
3rd Interim Evaluation Report

Evaluation TCA VENet

**In the frame of the Equal TCA-Partnership
“VENet – Vocational Education Network”**



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1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

The VENet is a transnational cooperation project involving 4 different development partnerships of Equal II (from Austria, Germany, Cyprus and Poland) that are sharing similar target groups and aims: to build up a competence network for demand-orientated qualification of disadvantaged persons (with low qualification or qualifications which are not directly usable in the labour market) in order to foster their integration into the labour market. All the partners are focussing therefore on the implementation of innovative qualification concepts that will help their clients to get back into labour market and fulfil the needs of regional companies for skilled workers as well.

The major common goal of the transnational cooperation is the mutual exchange and dissemination of products, knowledge and an exchange of national findings, ideas and results. The product of this transnational cooperation is to develop a concept of a Vocational Network representing a systematic idea which in principle can be transferred to any European country.

1.2 Evaluation

The Centre for Education and Economy (ZBW) acts as the external evaluator of the TCA-project on behalf of the project coordination team. We would like to thank for the reliance placed in our team and are glad to assist an innovative project such as the TCA by providing scientific support, acting as the evaluators. The present report is part of the formal evaluation of the project. It focuses on the cooperative structure within the TCA and the agreed procedures to reach the aims of the project.

This particular report covers two sub-reports: the interim evaluation of the cooperation and the interim evaluation of the fourth meeting in Katowice, Poland, in October 2006. Thus, it covers the period from the Meeting in Werl, Germany (May 2005) until the meeting in Katowice. The evaluation results are based on the satisfaction and social network survey carried out in September 2006 and on the meeting questionnaire distributed in Katowice in October 2006.

We would like to thank the TCA secretary Mrs. Judith Riessner for the excellent cooperation and her high efforts in providing all the information and documents we needed to compile this report. We would like to thank all the partners as well for returning the questionnaires and supporting our work.

2 Communication & Cooperation

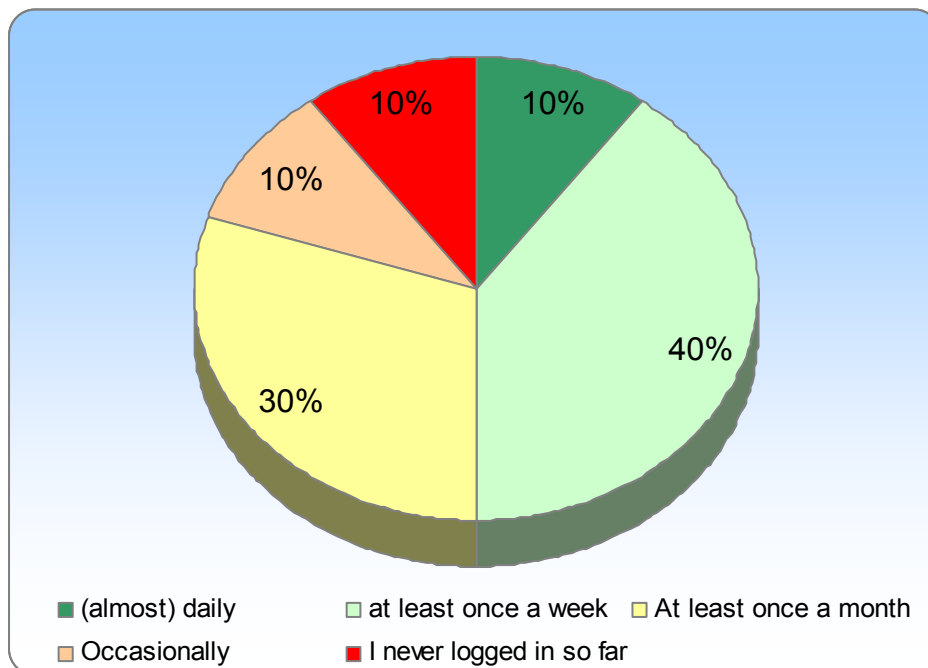
The data in this section is based upon the results of the second social network and satisfaction survey in the course of the TCA project. Social Network Analysis (SNA) is quite a young method in the social sciences, focussing on the analysis of formal social structures of a given set of protagonists. In this evaluation the set of protagonist consists of all partners involved in project activities so far. In total 13 persons have been questioned via an email questionnaire.¹ 10 of these 13 persons returned their questionnaire in time.²

Most of the representatives of the partner countries except the Cypriot partner returned the questionnaires. Nevertheless, these persons are included in the network graphs since it is possible to supplement their network positions from the available questionnaires (communication and cooperation is reciprocal).

2.1 The internet forum

The VENet Internet Forum is one of the communication instruments in the project. It is used to transparently discuss certain topics with all partners. Whenever a new posting is made, all forum members receive a notice of this posting via email. The partners have been questioned regarding their usage and their contentment of the VENet forum.

Illustration 1: Usage of www.venet-eu.com (N=10)



At least one person from each partner country uses the internet platform on a weekly basis.

¹ 4 Austria, 4 Cyprus, 2 Germany, 3 Poland.

² Only Questionnaires returned until 10th of October 2006 could be taken into account.

Illustration 2: Contentment with parts of the internet platform

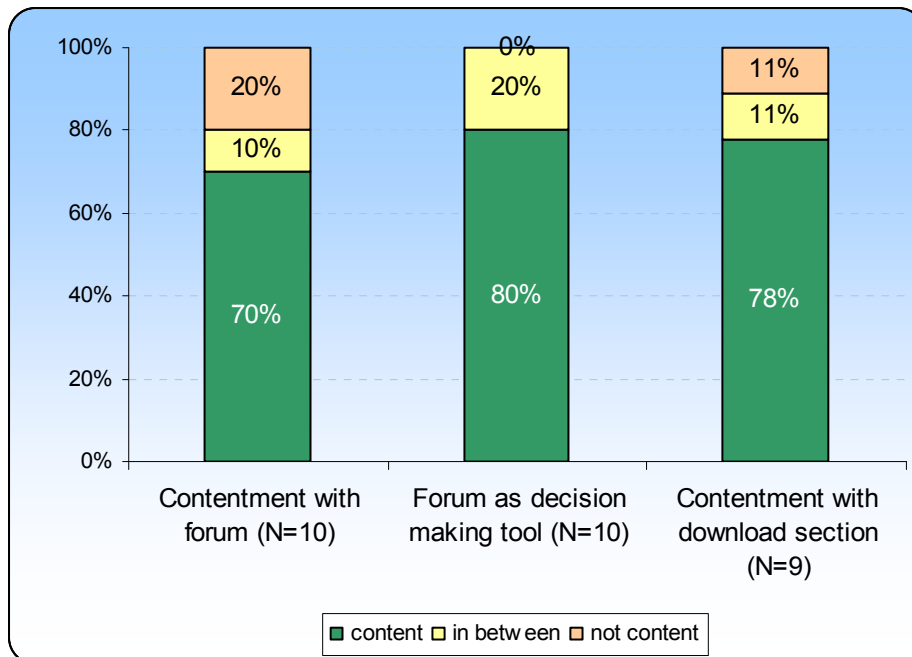


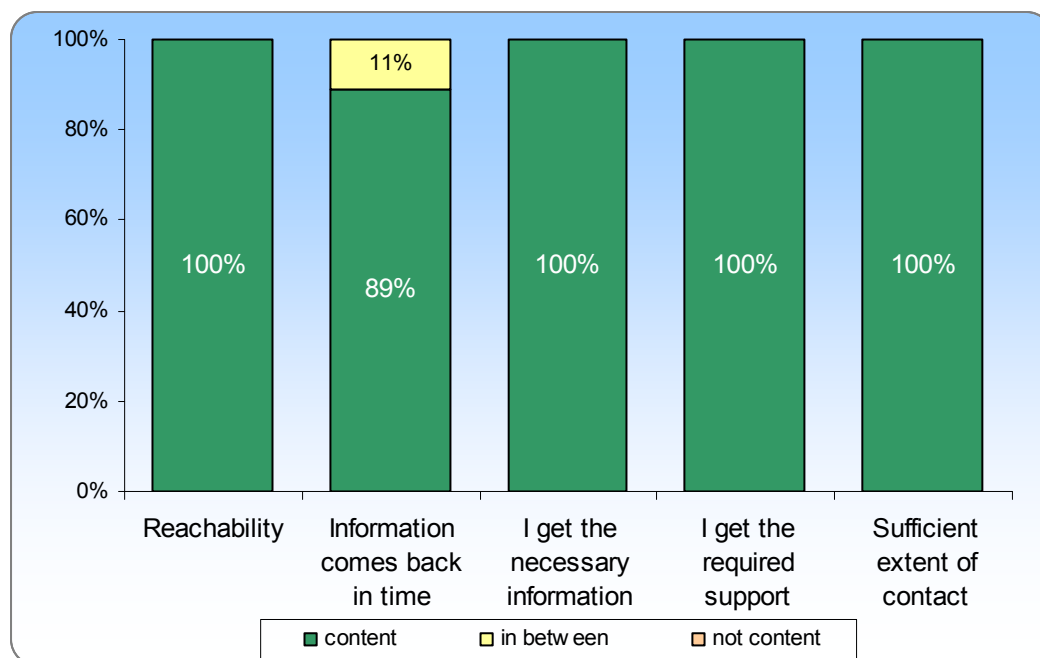
Illustration 2 clearly shows: the majority of the partners are content with the internet platform and its features. Two partners took the possibility to give additional comments on the internet platform. Both of them mentioned the forum. Obviously the fact that it is not possible to attach files in this forum makes the tool impractical for some partners for some purposes.

- ➔ At least one person in each partner country uses VENet on a weekly basis.
- ➔ The majority of the partners is content with the internet platform.

2.2 The TCA coordination & secretary

The TCA secretary acts as the main coordinating person within the project. Her duties range from exchanging information among the partners, preparing official reports for the Equal Office to monitoring the project development. The TCA secretary therefore holds the main project management position and is the only partner spending more than 16 hours per week within the frame of the TCA (other partner mainly spend less than 5 hours per week for the TCA). In the questionnaire the partners were asked to state their contentment with the TCA secretary. Like in the first satisfaction and social network survey, all partners show a very high level of contentment regarding the project secretary.

Illustration 3: Contentment with the TCA project management



➔ In nearly every respect 100% of the partners are content with the secretary's work. The high level of contentment with the TCA secretary's work has not changed since the first satisfaction and social network survey.

2.3 Frequency of communication within the project

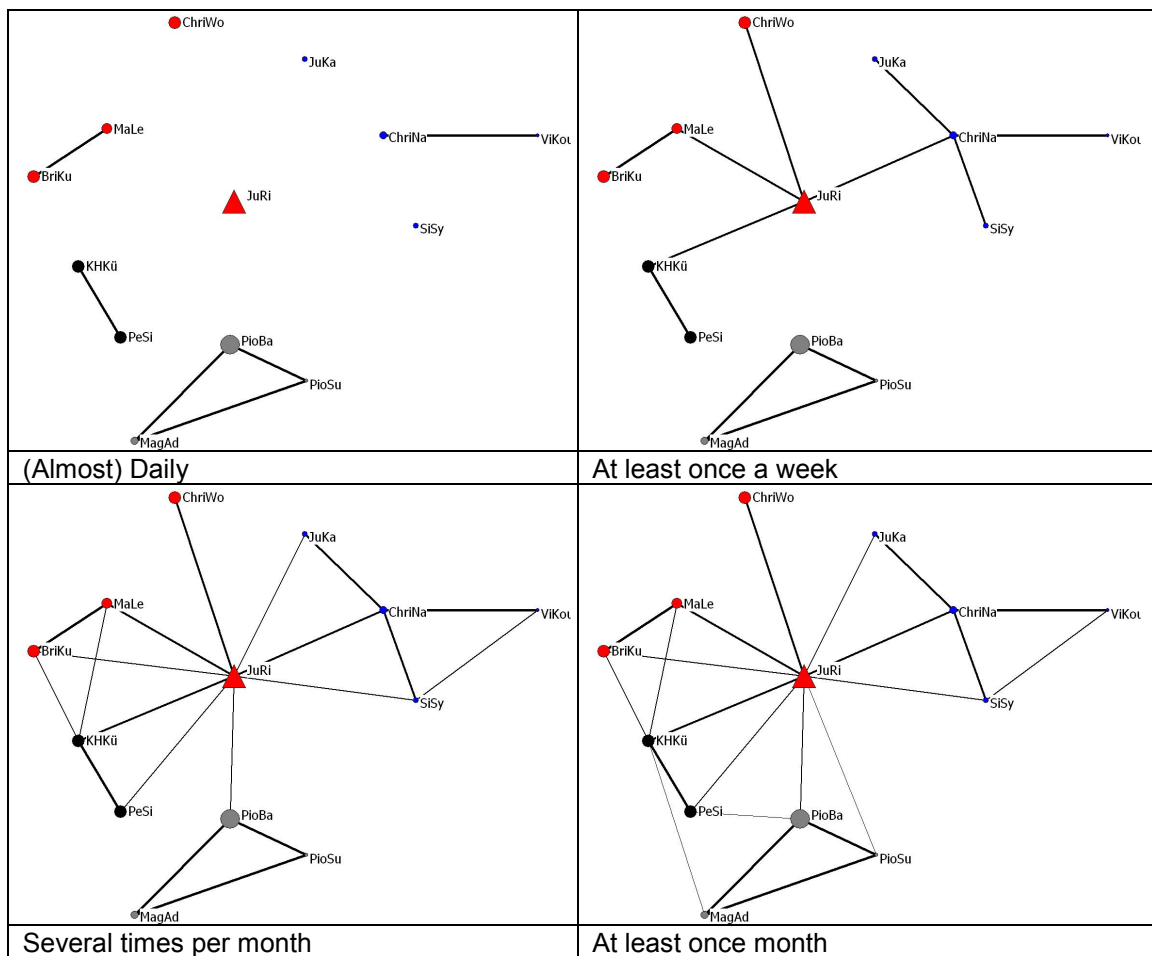
The first question in the network survey asks which persons within the project communicated with each other during the past four months of the project and what extent this communication assumed. The respondents were asked to rate their communication frequency with all the other partners on a four-option rating scale (almost daily, at least once a week, at least once a month, occasionally). The graphs on the following pages visualize the results.

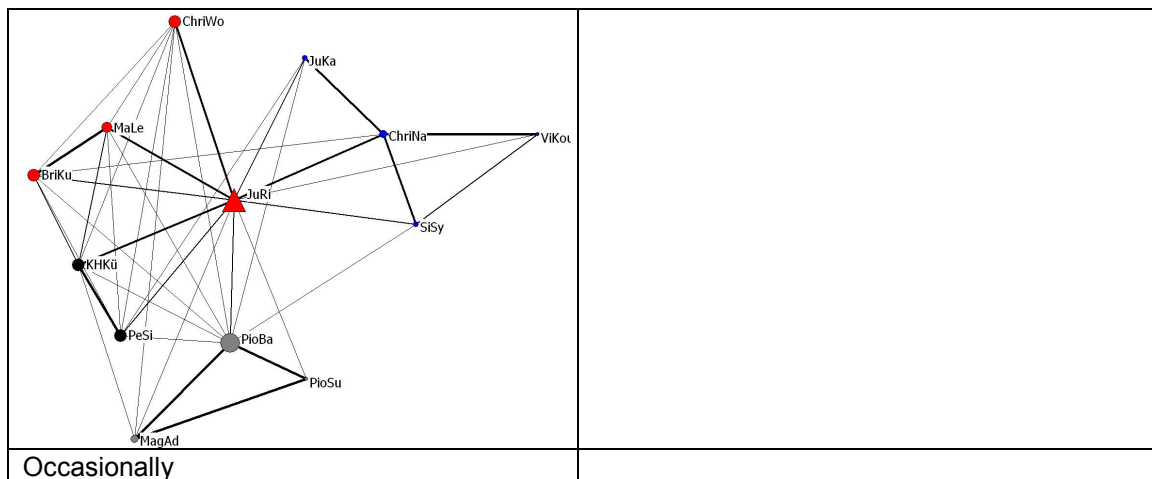
The aim of this first step of analysis is to find out whether there are protagonists in the project that are poorly integrated into the communication flows and to get an overall picture of the communication process in TCA project.

The following graphs visualize the 5 frequency dimensions of the question “With whom did you have direct contact in the past 4 months of the project?” In each case the different partner countries are indicated by different node colours. The shape of the nodes indicates a basic distinction between regular staff members (circles) and the project manager (triangle). The size of the nodes corresponds with the overall communicational involvement. The bigger the circle / triangle, the more communicational axes meet at a certain person.

If we take a look at the first graph that visualizes the (almost) daily paths of communication one can clearly see that daily communication only takes place within the same countries resp. organizations. As we move on in the analysis and put additional layers of frequency in the graphs the communication map gets increasingly dense and the communication axes between the partner countries appear.

Illustration 4: Frequency of Communication within the project



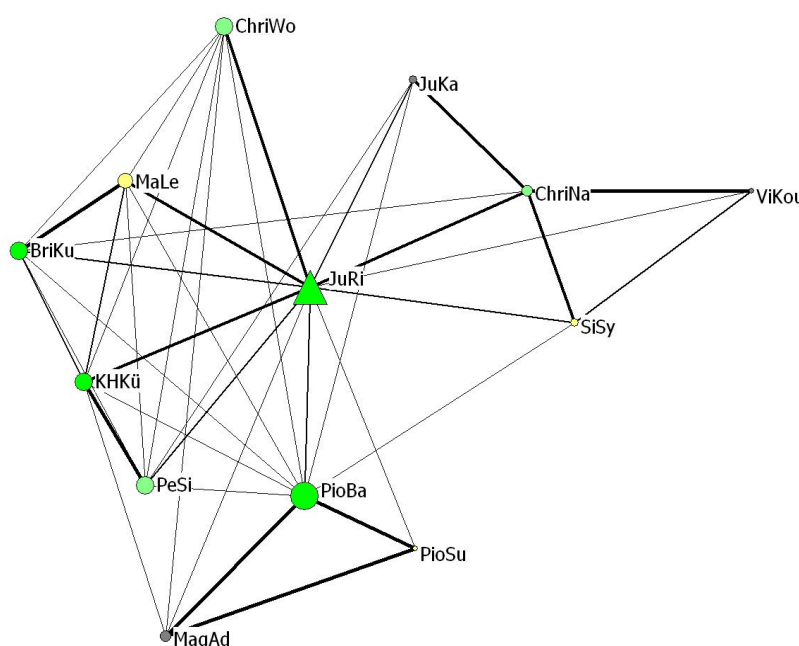


The illustrations clearly show that the communication is highly centralized and built around the TCA project secretary who acts as the central hub. Communication between the different partners themselves only appears to take place on a monthly basis and here especially between the Austrian and the German partners.

On the level of occasional communication a rather dense communication network becomes visible.

The Polish partners – with the exception of Mr. Piotr Bastek – and the Cypriot partners take rather periphery roles in the network. The size of their nodes indicates, that they have contact with few persons within the network. These partners with rather periphery position in the network are also less content with the communication in the project than persons with a central network position.

Illustration 5: Contentment with Frequency of communication



Explanation: Green = very content (4), light green = content (3); yellow = in between (3); grey = missing (3)

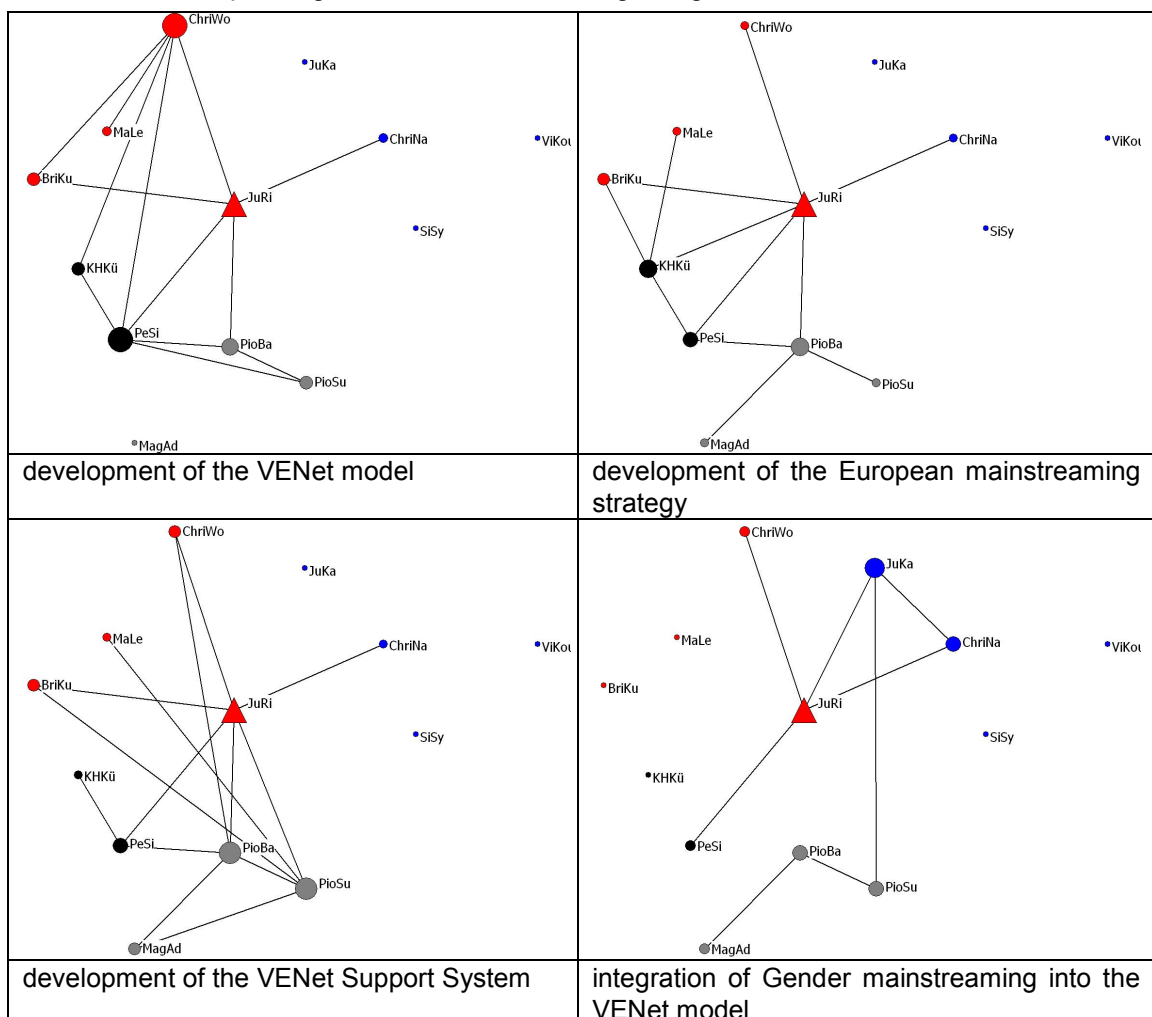
2.4 The cooperation structures in the TCA

Another part of the survey aimed at the cooperation between the partners at this phase of the project. Therefore we asked the partners to indicate with which other partners they are cooperating regarding different activities in the project. The four main activities have been:

- The development of the VENet Model
- The development of the European Mainstreaming strategy
- The development of the VENet Support System
- The integration of Gender Mainstreaming into the VENet Model

The following graphs represent the results of these questions. The connected partners in the network graphs represent those partners that worked together in order to fulfil the regarding task. One can clearly see that depending on the activity, different partners take central positions in the cooperation network.

Illustration 6: Cooperating structures in the TCA regarding different tasks



The analysis of the cooperation structure reveals that the projects secretary Judith Riessner holds a central role in all activities. Depending on the activity, also other partners take important positions in the cooperation network. In the development of the VENet model there is a strong cooperation between Austrian and German, with Christian Wolf and Karl-Heinz Kühne in key-positions.

The development of the European mainstreaming strategy is more centralized on the projects secretary, but Karl-Heinz Kühne and Piotr Bastek are playing still important roles. The development of the VENet Support System is rather centralized in Poland with Piotr Bastek and Piotr Suliga in key positions. Beside Judith Riessner, Julia Kalimeri holds a central position in the cooperation network regarding the integration of Gender mainstreaming into the VENet model.

To sum up: The projects secretary has the position of a hub in all activities, especially the activities regarding the development of the European mainstreaming strategy are built up around her. Regarding the other activities, also partners from other countries take important roles in the cooperation networks: Austria and Germany on the development of the VENet model, Poland on the development of the VENet Support System, Cyprus on the integration of Gender mainstreaming into the VENet model.

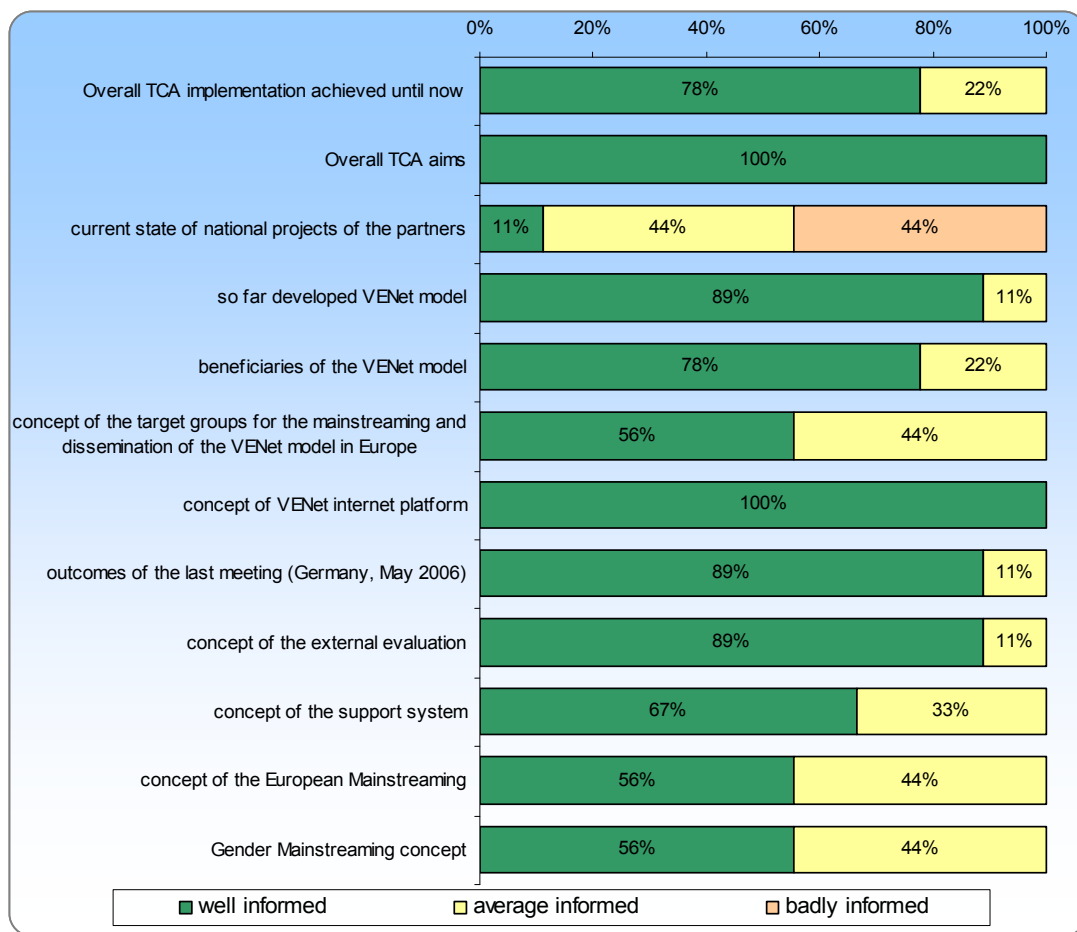
2.5 Degree of information

In the questionnaire the partners have been asked to state their degree of information on certain topics of the TCA out of their personal point of view and whether they would like to receive more information on a certain topic or not.

Some of the core findings are illustrated in the next graph. Like in the first satisfaction and social network survey one can say that the partners are predominantly content with their degree of information regarding central topics. Only regarding the current state of national projects of the partners, 44% of the partners feel badly informed. Three persons would like to receive more information on that topic. More information was also requested for the following concepts (from two persons each):

- target groups for the mainstreaming and dissemination of the VENet model in Europe
- European Mainstreaming
- Gender Mainstreaming

Almost half of the partners stated that they are “average informed” about these topics. Regarding all other topics, the majority is well informed.

Illustration 7: Degree of information among the partners (N=9)³

- ➔ Generally the information flow in the TCA is working well.
- ➔ The highest demand for information is regarding the current state of the national projects of the partners.

³ One project partner was responsible for the implementation of the webpage. This partner could not answer the questions regarding the information about different topics in the TCA.

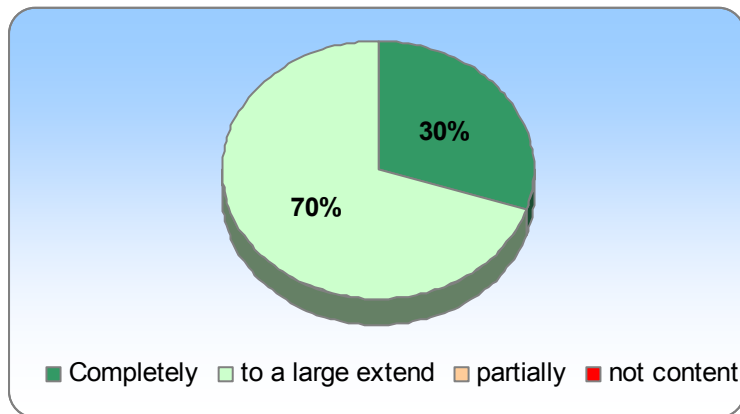
3 Satisfaction

The social network survey already also focussed on general topics of satisfaction, such as the ongoing development of the project, and so far achieved products of the TCA. They shall be described briefly in this subchapter.

3.1 Overall development

First of all we asked how the partners see the present overall development of the project. The results are shown in the next illustration. One can clearly see that most of the partners show high to moderate contentment with the project development so far. Like in the first satisfaction and social network survey not one project partner states criticism in this.

Illustration 8: Contentment with the overall development of the project so far (N=10)

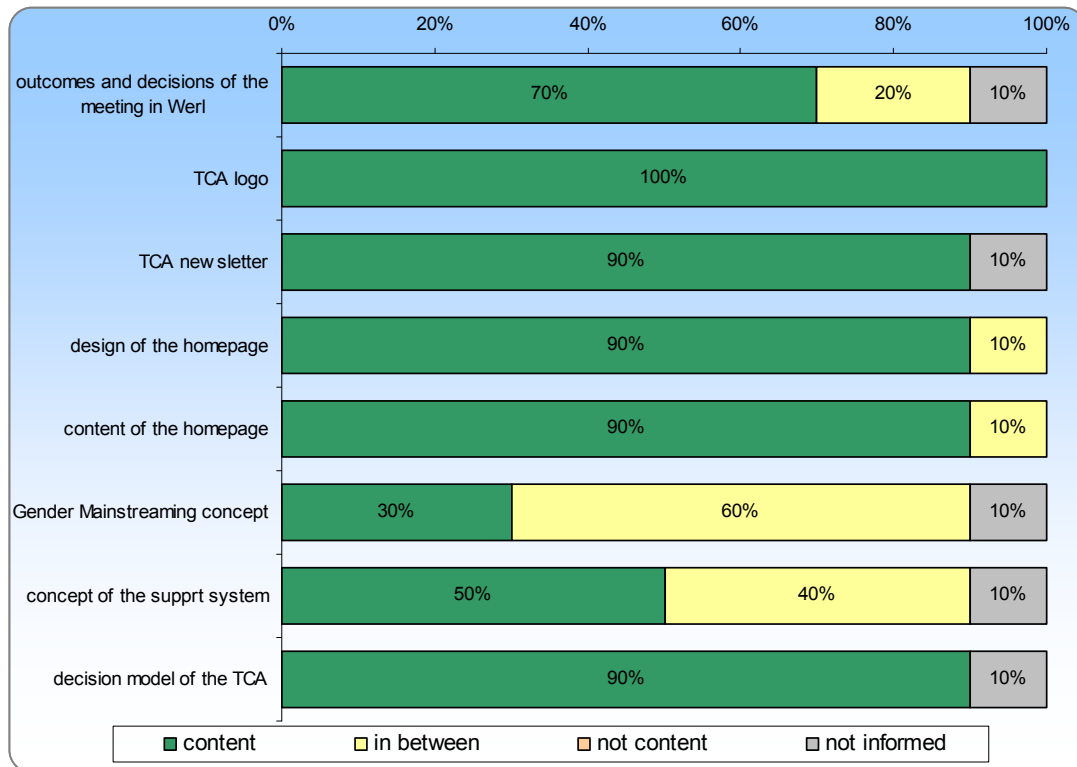


→ The TCA partnership can be characterized by high contentment of all partners regarding the project development up to now.

3.2 Outcomes resp. products of the TCA

As one of the concluding questions in the survey the partners were asked whether they were content with the TCA outcomes so far. Apart from the outcomes and decisions of the meeting in Werl (May 2006), we asked for their contentment regarding the TCA logo, the TCA newsletters, the content and design of the website, the concepts of Gender Mainstreaming and the support system and also the decision model of the TCA. The results are displayed in the following illustration.

Illustration 9: Contentment with the outcomes of the project (N=10)

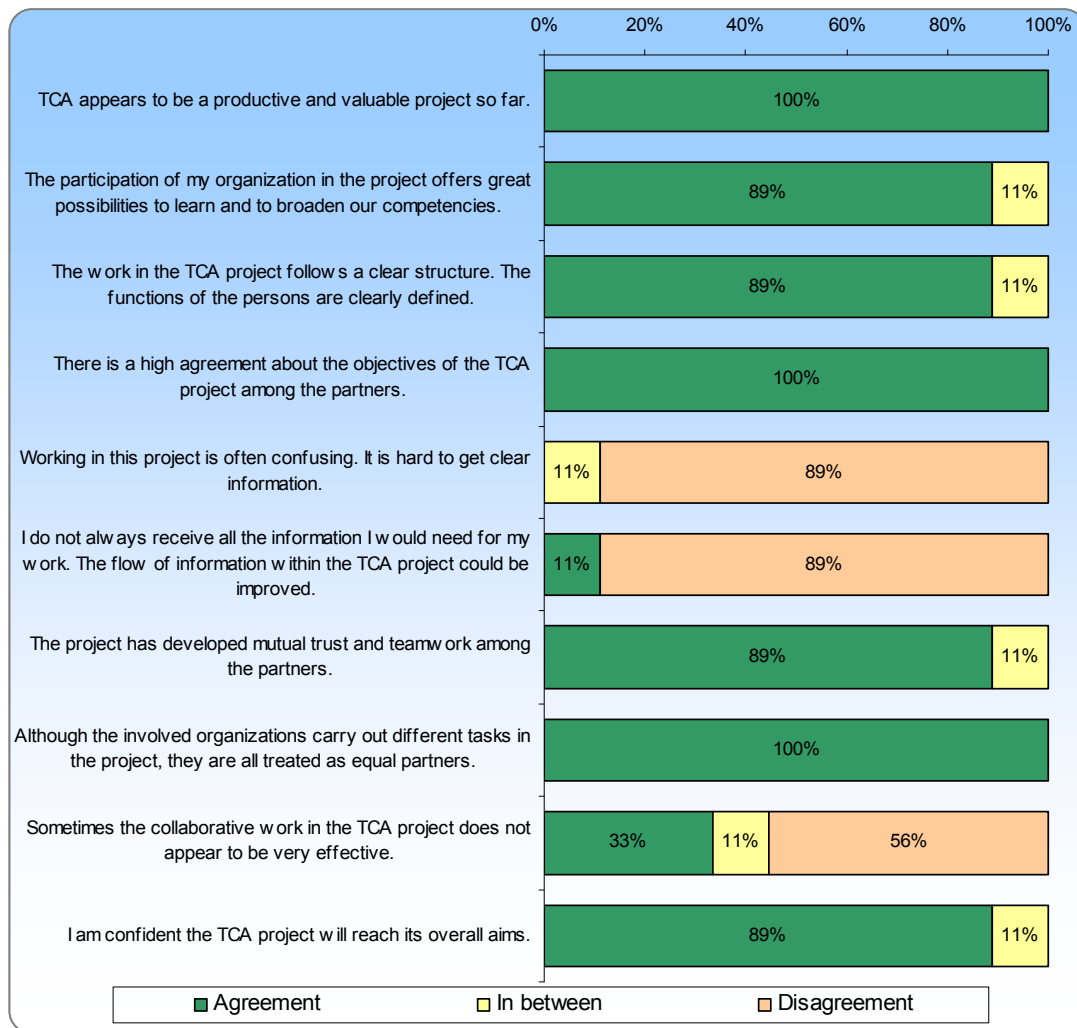


- ➔ The partners are clearly content regarding most of the contemporary outcomes of the TCA.
- ➔ The contentment with the Gender Mainstreaming concept and the concept of the support system is – in comparison with the other project outcomes – rather low.
- ➔ This result not only underlines the overall contentment of the partners but as well demonstrates the good cooperation within the project so far.

3.3 Attitudes towards the project

The questionnaire ended with some attitude questions asking for different levels of contentment within the TCA.

Illustration 10: Contentment with the project (N=9)



The results of the questions fit to the very high level of overall contentment within the project. One partner mentioned that the 'negative' answers in the questionnaire mainly reflect the sometimes difficult cooperation with the Cyprian partner. There has been a change in the Cyprian project team, accompanied with uncertainties regarding responsibilities and long waiting for inputs.

- ➔ The TCA VENet partnership can generally be described as a well working transnational partnership with high contentment of all partners on nearly all levels of the project.
- ➔ It is important to clarify the situation of the Cypriot partner. At the time of the survey, no evidence was available whether there will be any contributions from the Cypriot partner to transnational goal attainment.

4 Development of the meetings (with particular reference to the 4th meeting in Katowice)

This chapter concentrates on the analysis of project meetings, on the outcomes of the meetings and the satisfaction of the participating partners with the meetings. Within the range of the meetings, particular emphasis is made on the 4th meeting, which was held in Katowice, in October 16-19, 2006.

After the meetings in Cyprus 2005, Graz 2006 and Germany 2006, the meeting in Katowice was hosted by the Polish DP “First Shift”. One major goal of the fourth reason was to prepare the final event which is scheduled at the end of the transnational partnership in Brussels. Totally, 7 representatives returned the meeting questionnaire.

There is a particularity regarding the fourth meeting, since the Cypriot partner DP “Arris” did not manage to send representatives to this meeting, although it was agreed in the partnership that each partner would send two representatives to each meeting. This chapter shall therefore highlight the consequences for the transnational DP, too.

4.1 Environment of the meetings

In the meeting questionnaire, the partners were asked to rate their contentment with the general conditions of the meeting, such as the organization, the meeting venue and its infrastructure, the agenda and the moderation of the meeting. The findings indicate that for most of the dimensions, the ratings improved or remained on a high level throughout the project (see illustrations 11 to 16). With regard to the 4th meeting, it must be noticed that there was a low number of participants. Thus, already one answer with a lower rating than excellent leads to a seemingly great decline in positive ratings, which – in reality – should not be over-rated.

Illustration 11: Contentment with general organization

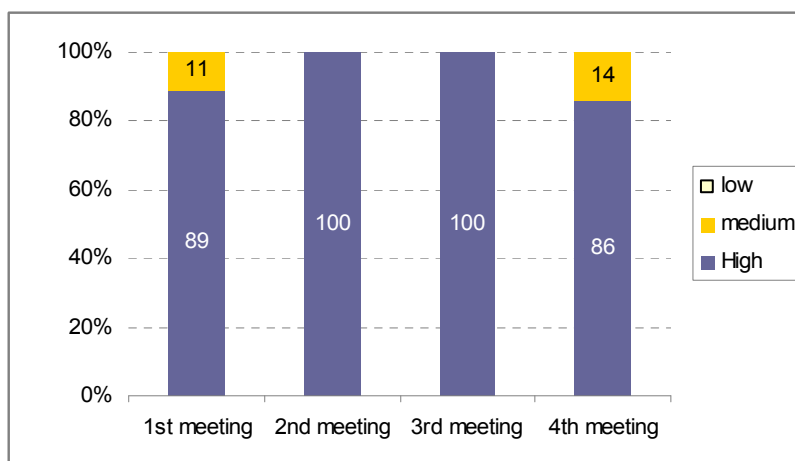


Illustration 12: Contentment with meeting venue & infrastructure

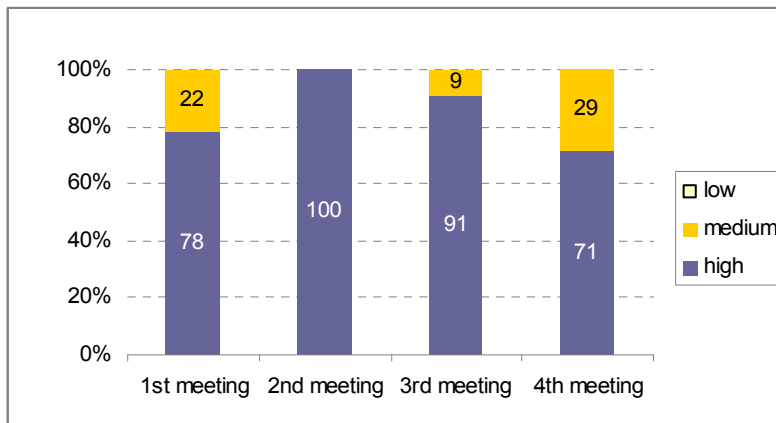


Illustration 13: Contentment with agenda

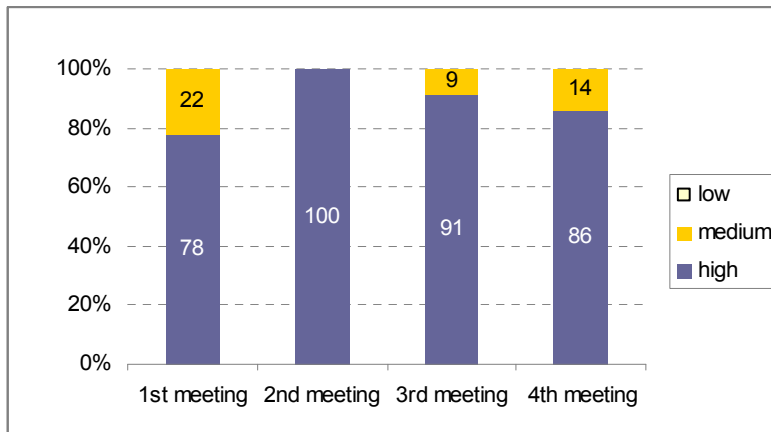


Illustration 14: Contentment with moderation

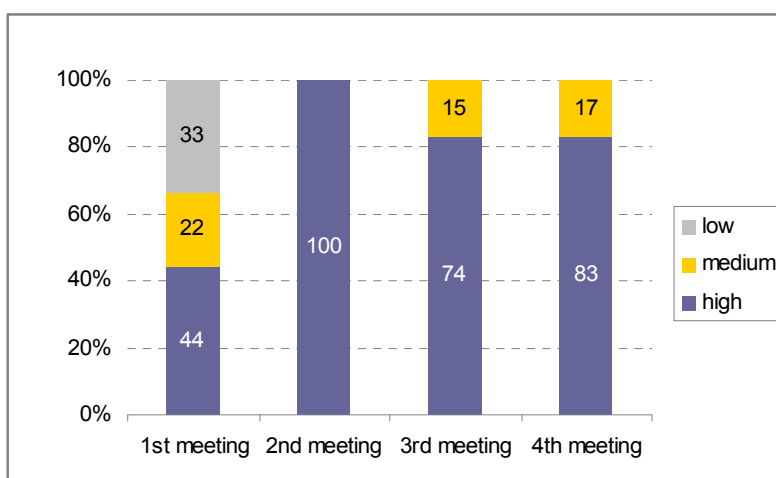


Illustration 15: Contentment with timeframe for agenda issues

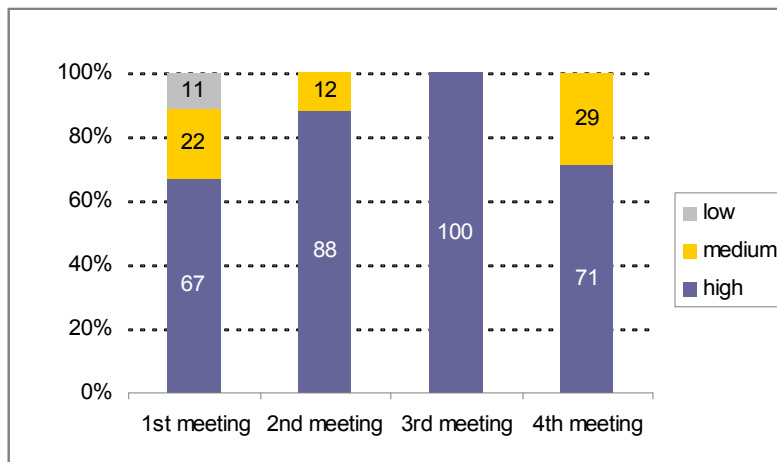
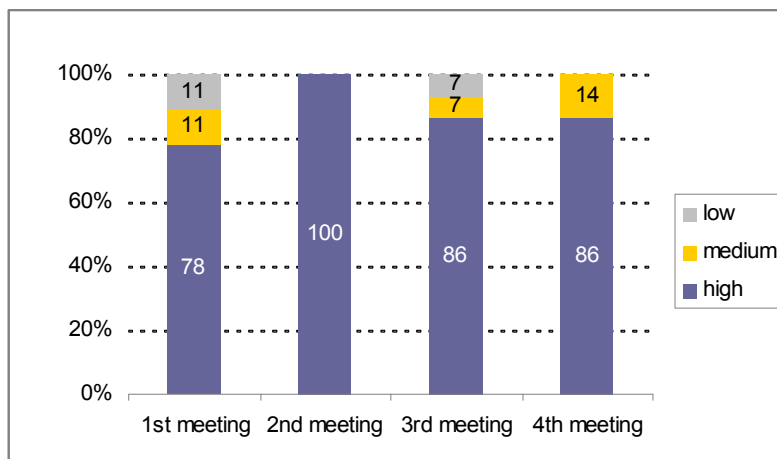


Illustration 16: Contentment with duration of the meeting



4.2 Agenda

The overall contentment with the agenda of the meetings was high at the kickoff meeting and received even better ratings in the subsequent two meetings (see illustration 13). It remained on a high level at the meeting in Katowice. In the course of the meeting, there have been slight thematic changes according to the different working stages of the TCA. Thus, it is interesting to monitor the development of the different ratings of the main issues of the TCA.

If we draw our attention to the particular developments of TCA themes, one can notice a growing and stable degree of contentment. Since the development of the VENet model was mostly done already in the third meeting, it was not captured in the fourth meeting question-

naire. In the fourth meeting, issues such as mainstreaming, different aspects of the final event and preparation work were predominant.

In the questionnaire of the 4th meeting, the item “contentment with session on the mainstreaming and the final event” was split up in two separate dimensions. During the first three meetings the older version of this item received very positive ratings: 89% completely positive in the first meeting and 100% in the second and in the third meeting. In the fourth meeting, the ratings on the two separate items got slightly lower contentment.

Illustration 17: Contentment with the session on mainstreaming and final event

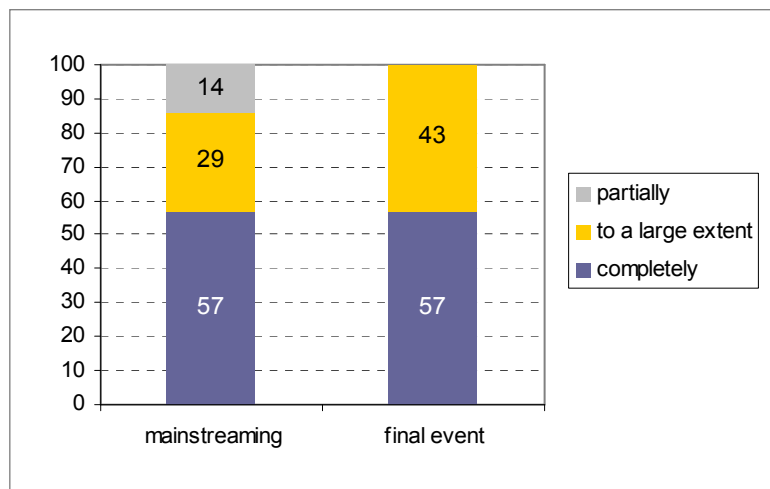


Illustration 18: Contentment with issues regarding the support system

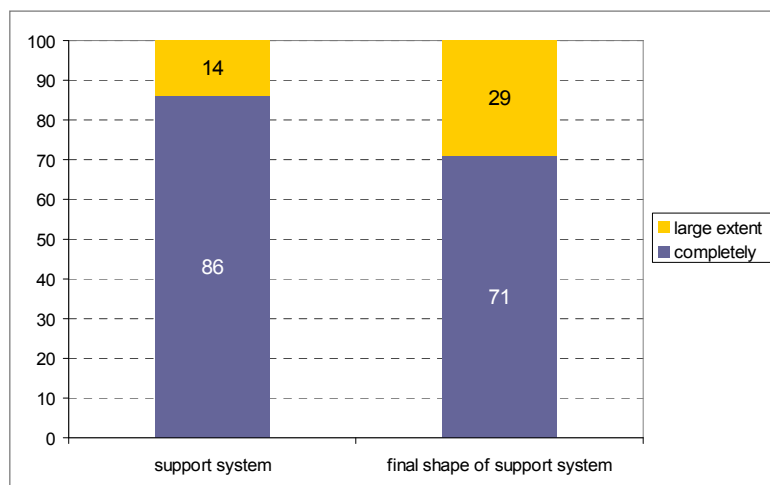


Illustration 19: Contentment with upcoming steps and division of labour for final event

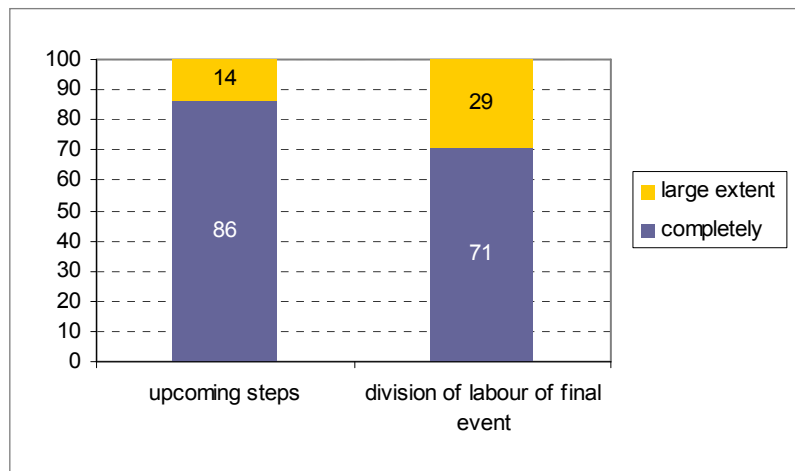
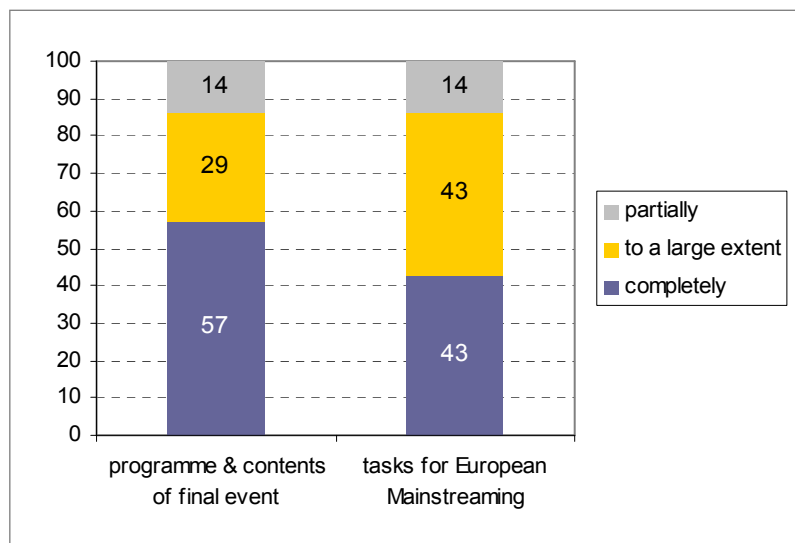


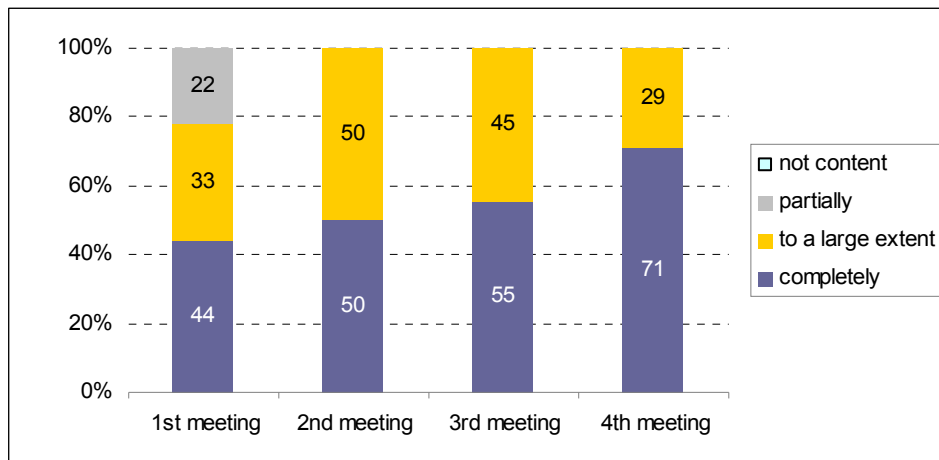
Illustration 20: Contentment with programme & contents of final event and future tasks for European mainstreaming



4.3 Outcomes

As one can observe, the contentment of the partners with the overall outcomes of the meetings reaches a peak so far at the fourth meeting in Katowice (see illustration 21). This excellent development depends on the progress made at particular levels of the project. In other words: The contentment with the outcomes of the meeting can be regarded as a result of information and workflow during the meeting- Therefore, several thematic questions concerning information were asked in the survey.

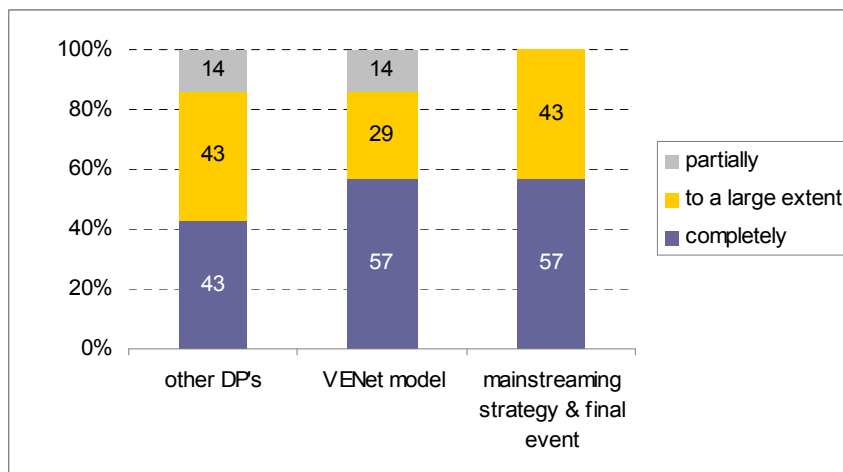
Illustration 21: General contentment with the outcomes of the meetings



Of course, the main objective of the transnational DP is the development and dissemination of its core product, i.e. the VENet model. Here, contentment was predominantly positive in the fourth meeting, too. This also holds true for other issues such as the information and decision-making on the mainstreaming strategy and final event as well as on the implementation of Gender Mainstreaming.

Compared to the poor understanding of the VENet model in the first meeting, where about 50% of the partners were discontent with the presentations and the working sessions on the VENet model, it can be learning from the fourth meeting in Katowice that this topic has developed very well in the TCA. As mentioned before, clear evidence for a significant improvement of the transnational work also comes from other ratings on the strengths and weaknesses of the meeting.

Illustration 22: Assessment on information & decision-making regarding ...



In addition to these issues, the particular workflow in the meetings has a strong impact on the overall goal attainment. As the ratings in the fourth meeting show, this dimension has improved markedly, too, as can be seen on the ratings concerning the mutual understanding of aims and objectives, the understanding about the shared roles and responsibilities and the working plan agreed until the next meeting. In all these categories, the excellent progress of the transnational DP becomes clearly visible.

Illustration 23: Mutual understanding of aims and objectives among the partners

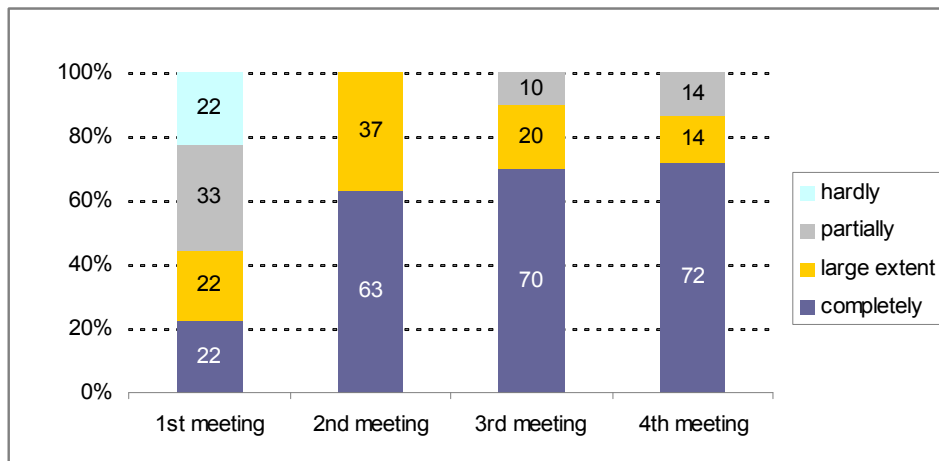


Illustration 24: Clear understanding about shared roles & responsibilities among the partners

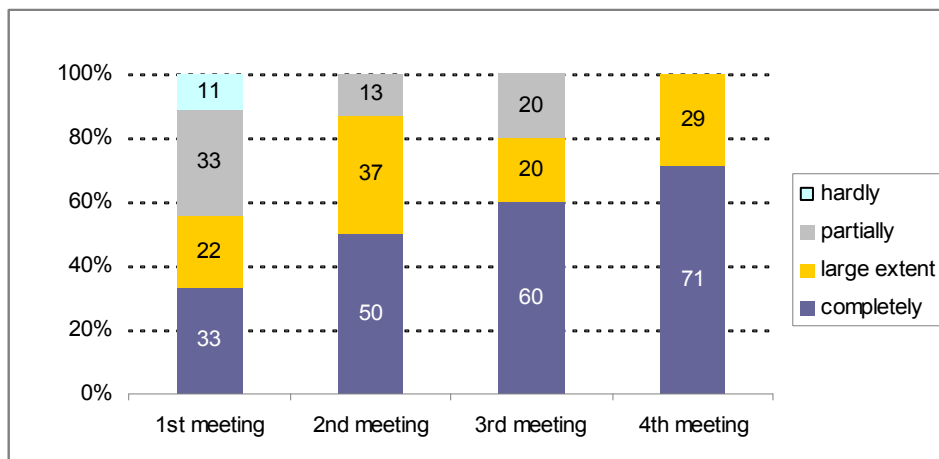
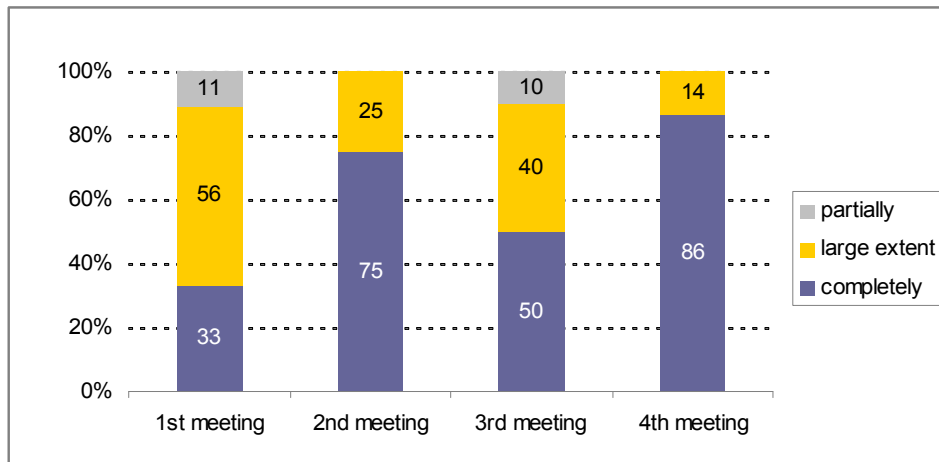


Illustration 25: Agreement on working plan until the next meeting



This positive image can be illustrated by the written comments the participants of the fourth meeting were invited to put in the questionnaire. Here, a rather unanimous picture comes up when the partners noted the following statements characterizing the strengths of the fourth meeting:

- “constructive discussion”
- “all partners involved in discussion”
- “constructive atmosphere”
- “good moderation, good plan of the meeting”
- “quite efficient, fairly equal input, good organisation, good timing”
- “very constructive meeting”

These remarks show the very positive atmosphere of the fourth meeting. However, some weaknesses have been mentioned, too. As it becomes clear, these weaknesses are linked with each other, since the lack of representatives of Cyprus and the weak treatment of Gender Mainstreaming can be traced back to the same problem, namely, the poor contribution and communication of the Cypriot partner:

- “Gender Mainstreaming”
- “no participant from Cyprus” (2)
- “miss one representative of Germany” (2)
- “lack of important persons”

4.4 Gender Mainstreaming (GM)

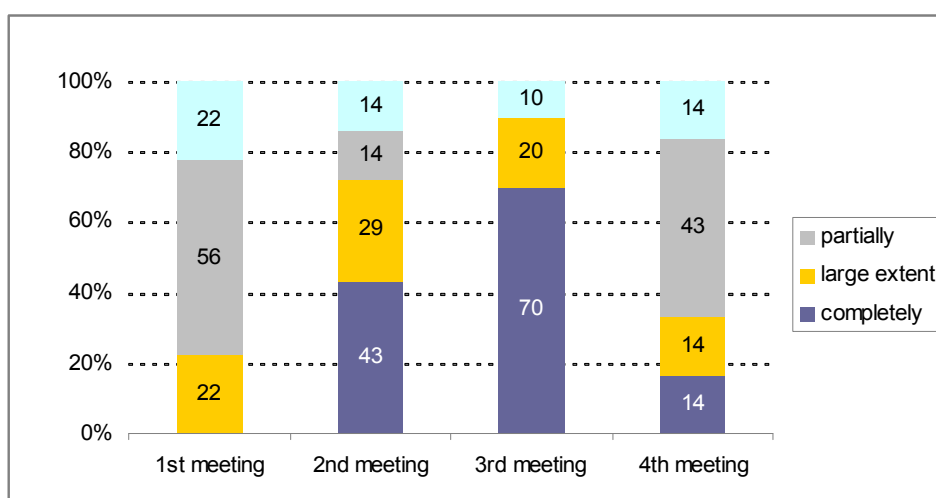
As Gender Mainstreaming is an integral part of every Equal project, transnational DP's are encouraged and forced to implement this as a horizontal issue in their work and in their products.

The implementation Gender Mainstreaming had a difficult start in the transnational DP, since in the first meeting, actually no volunteer was found who would have taken the role of the internal Gender Mainstreaming commissioner. In the second meeting, partners agreed that the Cypriot partner should take over greater responsibility for the Cypriot representative could contribute important expertise. In collaboration with the transnational secretary, the GM issue proceeded well. In the third meeting, the GM subgoals were made a part of each core issue – VENet model, internet platform, mainstreaming, and support system. GM received much more attention as a horizontal issue. Finally, this meeting became the first meeting where concrete and realistic GM goals have been determined in the main fields of the transnational action.

Thus, the transnational partnership very much improved the integration of Gender Mainstreaming in the course of the meetings.

However, due to unknown reasons, the Cypriot representative to the TCA was not sent to the fourth meeting. Even more difficult, the Cypriot partner did not contribute significantly to any development from summer 2006 onwards. Thus, the transnational DP began to lack specific gender mainstreaming expertise and knowledge. It is interesting to notice that at the fourth meeting, the partners of the transnational DP felt this lack very hardly, as the ratings on gender mainstreaming reveal.

Illustration 26: Contentment with information and decision-making on Gender Mainstreaming



As can be seen, the fourth meeting meant a real set-back with regard to information and decision-making on Gender Mainstreaming. Most of the partners are not content with the state achieved in the fourth meeting. This is particularly true with regard to the third meeting, which has been a breakthrough. Here, the transnational DP will have to be very careful to keep gender mainstreaming a well-integrated issue in all products.

- ➔ For consequent goal attainment, it will be necessary to activate all resources available to work out of the GM-subgoals as they have been set out at the third meeting.
- ➔ Since it remains unclear, whether the Cypriot partner will be able to contribute in meaningful way, other partners will have to cope with this situation.
- ➔ Nonetheless, as was mentioned in an earlier report, the TCA should continue the strong emphasis on integrating GM both in terms of contents of the final event and in its products and in terms of persons (e.g. GM experts).