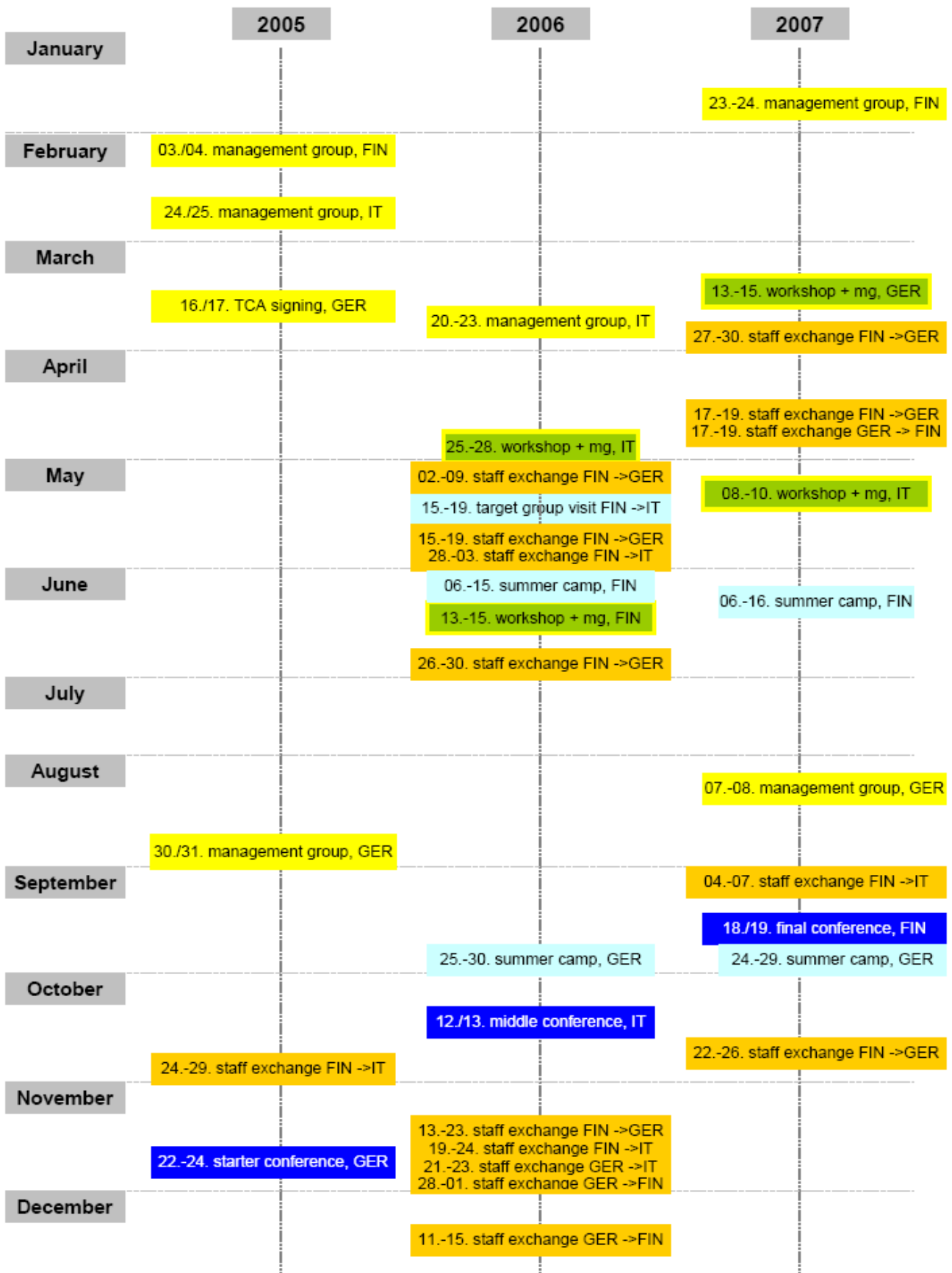
- **Working Groups and Workshops** - Thematic and practical approach has been carried out by three thematic Working Groups, who took part in the 4 workshops held in the 3 countries. Workshops were meant to discuss relevant topics, exchange information, analyse common problems and develop innovative strategies, methods and products.
- **Conferences** – Three conferences were organized during the whole Transnational Cooperation process. The starter conference was held in Hildesheim, where topics for working groups and workshops were chosen. The purpose of the conferences was to present the results of transnational cooperation and to provide and exchange information on key issues through the collaboration of experts.
- **Exchange of staff and trainees** – To ensure a more intense grade of cooperation a work exchange of staff, experts and trainees has been organized too. The duration of visits and the number of participants were variable, according to financial provisions of each DP (Italian DP PENTOS, because of the shortage of its budget, didn't send anybody).
- **Dissemination** – Each DP created a transnational website with links to other partner website, updated on a regular basis. DP PENTOS has provided its own website for the exchange of information and communication (reports and summaries of workshops' results). A guidebook on the whole transnational cooperation process served as mainstreaming and dissemination tool. It includes results, analysis and recommendations: DP ADAPTOR was responsible for publishing the guide⁸.
- **Evaluation** – PENTOS was responsible for continuous monitoring and evaluation, oriented to context and to objectives. Evaluation work includes also the writing and editing of the final report. Each DP has provided the information needed, while the contents and methodology were agreed on in the Management Group.

⁸ See Laura Kuismala (ed.), *FinD It – Transnational Cooperation – Supporting employment and integration*, Oswald Interkopio Oy, Mikkeli (Finland), 2007.

- **Transnational Secretariat** – DP PeB has been responsible of transnational coordination and secretariat. The responsibility of the secretariat was to finish the TCA and to guarantee that all the necessary information were shared between the transnational partners. Furthermore the transnational secretariat developed transnational work programme in conjunction with all partners and ensured the adequate information and communication between the partners.

The work programme is described on the timeline below, which is the effective one, slightly different from that planned at the beginning of the project. Despite some organizational problem, the timing of the working programme has been respected.

FIND IT – TIMELINE 2005-2007



4. The management process

The organization of the transnational process was granted by the Management Group, whose meetings were usually held contemporarily to workshops, but also, in few occasions, during specially appointed gatherings (See timeline above). Communication was carried out through different means, but mostly by e-mail (Table 4). This result is quite different from that recorded for the same question asked to the members of working groups⁹. In that case, due mostly to a lack of English language problem, the most used way of communicating has resulted to be “face to face meetings”.

Table 4 - By which means of communication was transnational cooperation carried out?

	Mainly	Often	Enough	Seldom	Not al all
Phone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	4	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
E- mail	7	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other internet communication means (Messenger, Skype)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	1	6	<input type="checkbox"/>
Face to face meeting	2	4	1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Documents on PENTOS website	<input type="checkbox"/>	1	1	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other means	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The Management Group has been varying few times, depending on the turn over of officials or persons in charge of the transnational steering task, and was composed by 7/9 persons. It has occurred, to PENTOS DP, to change its local managing group between December 2005 and February 2006, a circumstance which has stopped and affected for a while the almost newborn partnership and caused a delay on detecting and selecting social workers interested and well versed in transnational cooperation.

The partnership was anyway well planned and managed, thanks mostly to the German DP, who was concerned with the Transnational Secretariat and surely represented the mainstay of transnational cooperation from the point of view of information and sharing communication among partners. Members of the Management Group were asked, at the end of the process, to express their opinion on different topics concerning the cooperation process.

⁹ See the results coming from Evauation Questionnaire submitted to the members of Working Groups – p.43.

The results coming from the submission of the Evaluation Questionnaire specially made for the members of the Management Group are revealing different perspectives of the cooperation process, namely those concerning its real impact, its objectives and purposes, the steering system and structure. To the questionnaires have answered 7 women (2 GER/ 3 IT/ 2 FIN).

Table 5 - Did you notice an improvement of competences, methods and tools which has sorted out by FIND IT experience? To which extent?

	Very good	Good	Sufficient	Middling	Insufficient
Improvement of competences	3	1	2	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improvement of tools	1	3	3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improvement of methods	1	4	2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (specify):	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

There were different opinion regarding the improvement of methods, tools and competences (Table 5), but on the whole there's a quite high grade of satisfaction, especially for what is concerning methods. When asked about workers, partners and local authorities involved in DPs, namely about a possible "cultural growth" as for European policies, they have answered in many different way.

As for workers and personnel involved in DPs they note that:

- *"Feedback on transnational work was mainly positive. (...)Participants did see many positive learning effects in transnational work"*
- *"They learned things about measures in the field of social and employment policies and about EU Structural Funds"*
- *"(...)They have studied the European policies and the result of changing attitude is seen already"*
- *"They have learned how important is to acquire cross cultural competences. They also have seen, and admired, how efficient organizational contexts should work"*
- *"Some workers have started a process of international growth, but only a few of them recognized the importance of doing it by small steps"*

As for cooperation partners involved in each DP they add that:

- *“They have learned to pay attention to foreign attitude and working styles and have exchanged a remarkable amount of information useful to compare and test organizational methods”*
- *“Cooperation partners were able to participate to developments of transnational work and thus could see directly the benefits of it and the concrete implementation of EU policies”*

As for local authorities opinions are quite diversified, depending on each local environment, and on its political and administrative capabilities and efficiency: the evidence is that they are concerned – more or less deeply and with various approaches - with the development of EU dynamics and policies. The opinions expressed by the following statements are by the way quite opposite:

- *“The awareness of EU policy was raised by learning about different projects financed by ESF.(...) The link between EU and local topics became clearer, because transnational work made it obvious, that mainly countries are dealing with similar problems, but on the other hand local solutions need to be found. And that transnationality may help developing local solutions”*
- *“Local authorities still need to get more trustful towards transnational cooperation and more confident with the EU opportunities that such field of developing programmes may bring forth. Such an attitude would help to avoid also “diplomatic” misunderstandings and to create a cooperating atmosphere”*
- *“It is difficult to deal with the scepticism of local authorities. They are more focused on political roles than on problem solving”*

Looking at the next table (Table 6) it is evident that members of the Management Group were quite dissatisfied with “immaterial” results – such as finding common criteria for analysing best practices or developing *counselling and coaching* concepts - that are considered to be developed and tested on a long term perspective, while they were quite happy with concrete activities (workshops, conferences and staff exchanges).

Table 6– At which level were FinD It objectives scheduled in the TCA achieved?

	Very good	Good	Sufficient	Middling	Insufficient
Common criteria for analysing best practices and methods concerning youth unemployment and vocational training	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	4	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
Development of counselling and coaching concepts	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	4	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
Exchange of best practices	<input type="checkbox"/>	5	2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Linked websites	<input type="checkbox"/>	4	2	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
Thematic workshops	2	3	2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transnational conferences	<input type="checkbox"/>	6	1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff and trainers exchanges	3	3	1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

These feelings are partly explained by the following comments:

- *“The achievement of objectives was very good on the whole, if we take into account the starting situation (none of our DP subproject staff was experienced in transnational work). The development and discussion of common criteria was too high as a goal, because it involves a lot of very theoretical issues, which is difficult for language reasons. So the more practical approach of sharing and comparing methods, measures, etc. was the right one and less “frustrating””*
- *“To get better results on common criteria and concepts you need to make a previous research and analysis of systems (law – educational – vocational) of countries involved”*

5. Typology and description of activities

The organization and realization of activities was the main task of the transnational cooperation process, and consequently of the evaluation too. It was mostly through workshops and conferences that concrete cooperation was carried out and transnational partnership outcomes and products took shape. A relevant part within transnational cooperation was played by the staff and trainees exchanges: all members of working groups declared to have acquired a concrete idea of working methodologies used in countries partners after project visits.

Workshops were particularly meant to carry out the results of working groups. During each event evaluation questionnaires were submitted to participants, in order to see whether they were satisfied with activities or not, and, if necessary, to determine remedial actions. During time, DP PENTOS, accordingly with the Management Group, has changed slightly the format of the questionnaires (See annexes).

5.1 Workshops and Conferences

The **Starter Conference** (Hildesheim 22-24 November 2005) has been the first occasion, for all people taking active part to transnational cooperation, to get to know each other's projects and to get acquainted with FinD It objectives and working methodology. In particular the three countries' social and education systems were presented, and the thematic working groups were formed, according to the chosen topics:

1. **Coaching and counselling** – This group's main objective was "to support young and disadvantaged people to find their own resources to be a subject of their own life".
2. **Enterprises** – This group's main objective was to involve enterprises in processes aimed to integrate disadvantaged people in enterprises.
3. **Methods** - This group's main objective was to improve the work of social workers by using more efficient and innovative methods.

Each working group was guided by a chairmanship, made of 2 persons that had proved to be well versed in directing transnational tasks.

During the three-day conference/workshop around 40 persons took part to the activities and 30 of them answered to the questionnaire. Figures 1 and 2 report the grade of fulfilment of expectations and interests.

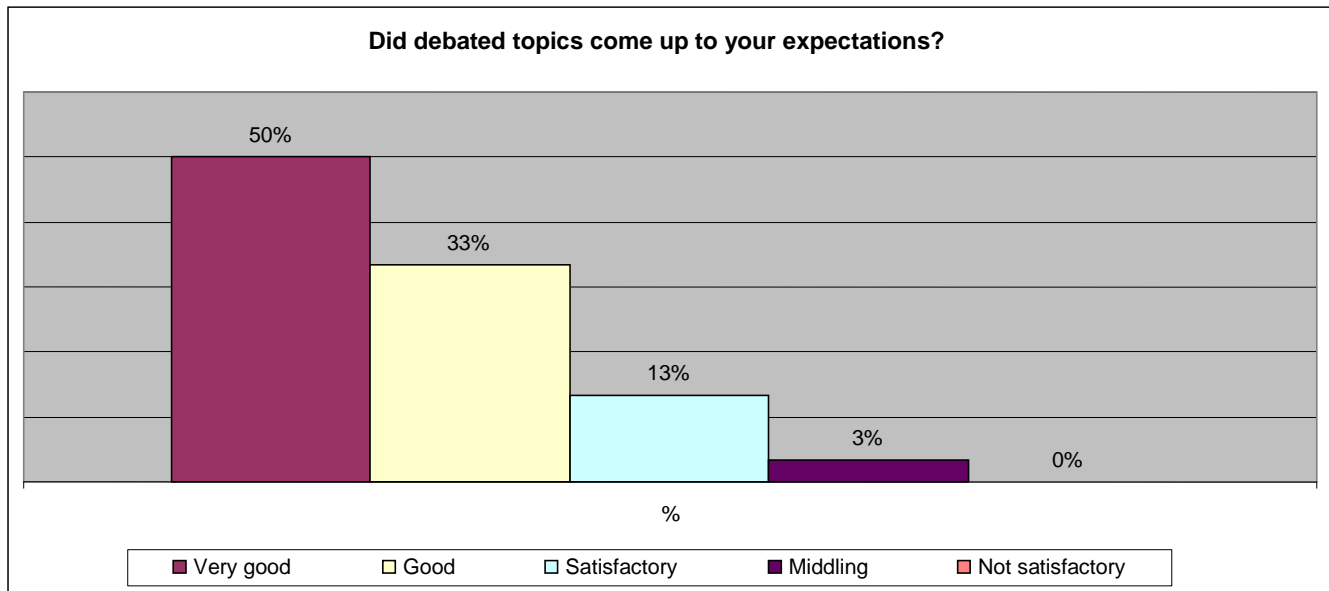


Figure 1– Hildesheim Starter Conference

The grade of satisfaction was quite high: only 13% of the participants found that treated topics were satisfactory, while most of them (83%) considered that they were good or even very good.

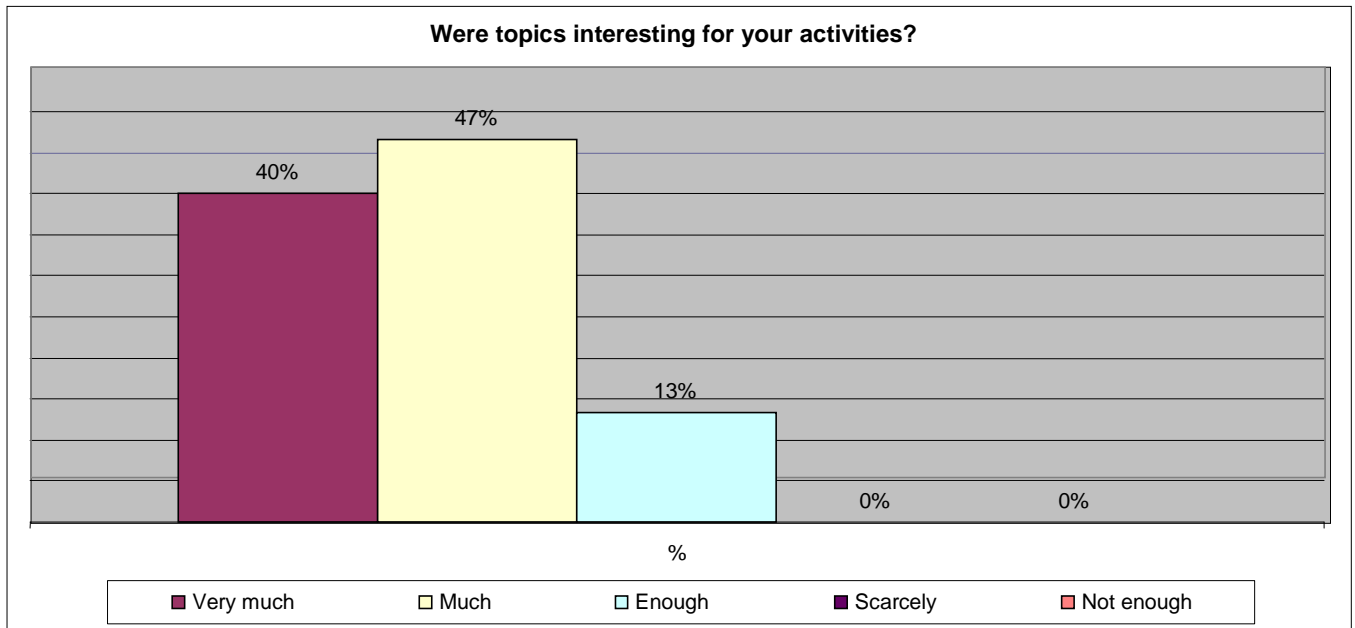


Figure 2 - Hildesheim Starter Conference

The results of the questionnaires telling about the connection between treated topics and activities usually carried out by participants within national projects are slightly different: 40% said that topics were very interesting, and 47% declared that they were “only” interesting. But the lowest result came from the question asking if participants had exhaustive answers to their questions (Fig. 3). A remarkable amount of people (30%) revealed that their doubts were scarcely clarified, but still most of participants (47%) had satisfying or very exhaustive answers. In fact there were always so many questions and so much information to be exchanged, that this result it is not to be considered so essential.

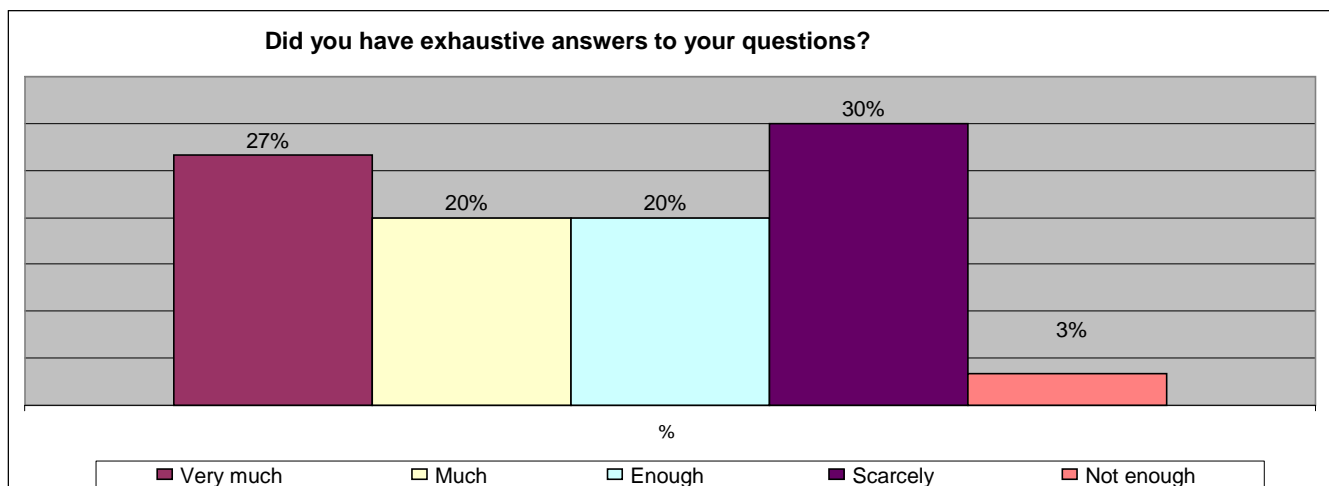


Figure 3 - Hildesheim Starter Conference

As for used methodologies the grade of satisfaction was really high (Fig.4): only 17% of participants found them “only” satisfactory.

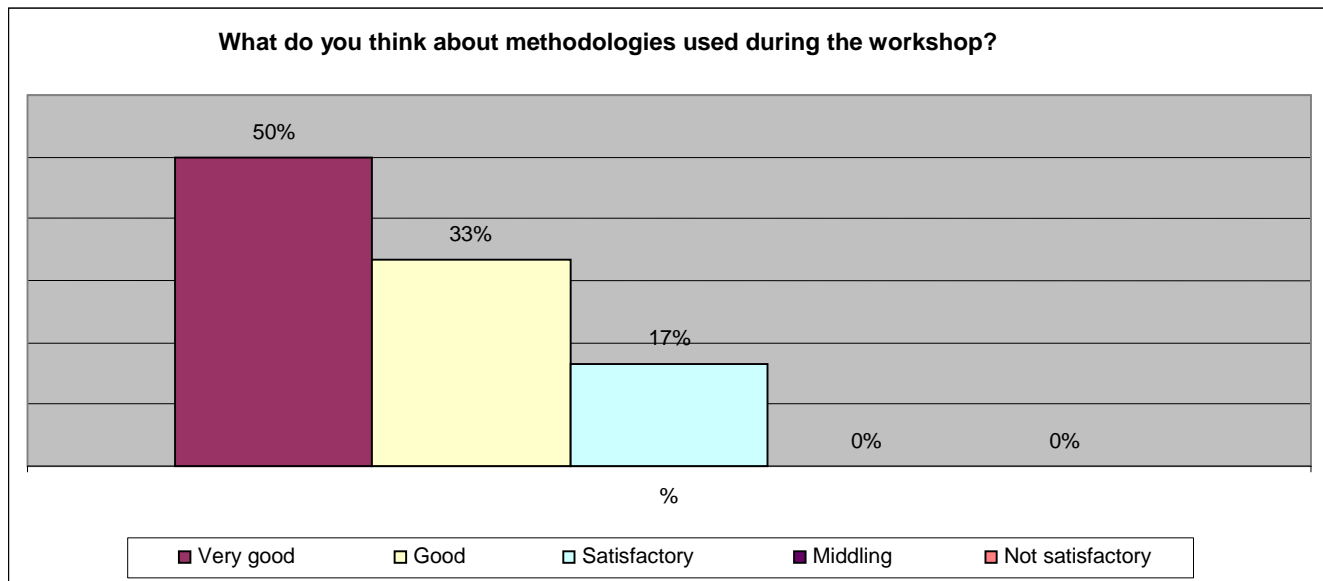


Figure 4 - Hildesheim Starter Conference

During the **First Workshop** (Fertilia 25-28 April 2006), nearby Sassari, some change was made to questionnaire’s format, previously agreed during the Management Group in Sassari (20-23 March 2006): participants were asked to specify sex and nationality, in order to highlight gender issues (female participation was much higher than the male) within transnational activities. Around 30 persons took part to the workshop and 28 answered to the questionnaire.

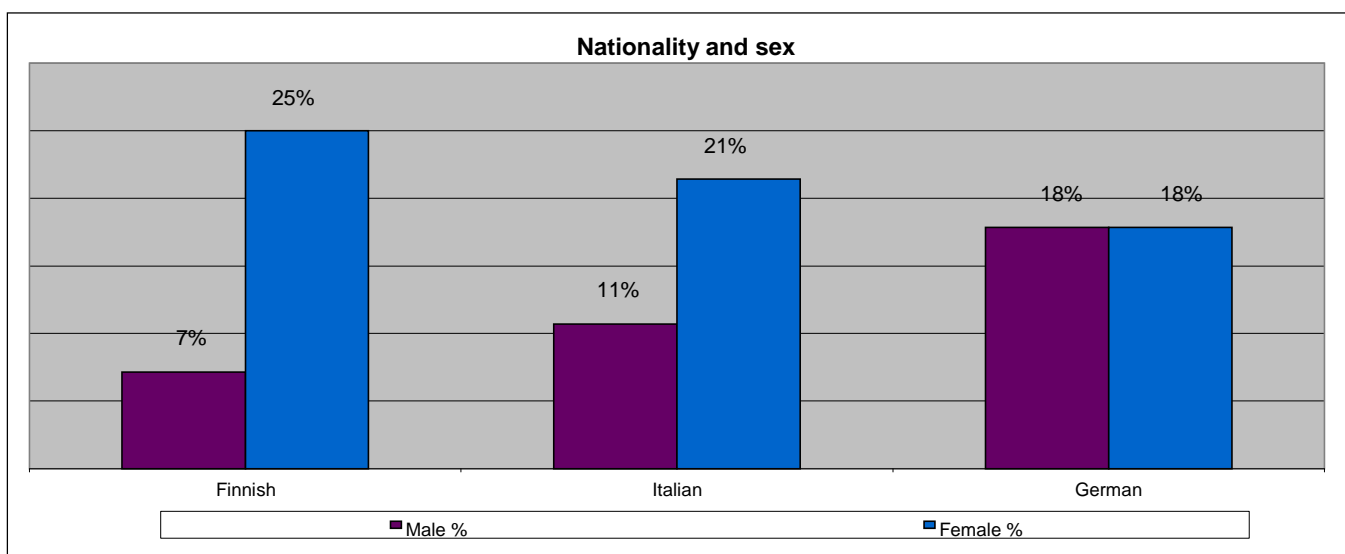


Figure 5 – Fertilia First Workshop

The First Workshop was an ice-breaking event, where people taking part to transnational activities got to be more familiar with each other. Italian members of the Management Group were just changed, because of their DP leading organization's turn over. This change caused some problem - especially for working plan - that was underlined in the notes of the questionnaires (*"The timetable and schedules didn't work" – "It would have been better to give more time to work within the working group and preparing a joint presentation"*).

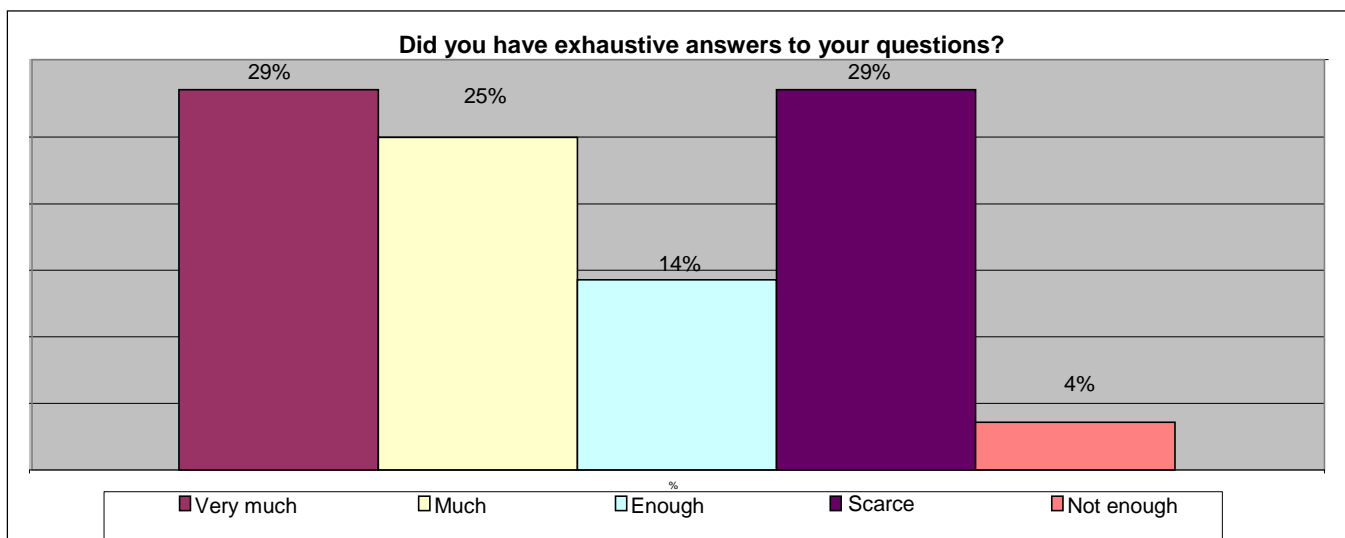


Figure 6 – Fertilia First Workshop

As we can see (Fig. 6) participants were divided in their opinion about the correspondence between interrogatives and answers: 29% of participants were respectively very much and scarcely satisfied. Nonetheless members of working groups had the chance to really start to cooperate together (*"In our working group the interesting thing was that we could discuss about really important and interesting things and exchange information socially relevant. Working within a working group is a really good method"*). All relevant topics were discussed during the Management Group's meeting, held parallel to the workshop, as usual.

The **Second Workshop** (Mikkeli 13-15 June 2006) has been particularly efficacious for the progress of working groups, and stood up for its methodological approach and the quality of accommodation and hospitality, meant to offer an informal way to get deeply in contact with the Finnish life-style. The discussions held within the Management Group meeting focused as usual on guidelines for working groups and on the organization of transnational

events and managing activities. The number of participants was around 40, while persons answering to the questionnaire were 31.

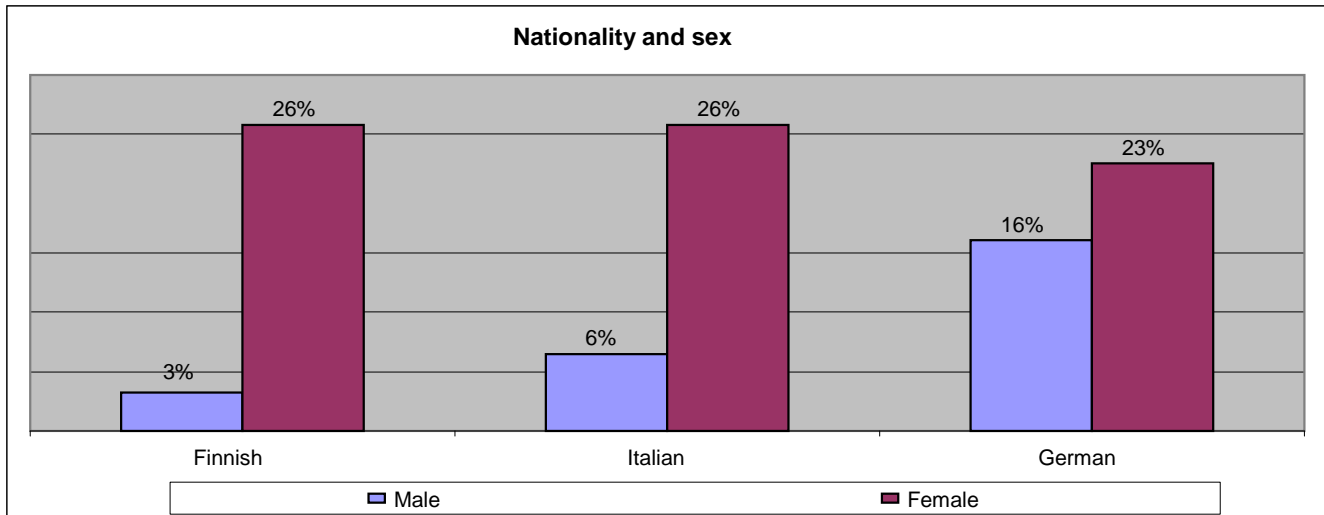


Figure 7 – Mikkeli Second Workshop

After the Workshop in April, the coordination has worked, among other things, also on the progress of the working group “Enterprises” – which revealed itself to be quite problematic because of the diversity of each national working background - so to introduce new working methods facilitating the process of this working group.

The chosen solution for the working groups was that each country picked up special projects or integration measures directly connected to enterprises. Nonetheless the results of the questionnaires are quite unsatisfactory as for the correspondence between questions aroused by transnational cooperation and related answers (Fig. 8).

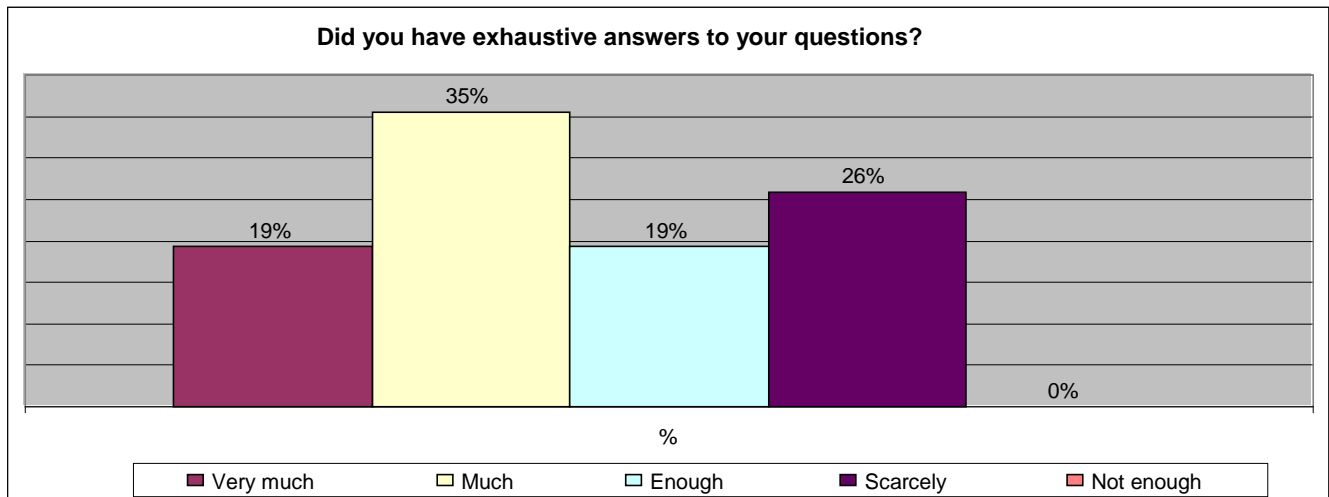


Figure 8 – Mikkeli Second Workshop

In spite of that people felt to have acquired a deeper knowledge, probably due to concrete and lively human experiences (Fig. 9).

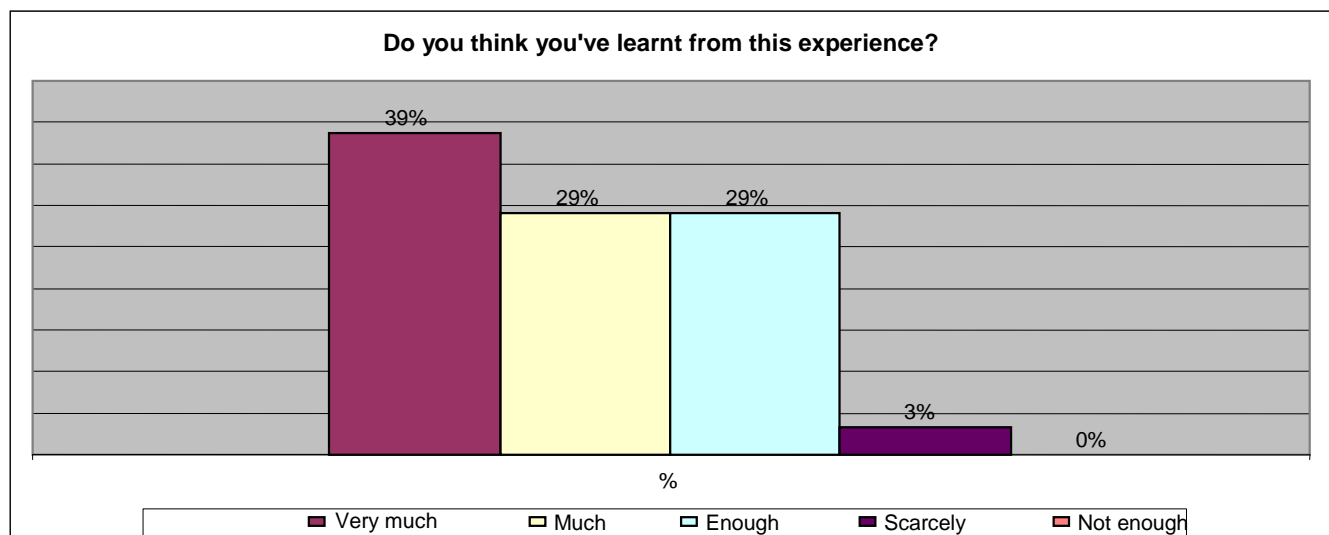


Figure 9 – Mikkeli Second Workshop

The **Middle Conference** (Sassari 12 – 13 October 2006) was a very important occasion to test DPs capacity of involving stakeholders. The first day of the conference was especially dedicated to present DP PENTOS and describe the practical experience of those people that support individuals belonging to categories at risk of social exclusion, taking care of their education and helping them to get included into the job market.

Experiences of professional social workers were recalled; furthermore, it was underlined how similar problems occur in the three countries, and it was stressed the

opportunity to search solutions both at a local and European level. The aims, tasks and results of working groups engaged within FinD It were described by their respective chairmen/women: reports on themes considered important for supporting target categories were presented, especially under the point of view of singling out best practices.

The second day was conceived as an updating workshop, so to allow partners, and all those interested in treated theme, to have a glance on European Community Strategic Guidelines for Cohesion 2007-2013, regarding Social Inclusion and Transnational Co-operation as well. In that occasion the questionnaire’s format was changed, so to highlight different aspects of transnational events (See annexes). On the whole around 80 persons attended the conference on both days, but the results of the questionnaires are referring only to 26 persons who constantly took part to the process of transnational cooperation. It is evident, looking at the following graphic (Fig. 10), that female participation was much higher.

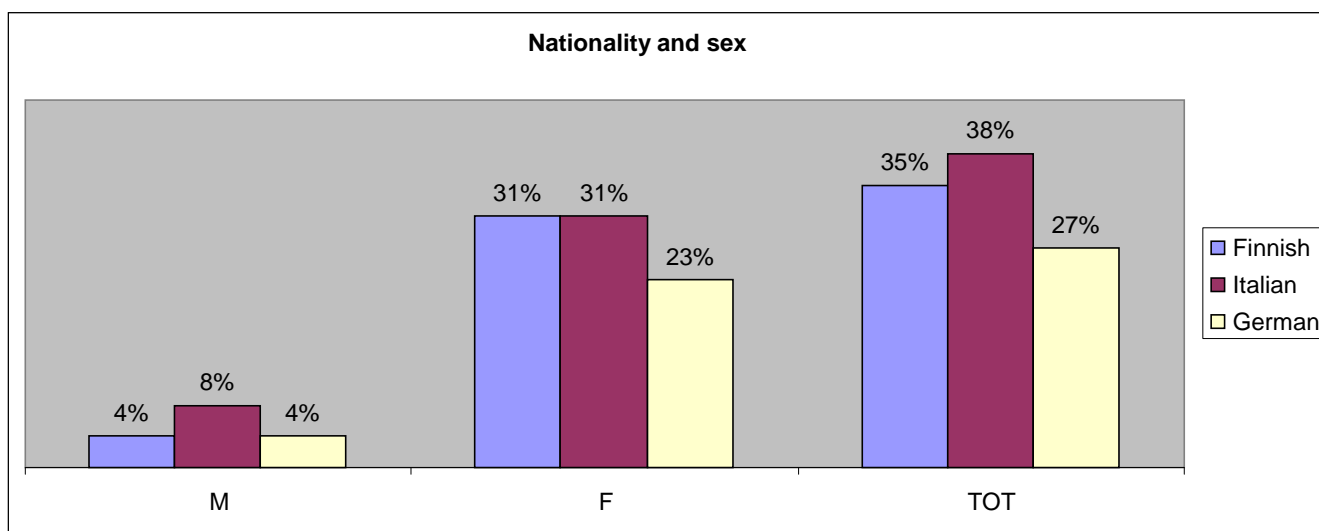


Figure 10 – Sassari Middle Conference

The results of the questionnaires are quite unsatisfactory as for the part relating to participants’ expectations (Fig.11): just 50% of them found that meeting’s organization was reflecting their expectations in a good way. Treated themes too were judged on the whole quite unsatisfactory, if we consider that 46% of the persons asked about it thought that they were just sufficient.

But the most negative opinion was that expressed on meeting’s aims: 36% of participants found that they were middling. This is probably due on one hand to the fact that PENTOS DP wasn’t able to prepare an adequate service of translation and on the other that

the second day of the meeting was organized and shaped as an updating seminar on European policies, but it was best focused on opportunities to be exploited for the development of the Sardinian society and territory.

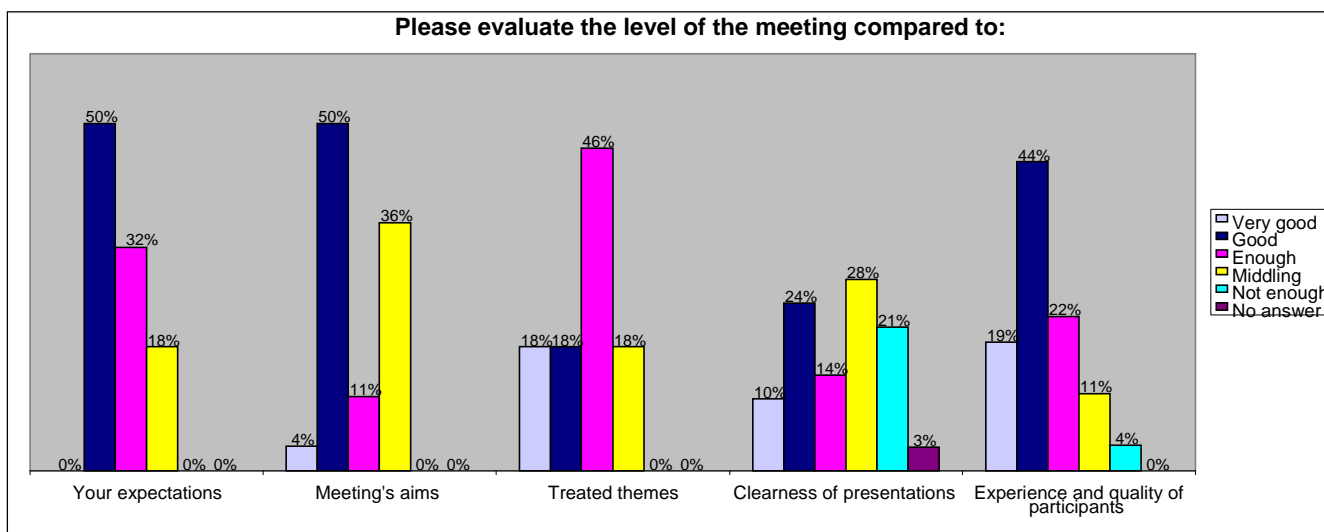


Figure 11 – Sassari Middle Conference

The following graphic highlights the unsatisfactory feature of this experience (Fig. 12). The only part which may give a hint of satisfaction is the one referring to contacts and relationships: in fact, whenever there have been difficulties in practical engagements and organizing activities, the “human factor” has always been satisfactory and compensating.

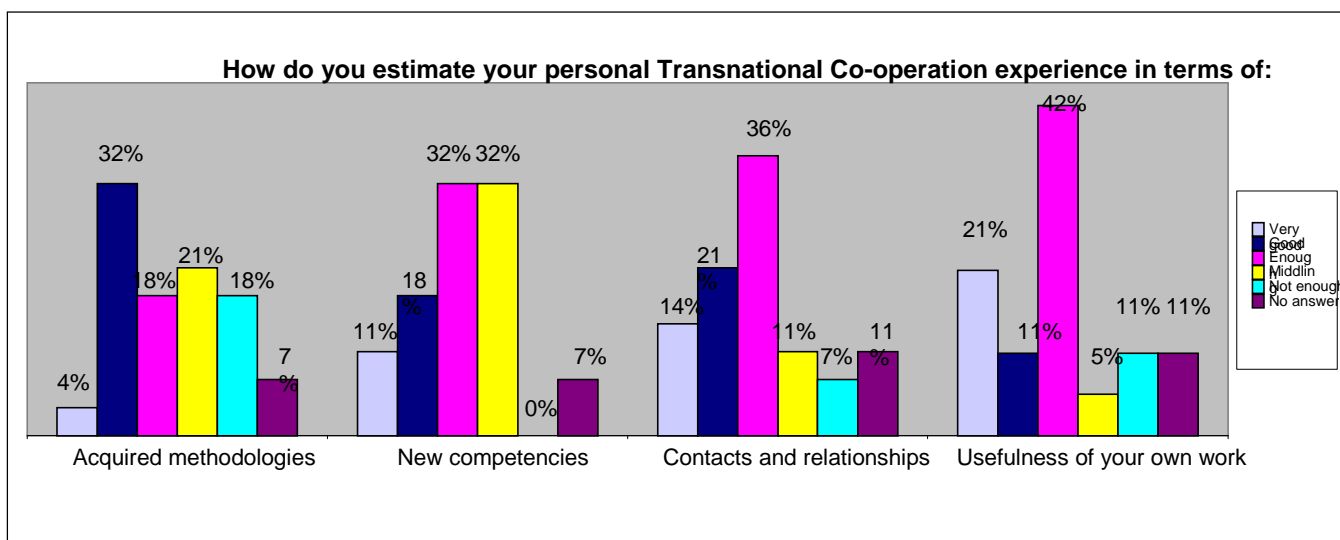


Figure 22 – Sassari Middle Conference

The **Third Workshop** (Hildesheim 13-15 March 2007) was particularly important. The situation of working groups reached a good grade of development despite the problems met

at the beginning of the cooperation process. The results of the questionnaires refer to 38 persons taking part to the workshop.

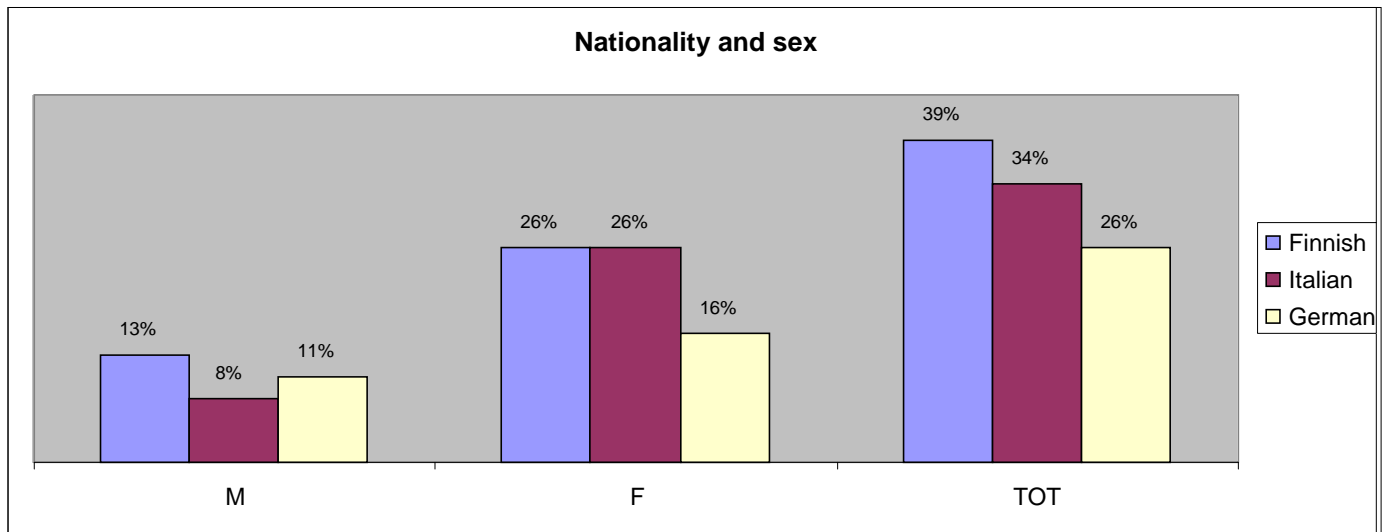


Figure 33 – Hildesheim Third Workshop

As we can see (Fig. 13) FinD It participants are mostly women. In fact FinD It partnership was mainly a female one. The whole management group, as well as the most part of the working groups, was composed by women, a fact that witnesses how the social field is still more a women issue. The workshop was very well organized, and all participants were really satisfied of the experience (Fig. 14).

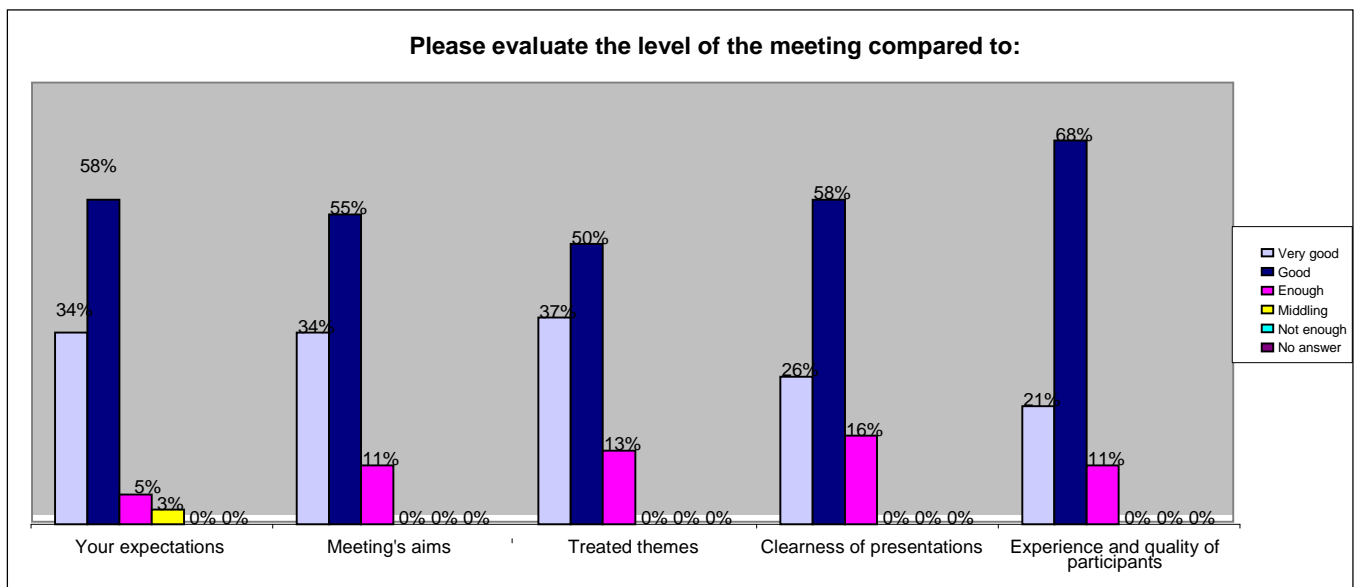


Figure 14 - Hildesheim Third Workshop

Limited face-to-face meeting time and language barriers were the main difficulties the working groups had to cope with, but on the whole all participating persons learned a lot from the process. From the Management Group point of view it seemed important to stress team building and to give as much time as possible for face-to-face meetings.

By the way PeB organized different project visits during the third day of the workshop, in order to make transnational partners more aware of the activities brought ahead within their sub-projects. This arrangement was particularly useful for the Italian delegation that, because of the shortage of PENTOS budget, wasn't able to take part to any staff exchange and had thus a chance to get more deeply into German partnership's work.

The only lowest figure is that related to the efficaciousness of work done by working groups (Fig.15), but this is probably due to the fact that still language barriers and cultural backgrounds were strongly felt.

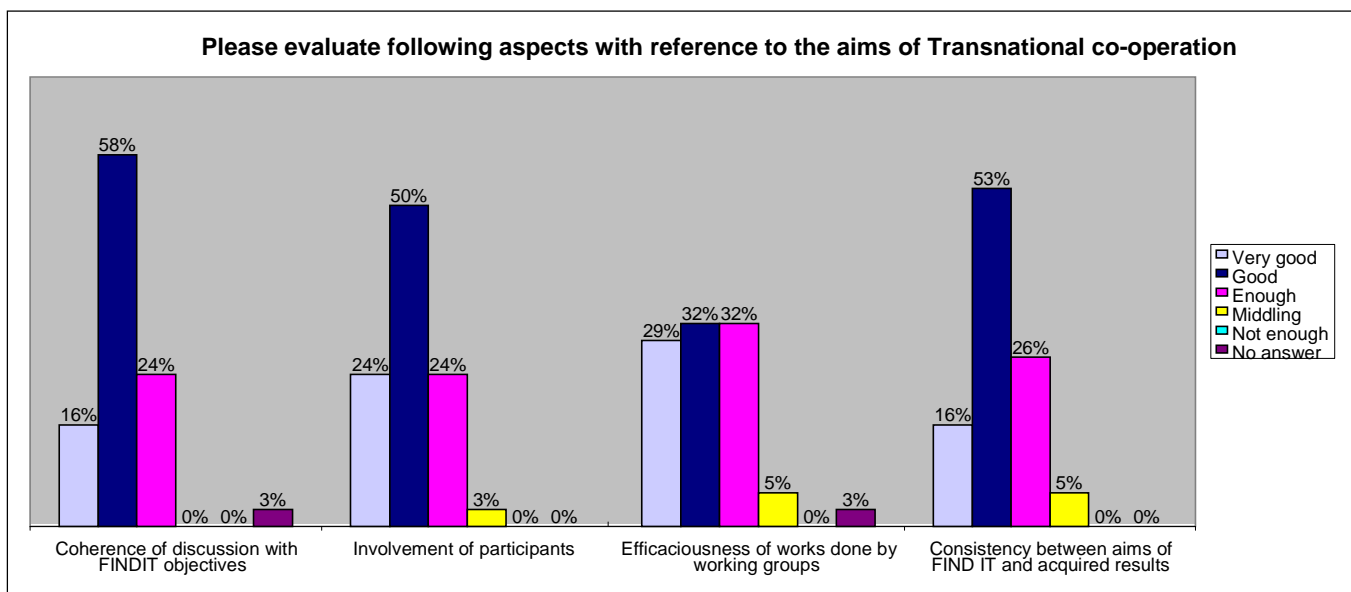


Figure 15 - Hildesheim Third Workshop.

Furthermore it was laid the work aimed to outline and organize the contributions of the working groups to the writing of FinD It Guidebook. Some problem was especially met by the working group "Coaching and counselling", and that's probably the reason why participants found working methods more useful in plenary meetings than in working groups (Fig. 16).

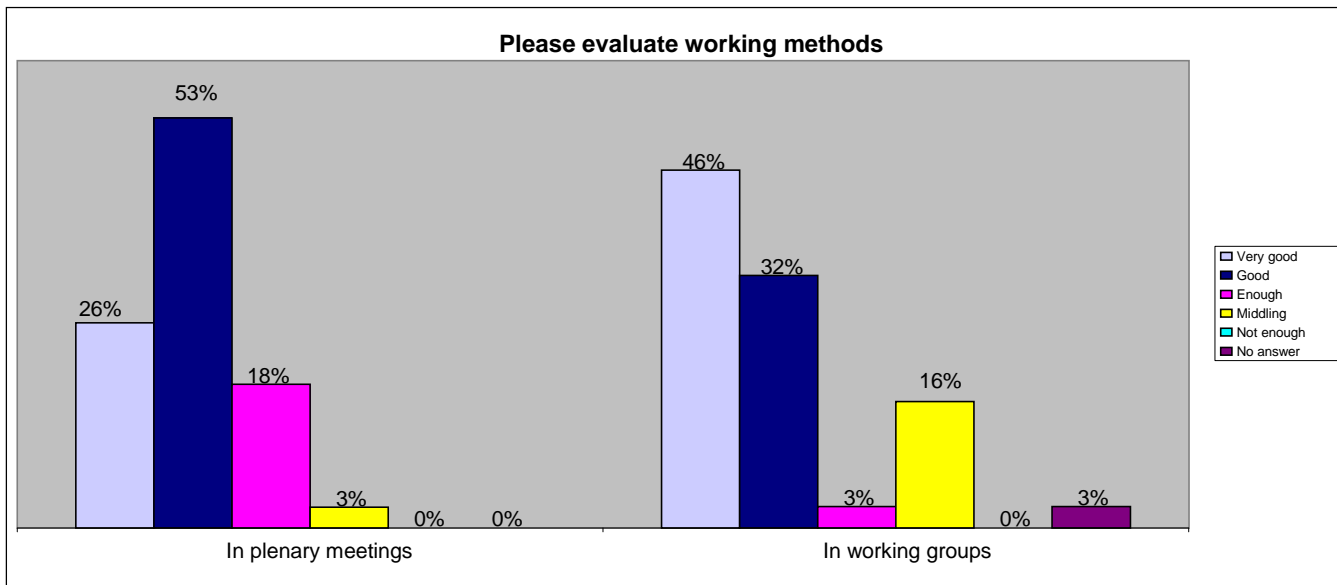


Figure 46 - Hildesheim Third Workshop

The **Fourth Workshop** (Sassari, 8-10 May 2007) was the last one and brought to the final results of the three working groups, to be included in the FinD It Guidebook and presented during the final conference. The followings graphics are referring to the answers given by 23 participants.

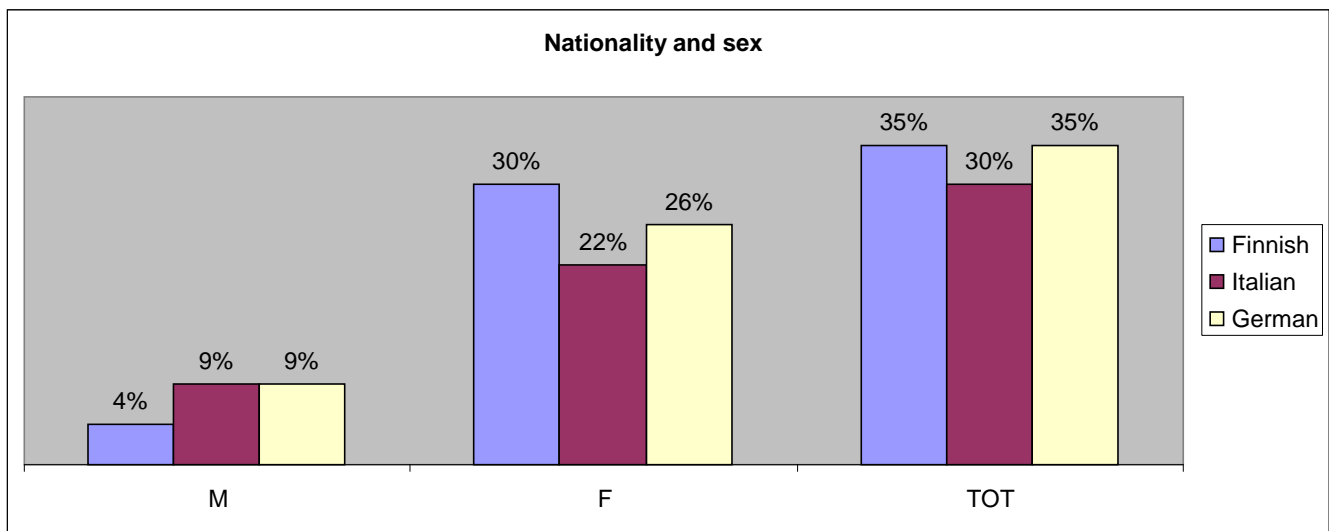


Figure 17- Sassari Fourth Workshop

In spite of some organizational difficulty, FinD It participants were quite satisfied. Some problem was particularly met by “coaching and counselling” group: by the way there were strong differences regarding the realization of its final product, the “Basic Promotion Plan” to be used by clients/users of social and/or educational services. It was quite challenging to fit together the different theoretical backgrounds of the group’s members, but at the end a

practical compromise was found, and it was decided to insert within the Guidebook two promotion plans, in accordance with two different perspectives.

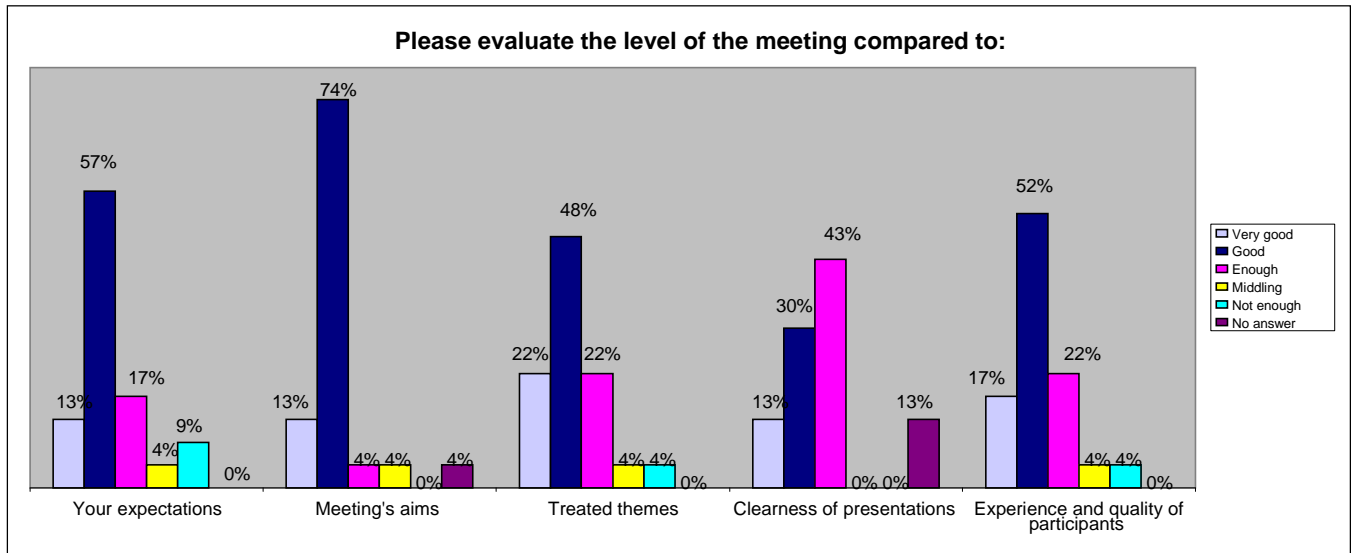


Figure 18 – Sassari Fourth Workshop

As we can see (Fig. 18) participants expressed a good opinion particularly on “meeting’s aims”, that for the occasion were to be identified in the closing of working groups’ products, while it has been quite inadequate the part related to presentations.

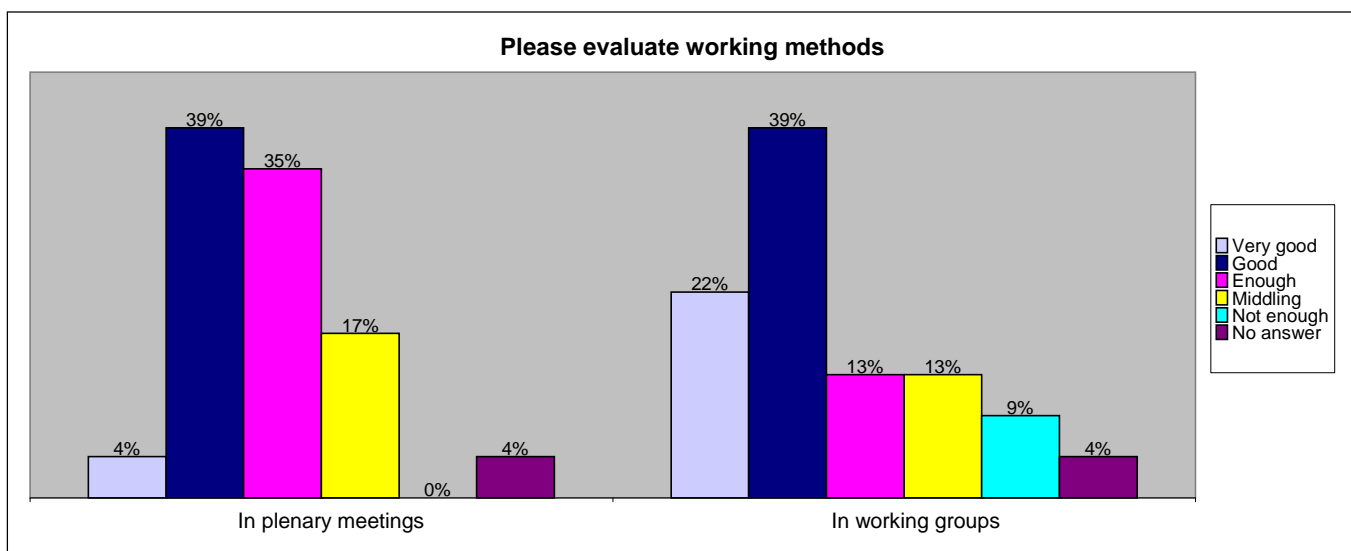


Figure 19 – Sassari Fourth Workshop

In fact presentations were judged not so important in this final workshop, but nonetheless the groups' works were presented, and that happened in an informal and not so well organized way. Furthermore, communication and cultural misunderstandings occurred within the "coaching and counselling" group have been slightly invalidating the results of the questionnaires related to working processes and methods (Fig. 19).

The **Closing Seminar/Conference** (Mikkeli, 18-19 September 2007) was the final event of FinD It Transnational Cooperation. It was especially dedicated to the presentation of the Guidebook, the final product of FinD It process, enriched by a panel discussion on the works of each working group, and of the projects run by each national DP. Furthermore, thanks to the commitment of a Finnish expert, a "learning café" was organized. It is an innovative method meant, in that case, to help participants to find out summarizing sentences which should highlight the process of getting acknowledged on how to find out "best practices" on social cohesion and employability. The following graphics are referring to the answers given by 32 participants.

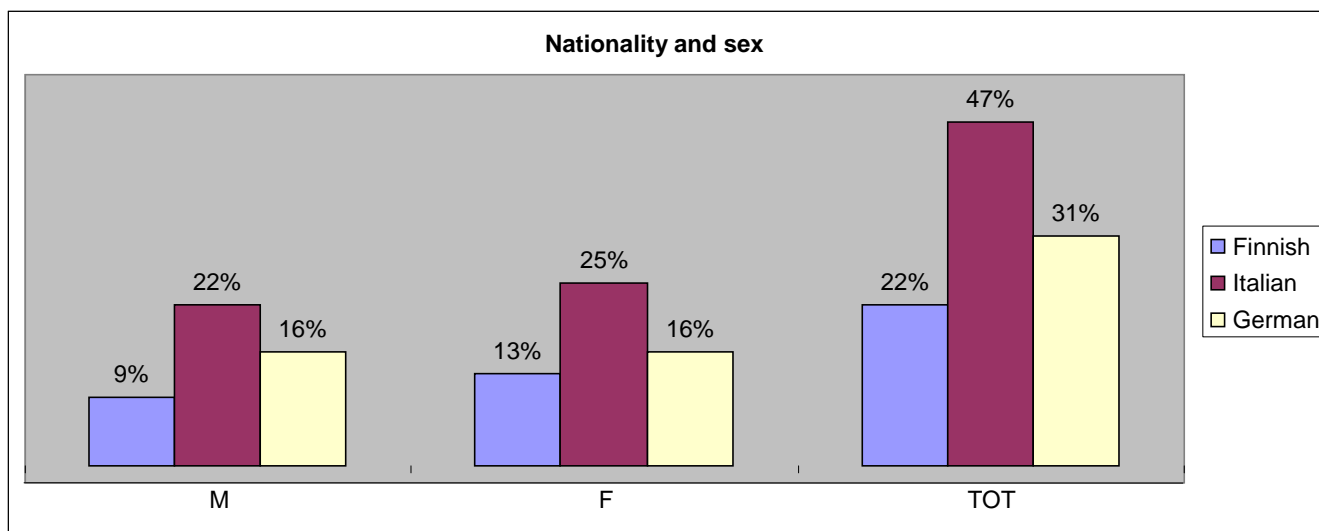


Figure 20 – Mikkeli Closing Seminar

As we can see in this occasion the male participation was almost equivalent to that female (Fig. 20). This because the Italian delegation was rather large, and was strongly composed by men. The closing seminar was perceived by most of the people taking part to it

as a successful event, and the results of the questionnaires are reflecting this feeling, above all for what concerns the fulfilment of expectations and the meeting's aims (Fig. 21).

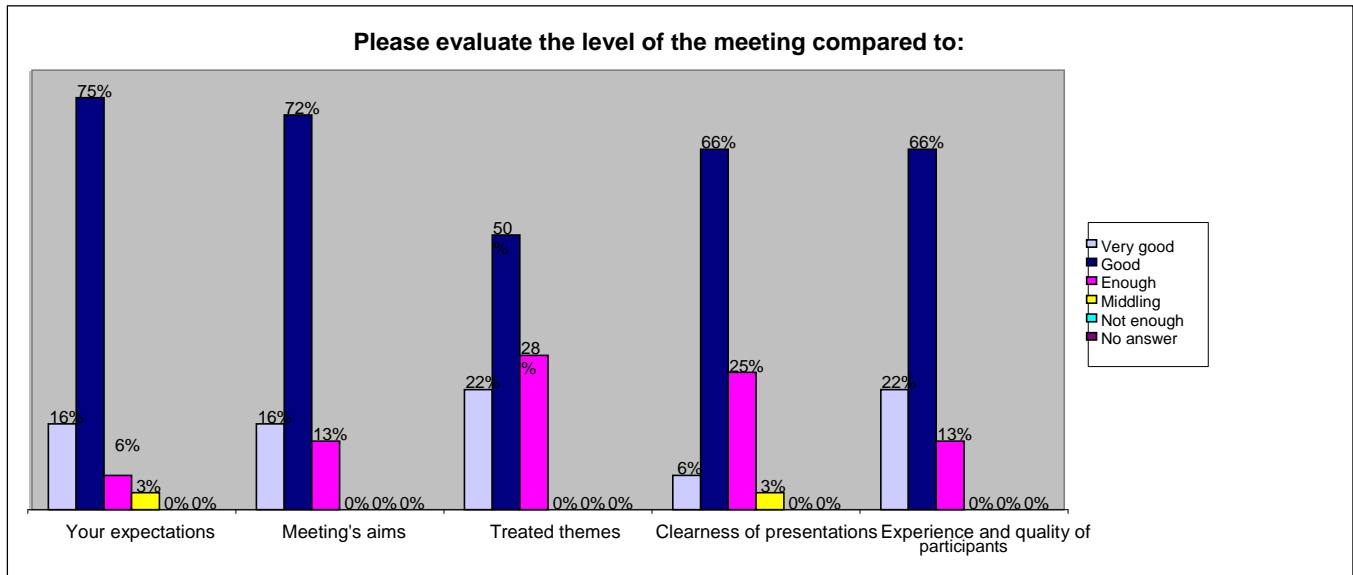


Figure 21 – Mikkeli Closing Seminar

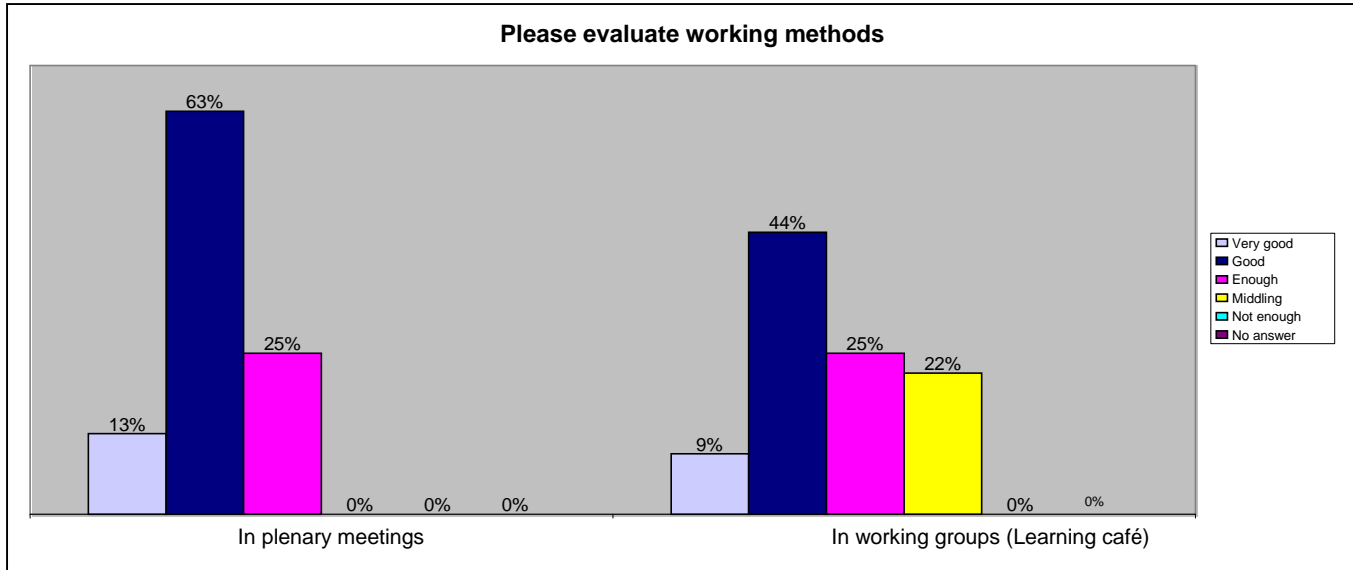


Figure 22 – Mikkeli Closing Seminar

It is evident (Fig. 22) the strong difference between opinions expressed about methods used respectively in plenary meeting and working groups: this is probably due to the acceptance of the “learning café” method, which was experienced in a too quick way and

didn't leave time to participants to get acquainted with the promptness and requirements coming from of the steering expert managing that technique, which was in turn compelled to strictly follow the timetable.

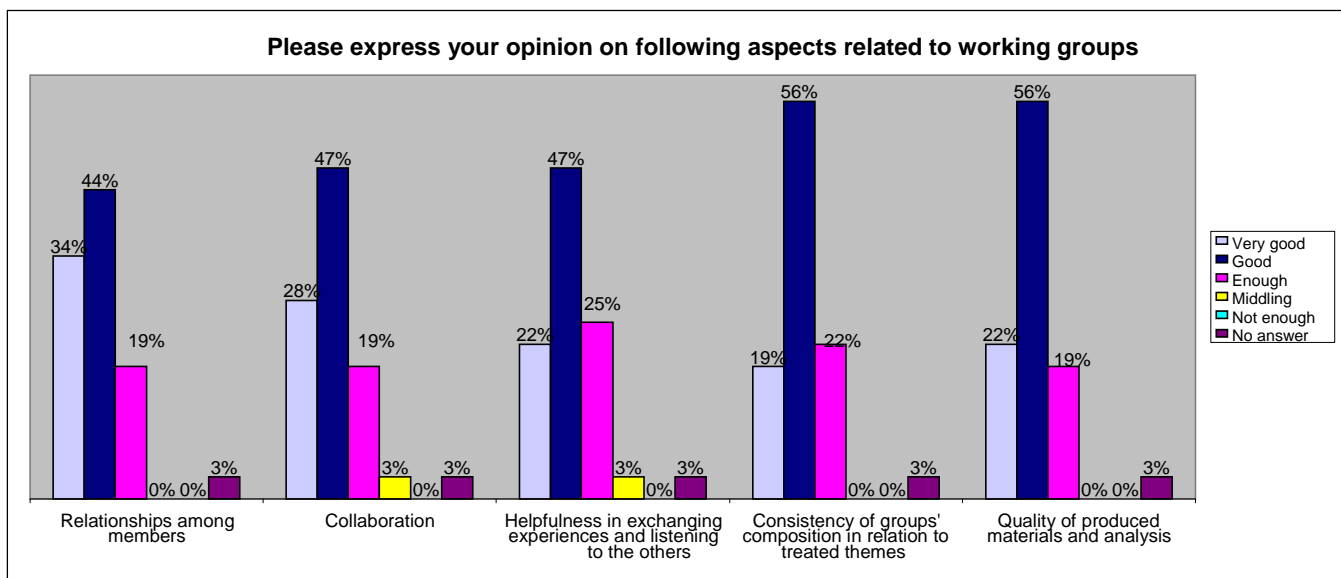


Figure 23 – Mikkeli Closing Seminar

One of the best results is the one witnessed by the opinions expressed on the quality of produced materials and analysis (Fig. 23): it is evident that the Guidebook, as well as the presentations of the different national projects, was quite appreciated.

5.2 Staff exchanges

What has immediately become apparent since the first workshop is that projects and working environments should be visited on a regular basis, in order to get aware of different countries' methodologies in the fields of education, vocational training and social services. In all 41 participants (11 from Germany - 33 from Finland) took part in staff exchanges. These were bilateral between Germany and Finland but the Italians were unable to return the visits of the Finns and Germans due to budgetary restraints.

Staff exchanges not only supported the work of the working groups but also gave a wider perspective on the activities in the other countries. Much of the real mutual learning, the

transfer of good practice, and creative joint development takes place during brief periods of face-to-face contact in meetings, study visits and exchange of personnel.

Generally speaking the working plan has been met. As to visits, FinD It partnership defined an organization frame without defining the visit number beforehand. As the activity went on, each partner, according to transnational budget, expressed its interest and investigation requirements to the host partner, which consequently started the organization.

DP ADAPTOR, which has been more committed than other DPs with staff exchanges, organized special preparatory e-learning courses for the persons sent abroad and has been taking care to make host organizations informed on goals and wishes of each visitor, sending beforehand their CVs.

Since the writing of the TCA it was decided to set an amount of funds aside for staff exchanges. Those amounts were different for each national DP, namely € 10.000,00 for PeB, € 7.000,00 for PENTOS, and € 119.000,00 for ADAPTOR. Therefore, as it is evident, the Finnish partnership had more possibilities to send workers, experts and beneficiaries around, while German and Italian DPs were tightly bent to their smaller budget's size. PENTOS has been using the money at its disposal in order to make possible, for the members of the territorial network, to take part to workshops and conferences.

The usefulness of staff exchanges in order to get acquainted with the various systems (educational, vocational, welfare) operating in the three different countries, has been underlined in many occasion. On the whole around 40 persons took part to staff exchange, but, if we take into account also target group visits, the visiting persons were 50. Usual questionnaires were submitted to participants, and from their analysis it is clear that, despite some random organizational problem, mostly regarding PENTOS DP, usually participants were quite satisfied of their experiences.

The evaluation questionnaire, submitted in the final part of the cooperation process, contains a question especially regarding the usefulness of the staff exchanges. The following graphic (Fig. 24) shows the results obtained asking how important staff exchanges were perceived: the number of the persons asked is 18, but 3 of them didn't answer because they

didn't take part to any staff exchange. The results are quite significant and prove that to most of participants this kind of activity was useful to a very high extent.

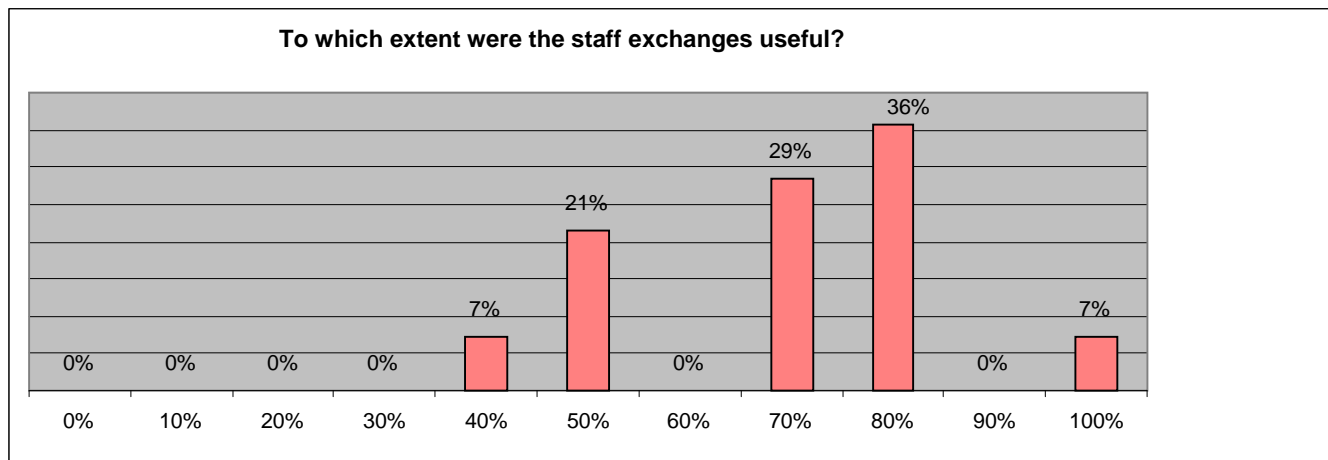


Figure 24 – Results of the Evaluation Questionnaire

Some comments attached to this question, together with those included within reports written after visits, are really eloquent:

- *“Staff exchanges showed issues in practice, and there was more time to concentrate on issues during the exchanges”*
- *“You get a very much better view of the foreign system and a better understanding of all you talked about in the transnational work. Many of the information I heard at the meetings found place in my mind after the conversation with guests in our school or after visiting institutions”*
- *“It was useful for getting new ideas and perspectives”*
- *“Through the staff exchange I got to know interesting people and an intercultural coexistence. The exchange of information and practical approaches was interesting”* (Comments taken from report on the visits from German DP to Italian DP)
- *“I got an insight on different teaching models that could with some adaptations also be used in our school system. The enlargement of intercultural competence through a staff exchange makes work in the transnational working group easier, through the gained knowledge, and supports the understanding of the partner's work”* (Comments taken from report on the visits from German DP to Italian DP)
- *“A staff exchange has the advantage that you can visit partners directly at their working place/organisation and you can form an impression of the work and the working conditions.*

Apart from that it is possible to have many informal conversations, which is not possible during a conference or workshop” (Comments taken from report on the visits from German DP to Italian DP)

- *“For an effective transnational cooperation it is important to know the work (projects) of the partners. Through the one week in Finland, I could develop a clearer impression of the work of our Finnish colleagues” (Comments taken from report on the visits from German DP to Finnish DP)*
- *“Some ideas and principles can not be adapted because of the different national frameworks, but I also saw a lot of things that could be adapted or are already being implemented through our EQUAL projects” (Comments taken from report on the visits from German DP to Finnish DP)*
- *“Through the many new impressions I have a better possibility of reflecting our own systems of school and vocational training and to think about where and how to optimize our system” (Comments taken from report on the visits from German DP to Finnish DP)*

6. Communication and cultural differences

Organisational differences between transnational partners can cause troubles in defining and following the work plan, sharing resources and using the common results. Therefore it is important that organisational differences - like the ones experienced within FinD It programme, mostly referring to different budgets, but also to diverse cultural backgrounds - are solved with communication tools. It should be always kept in mind that differences in culture and working styles can cause more misunderstandings and difficulties than language. The same content may be understood differently in the different national contexts. Difficulties and misunderstandings can result from different:

- social attitudes and behaviour
- business and work culture
- attitudes to time and time-keeping

Working style differences presents challenges but also offers great learning opportunities. The key is to remain aware of diversity while working together and learning from and about each other. Everyone in a transnational panel learns basically by taking part. But what is coming up from experiences – especially if there's someone doing transnational work for the first time, and this has been the case of many participants – it would be greater if preceded and supported by some structured learning.

Working in a transnational cooperating environment implies that persons taking part to it should be able to understand, communicate and respect each other. To reach this just apparently obvious goal, a transnational cooperation process needs to be preceded by an in-depth preparation on crossing competences, overwhelming cultural and language differences. Experiencing innovative approaches in different contexts is worth giving, but may be also disappointing or frustrating. All these issues came along during FinD It cooperation.

Workshops and study visits were the opportunities to exchange information and work together. Although e-mail has proved to be an efficient method of communication in order to make arrangements or to write, revise and validate a document or a text, the current opinion is

that face to face meetings are more effective and help to avoid the possibility of misunderstanding. Furthermore, neither the e-mail nor the telephone and other Internet devices proved effective communication when complex goals have to be reached, like the creation of common criteria and working frameworks aimed to foster social inclusion.

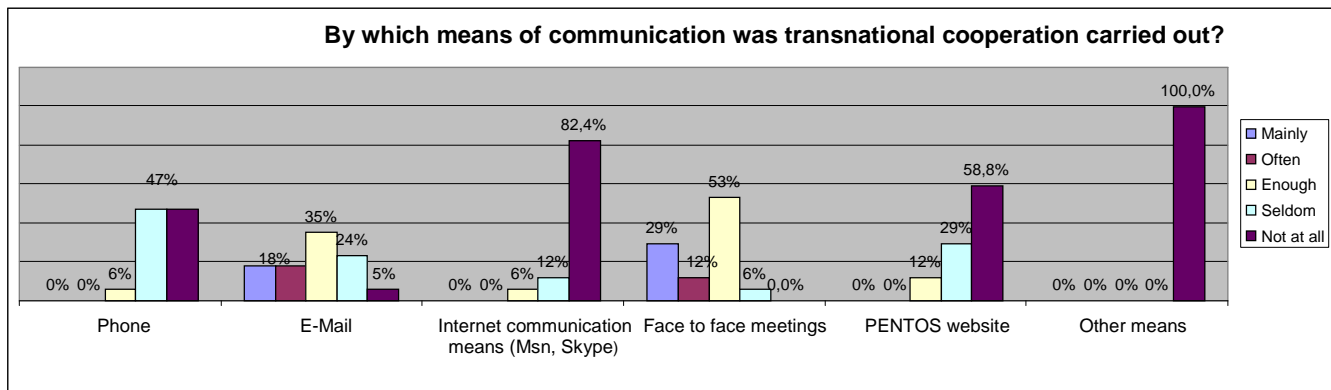


Figure 25 - Results of the Evaluation Questionnaire¹⁰

Off course, in order to ensure a successful cooperation, it has been fundamental to clarify each DP's local concepts and background: to get benefit from the process of transnational cooperation it has been necessary to create and agree on common criteria, mostly directed to define who "disadvantaged people" are, what is a "best practice" or an "innovative concept". The following comments attached to the evaluation questionnaire give hints on the kinds of difficulties met by FinD It participants:

- *"I think that geographical and cultural differences haven't been taken into right consideration, especially in working relationships. Different working methodologies have caused some misunderstanding among groups"* (IT)
- *"The main challenge for the members of the working group was finding a working rhythm that could fit well for each person. Besides, sometimes there was confusion in the communication because the using of the English words was based on different national backgrounds. So it was necessary to define terms to be used for the resulting process"* (GER)

¹⁰ The results are referring to the evaluation questionnaires submitted to 20 participants to FinD It cooperation.

- *“The experiences were as different as the transnational partners are: the working methods of each partner are different. The northern partners are very organized at work, the southern were not. During the first meetings, this problem took a lot of time. It was needed to get along some meeting in order to accept the differences and to see the result of the common work. The biggest problem was concerning the differences between different law systems in each country. And in the area of social measures, like taxes or special programs for disadvantaged people, it is very complicated to understand for members of the working group belonging to different countries” (GER)*

Anyway the biggest difficulty was almost completely related to a widespread lack of language skills rather than to other kinds of troubles, even if the results of the following graphic show some critical aspect of the communication process. For instance (Fig. 26) it is quite low the rating assigned to working relationships (only 33% thought that they were effective in a good way, and 39% thought they were just sufficiently effective) and to the delivery of management reports, that for 47% of persons asked about it was only sufficient.

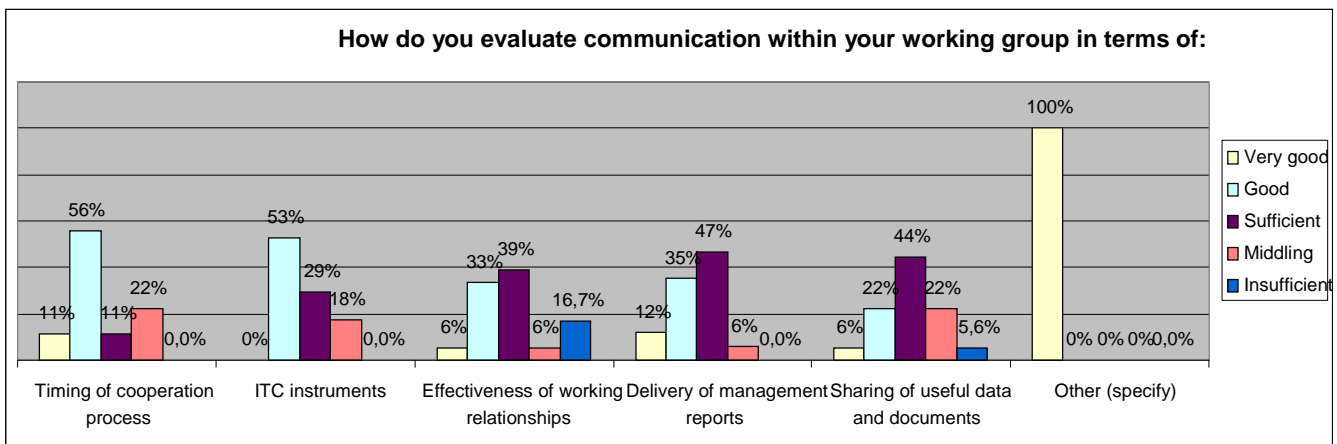


Figure 26 – Results of the Evaluation Questionnaire

- *“Italy did not give enough information early enough, but on the other hand the warmth and kindness of the Italians made workshops and conferences enjoyable” (FIN)*
- *“In the beginning there were difficulties to understand each other. Later the co-operation came easier and we understood the differences, for example in using time” (FIN)*

- *“A good starting point was to take differences into account, so to get a gear more” (IT)*
- *“Once that we got through linguistically difficulties and mutual distrust, we found a great availability” (IT)*
- *“There were language misunderstandings. We need to improve cultural competences and to understand different social systems” (GER)*
- *“Negative experiences: very different English language skills – differences in working hours (beginning and end of the works) – long trips to get to workshops’ places. Positive experiences: partly a more relaxed working atmosphere than in Germany – thoughtfulness concerning different language skills – endurance and standing power in difficult situations relating to the group” (GER)*
- *“Positive experience: more creative methods. Negative experience: no consequent timetable” (GER)*
- *“Positive experience: I have met nice human beings in nice countries. Negative experience: sometimes the conferences were badly organized, especially the Italian one” (GER)*
- *“It was a pity that Italian members did not know English language well enough so to avoid interpreting. The Italian members could not take part in the final meeting of our working group in Sassari. There were big differences between the budgets of the three countries for transnational cooperation. So it was difficult for the Italian delegation to send their members to all meetings. The mid-term conference in Sassari was not well organized. All the Italian presentations were prepared and held in Italian while the working language within FinD It was English “ (GER)*
- *“I’ve learned much about other ways of thinking, because I got much information. But there were also differences about professional working styles” (GER)*
- *“It was very interesting to work with our Finnish and Italian colleagues. I think that transnational work was a chance to learn many things in the private area” (GER)*
- *“There was a high learning effect because of visits in the different countries. There was mostly a good communication despite language difficulties” (GER)*

A general perspective of how communication has been working within FinD It cooperation process is expressed by comments of members of the Management Group, which are revealing attitudes, wishes and recommendations for a proper running of a transnational project:

- *“(...) certain differences were not so easy to accept (like the Italian management of time, for example). It took a lot for explaining differences and even then some people were not able to see the different situations of the transnational partners. I think that intercultural learning involves trying to adapt to other “rules” (like mealtimes, working hours, etc.). There should have been more exchange about expectations and how (in detail!) to achieve common goals within the Management Group. But it is difficult to divide and judge whether and to which extent things happened for reasons of individual personality and/or culture”*
- *“From a result-oriented perspective, the work in the working groups was very effective, the members of the workshops were motivated They found ways to handle the communication problems with the language. Sometimes there was a problem in understanding each other, for example I think that members of our DP needed time to accept different timetables, but it was not a great problem”*

Including social activities in the schedule or programme, so to enhance informal networking, is often the best way to get to know partners. The next comment highlights how this component of FinD It partnership has been slightly neglected:

- *“There has been some negative feedback about too easy programme during meeting/conferences/visits from some very efficient Finnish people. Also language wall (no speaking English) has made communication sometimes complicated and slow in workshops. Unfortunately the informal part of the meetings has been often disregarded and members of each nationality have been quite separate in their own group”*

7. Conclusions

FinD It partnership was quite a success. Critical aspects have to do with time and managing of time and resources. This was not because of the overall length of Action 2, but the total amount of time the partners were able to spend on transnational work, which itself is known to be a slow development.

Various deadlines forced the partnership to speed up, even if it would have been useful to get deeper into analysing possible future cooperation. The partnership was coordinated and managed by the Management Group, which defined general guidelines for the cooperation in the Transnational Cooperation Agreement.

The Management Group defined a work programme in order to exchange information on experiences, to compare each others' projects, approaches and working methods, ways to face similar problems, as well as national policies and laws determining working contexts. The thematic discussions pointed out similarities and differences, which in turn obliged the participants to take a look at their own activities from a new point of view and figure out where they stand in relation to others.

The participants from different Member States noticed that they struggle with similar issues, which in turn strengthened their feeling of being on the right path and gave them confidence to continue their own work. However, the partnership realized joint development of end products by publishing a Guidebook which includes information about each development partnership, and the content and outcomes of the activities of the transnational partnership.

FinD It participants noticed that it is quite complicated to get to know and understand both contexts and contents of work differing considerably from ones' own, especially as English language skills of the participants varied considerably. By the way that was the biggest problem met by FinD It, which has particularly affected the effort of the working groups, whose members have been changing several times during the length of the project.

The main added value of the transnational cooperation for the participants was a chance to exchange information and experiences related to themes of the conferences and the working groups. They exchanged information and experiences about contents, contexts,

methods and approaches, learned to see their own activities from different point of view, as well as to respect each others ideas and opinions.

In addition, the participants gained operational knowledge, as they experienced in practice that transnational development work requires a lot of time and commitment, explicit definition of common objectives, detailed working programme and effective management. Moreover, the cooperation increased the participants' understanding of and competence in transnational development work, and thus hopefully also encouraged and motivated them to engage themselves in similar programmes in the future.

7.1 Lessons learnt – *It takes time to find a common basis to work on*¹¹

The first lesson to be learnt is that time is needed in order to build a concretely operative and working partnership. The problem you first meet is related to finding suitable partners. The deadlines required by the EU applying procedure - and the still low capability and experiences of actors of Member States involved in transnationality issues - force the forming cooperating networks to seek partners on the ECDB without knowing them in a deep way.

Secondly, when time comes to prepare and negotiate a TCA - and a coherent working programme that would fit each DP's needs - the period to dedicate to this delicate phase is once again too short and compels partners to agree on not so strongly joint programmes. Requirements are usually met with many difficulties, and that was a point the members of the Management Group have stressed many times.

It has been important to stress team building at the beginning of the transnational work, so to familiarize and define a really shared working programme and methodology, and to give as much time as possible for face-to-face meetings. FinD It participants gained operational knowledge, as they experienced in practice that transnational development work requires a lot of time and commitment, explicit definition of common objectives, detailed working programme, effective management, as well as an on-going evaluation of all activities

¹¹ Sentence taken from the feedback of the Transnational Closing Seminar – Mikkeli, 18/19 September 2007.

Finally, the lack of language skills may deeply affect a transnational partnership, as it obvious. Therefore it would be very useful to support the commitment to transnational cooperation by preparing adequate language and cross-cultural trainings and guidance before starting the practical work.

7.2 **Weaknesses and strengths of FinD It – Diversity is the key**¹²

The three countries have different systems and different cultural backgrounds. This is off course a factor that may enrich a mutual cooperation, but which in turn may bring forth many difficulties. The main challenge is to turn difficulties into added values.

As for FinD It the central difficulty was represented by a threefold difference:

- **DPs structures**: ADAPTOR and PeB were divided into subprojects, while PENTOS into macrophases
- **dissimilar budgets**: the amounts of funds dedicated to transnational cooperation were quite different from one country to the other, and PENTOS was the one less endowed with transnational budget, a condition that has not permitted its participation to staff exchanges
- **different target groups**: PeB and ADAPTOR were working with mostly young people with difficulties in entering working life, while PENTOS was addressed to a wider range of disadvantaged people

All these elements may hold back the process of cooperation and should be taken into right consideration when planning activities. Anyway FinD It partnership has been able to manage these obstacles, and even to turn them into added values thanks to the commitment of its participants.

The most widespread feeling among members of the working groups, at the end of the cooperation process, was that cultural diversity is the key to get knowledge and awareness on each other. Even if many of the participants were neither acquainted with transnational cooperation nor skilled with English language, they found their experience worth giving and fruitful.

¹² This motto is taken from FinD It Guidebook (see note n° 8 – p.17of this text), p.52.

It would have been useful to involve beginners into transnational cooperation more deeply and systematically, preparing them to it through language courses and transferring cross-cultural competences, so to level out and equalize participants' skills and avoid the feeling of frustration of the persons more experienced with transnational activities. That was quite challenged in FinD It cooperation, which has motivated and improved internationalization also among people and organizations that have not been working on a transnational environment before.

Staff exchanges in particular were regarded as being valuable when getting to know social systems and real life in each country and as a great opportunity to experience directly different ways of working with similar target groups.

7.3 Dreams and ideas for future cooperation – *Learning together*

FinD It cooperation, as any working endeavour connected to a development process, was preceded, accompanied and even crowned by many expectations and “dreams”. In facts the cooperation increased the participants' understanding of and competence in transnational development work, and thus hopefully also encouraged and motivated them to engage themselves in similar programmes in the future.

The general expectation coming from all participants was to learn by getting involved in a common development process. Building an inclusive and multifaceted European network was the expected outcome of FinD It process, and participants' expectations were met at a high extent (on a scale from 10 to 100 most of people said that their expectations were met for 70%).

What came up as for future cooperation perspectives is generally divided in two kinds of prospects: recommendations and ideas. As for recommendations the main suggestion is to choose transnational partners involved in development projects addressed to similar target groups and with similar objectives. Another suggestion is referring to the choice of partners which should take into account and be oriented towards a similarity of budgets. Finally, the last recommendation is referring to a bottom-up organization of the cooperation process,

which is to say that management should come also, or more effectively, from the lower organization level of each partner.

Finally something must be said on the effectiveness of EQUAL Programme and on its impact on the beneficiaries. As the process of evaluation brought up in a programme such as EQUAL the biggest difficulty is to get results directly related to target groups. Especially in a transnational cooperation process the beneficiaries are slightly reached by concrete benefits.

“The impact of transnational cooperation on the actual DP target groups is indirect by nature: mainly experts are involved in transnational work and the added value they get from FinD It can affect also the perspectives of the target groups, but this process is a very slow one and not really measurable¹³”.

Even if there were concrete example (a staff exchange brought up the idea for a new support class at a special school in Germany), the impact of new concepts picked up from partner countries can only be measured in some year. And as transnational cooperation involves also a lot of informal learning, the impact is very hard to measure, but still helps partners to learn more about themselves and other projects.

¹³ Comment taken from the Evaluation Questionnaire submitted to the members of the Management Group.