

Lessons from the evaluation of EQUAL

Report on EQUAL Evaluation Conference

Hotel Bedford, Brussels, 23-24 February 2006

1. Introduction

Rationale

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Three areas vital to the success of the European Social Fund

‘First, the importance of linking the Structural Funds to the Lisbon goals of high employment, strong growth and greater social cohesion by applying a more strategic approach to programming.

‘Second, the need of enhancing the level of institutional and administrative capacity as a determining factor for Member States to better deliver the expected reforms.

‘Third, the value of partnership and empowerment, innovation and trans-national cooperation as added value element for the next generation of ESF programmes (2007-2013) and the need to effectively integrate them into the new ESF programmes, the very purpose of this Conference.’

The conference's purpose was to provide a context in which the findings and conclusions arrived at up to the end of 2005 of the EU evaluators of EQUAL, and those of the various evaluators of the national EQUAL programmes, could be compared and discussed. This was focused on reviewing what they had to say in relation to the EQUAL priorities: partnership, empowerment, innovation, mainstreaming and transnationality.

It was intended that this should encourage further high-quality evaluation over the remainder of the period of the Initiative, and provide insights of value in planning the next ESF programme period.

Participants

There were some 170 participants drawn from all Member States, and from the following groups:

- EQUAL Managing Authorities (in particular the evaluation coordinators)
- The independent Evaluators of EQUAL at national and EU level
- Members of the ESF Technical Committee involved in negotiations of the new programming period
- Commission staff of DG Employment and other DGs,
- Observers from other European Institutions.

These included:

- Delegations of Member States including persons involved in negotiations of the new programming period, the co-ordinator of the evaluation of EQUAL for the MA and the independent national evaluator.
- EU evaluators (BBI & Associates).
- Commission, DG EMPL: Evaluation Unit (I 3), Geographic units, Secretariat of the ESF Committee (A4), Horizontal units, e.g. antidiscrimination (D3), etc., EQUAL unit (B4).
- Commission, other DGs: e.g.: correspondents from DGs AGRI and REGIO.
- Other EU institutions, e.g.: Court of Auditors.

The structure of the event and the working method

The event took the form of a conference furnished with structured information from presentations by the EU evaluators, and by the national evaluators of France, Spain, Germany and Ireland, and then a discussion in three working groups, linked by common themes and tasks and co-ordinated in their work by a group of working group chairs and rapporteurs.

The key working document was a grid containing synthesised proposals from national evaluators and key questions posed by the EU evaluators. Participants in the working groups were asked to use this as the template for their discussions, and to attempt, in the total of three hours allocated to them, to have some debate on each of the themes: partnership, empowerment, innovation, mainstreaming and transnational co-operation. These discussions were further assisted by a series of brief presentations from national evaluators.

The report

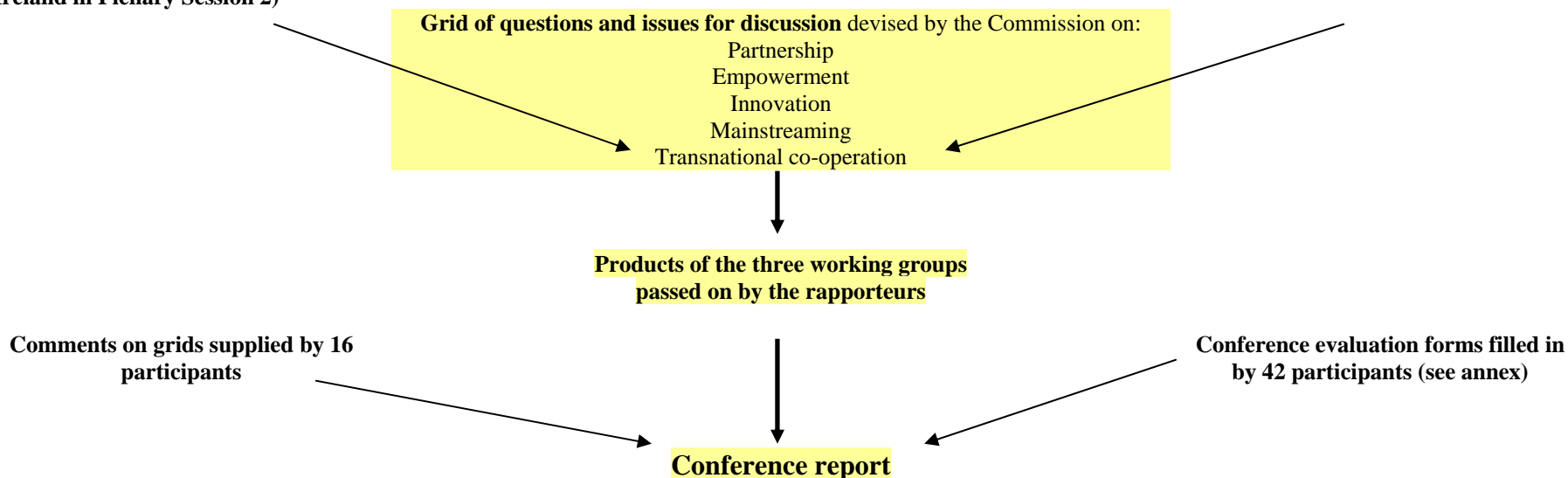
This report has been written by Jeremy Harrison, with the assistance of Jacqueline Hall and Ian Livingstone of the European Commission, who each served as rapporteurs for one of the working groups.

The report brings together the contributions from all the main sources on each of the themes discussed. It uses the structure of the grid that was provided to all participants as the backbone for the report. Specific comments have not been attributed to individuals. There has been some editing of comments to improve clarity, especially in cases where participants were writing or speaking in a second language.

The report sets out to summarise the main themes and conclusions of the conference, and to record the principal contributions to the discussions. These were made in a number of different forms: advance papers and syntheses, presentations to plenaries and working groups, discussions in working groups, and further comments provided by participants (responding to points made on the grid), and the conference evaluation forms. In the main, contributors have not been identified by name, but this information can be secured by reference to the conference website. This structured build-up of information is illustrated below:

**Input from national evaluators
(Recorded on grid and contributed
by Spain, France, Germany and
Ireland in Plenary Session 2)**

**Input from EU evaluators to the
Opening Plenary Session**



2. Summary of key points and issues emerging from the conference and the workshops

Partnership

- The discussions of the working groups reflected a practical view of partnership. There was support for the idea of two-tier partnerships (a management tier and a mainstreaming and dissemination tier), and for the contention that size of partnership is in itself much less important than quality.
- It was widely noted that projects had experienced difficulty in involving employers in partnerships, and that this affected both the quality of partnerships themselves, and their ability in many cases to mainstream their work as effectively as they might have wished.
- It was also noted that previous experience of partnership work was an important factor in effectiveness, and that sustainability was closely linked to ability to mainstream work.
- A link was also noted between effectiveness – especially of innovative work – and the ability to apply self-evaluation to partnership activities.

Empowerment

- The discussion on empowerment was the weakest of that of all the themes. There seems to have been little interest in addressing it. This may have been in part because of a lack of consensus about the importance of involving target groups in decision-making, and in part because of a lack of understanding of how empowerment might be assessed or measured.
- It was noticeable that some participants saw the desirability of fostering empowerment as running counter to the demand for projects to be efficient and cost-effective in pursuing innovation.
- The instances of successful empowerment that were noted in the discussions were almost exclusively those involving partner organisations, NGOs and small organisations representing target groups, not individual members of target groups themselves, except in respect of fostering equality of opportunity.

Innovation

- The discussions on innovation seemed to confirm a view that the concept is differently defined in different Member States, and may be described in varying ways in respect of different kinds of activities or economic sectors. It was fairly clear that few if any contributors were familiar with other innovation work sponsored by the European Commission, for instance that done by DG Industry within the Trendchart on Innovation.
- The view that innovative work should be new, and should be better than what has been done before was not contradicted. Neither was it improved upon.
- There were consistent demands for a more focused view of innovation, and for better support for it in the form of more precise policy structures to which to relate it.
- In respect of future programmes there was a difference of view as to whether it should be a blanket requirement on all projects or a focused and privileged requirement of a minority. Those who supported the second view felt that it should be funded by specific extra funds.
- It was also interesting to note some voices suggesting that more effort should be expended on encouraging projects to do further work on innovations initially pioneered by others in previous programmes.
- There was also some anxiety about the lack of good evaluation tools to assess the cost benefit of innovations.

Mainstreaming

- It was clear from the discussions that participants appreciated that effective mainstreaming is the key justification for the effort and funds behind EQUAL. They were also consistent in signalling that whereas they felt that projects had very effectively managed their horizontal mainstreaming, the far more important vertical mainstreaming priority remained problematic.
- A variety of suggestions were made for strengthening mainstreaming. Most involved strengthening the policy background to projects' work and finding ways of theming and clustering their activities.
- The difficulties of involving policymakers in some Member States was acknowledged, as were successful instances of achieving this like the Swedish committee of deputy ministers which reviews EQUAL projects' work on a regular basis, and the Irish inter-ministerial and agency group, which does the same thing.
- It was noted that much current practice by projects is the wrong way round – they should be encouraged first to articulate mainstreaming objectives, and then to devise dissemination methods. This matched the agreement that mainstreaming needs to be planned and begun as

early in a project's life as possible.

- There was concern that evaluation methods need to be improved. Peer review could be used better and more extensively, and more work needs to go into developing shared impact indicators against which mainstreaming can be monitored and evaluated across projects.

Transnational co-operation

- The discussion was largely about project-level transnational co-operation and very little about thematic transnationality or about Member State or inter-regional partnerships. Some participants took the view that the purpose of transnational co-operation should be to improve the quality of project work, and some took the view that it should be to make a contribution to national policy priorities.
- There were suggestions that there should be a better – preferably common - structure for evaluating transnational co-operation

Other emerging issues

- A number of contributions from new Member States underlined the learning opportunity that involvement in EQUAL has offered both to managing authorities and to project promoters. It was noted how difficult many had found the EQUAL application process, both because of the lack of what was referred to as 'a project pipeline' of experienced former applicants able to convene partnerships and manage the application process, and because it was felt that the meaning of some of the guidance materials supplied by the Commission had been lost in translation.
- This lack of an experienced 'project pipeline' suggested a potential strong role for ex-ante evaluation of national plans for the implementation of future programmes in new Member States. This evaluation could be used as a way of adding context and guidance for potential applicants.
- There was a call across all the themes discussed for better and possibly for shared evaluation approaches that could be applied at project level. And could include usable cost-benefit tools, benchmarking structures and guidance on peer review.

3. The debate on the EQUAL priority themes

Partnership

Key conclusions

The following broad themes came through the discussions in the workshops and the written comments provided by those participants who chose to contribute them:

Partnership structure

- Partnerships need to be structured on the basis of what they need to do to deliver on their aims, and to ensure that their work is sustainable.

Employer involvement

- Employer involvement is important, and needs to be matched by labour market organisations and NGOs that can represent beneficiary groups.

The size and structure of partnerships

- The size of partnerships is not as important as the quality of its partners, their ability to work together to achieve common goals, and the specific expertise they can bring with them.
- There is an argument for two-tier partnerships in projects concerned with innovation: a first tier which is involved with day-to-day management and achievement of the core aims, and a second tier which brings different skills and qualities to the task of dissemination and sustainability.

The importance of experience or prior collaboration

- Evaluators had observed in EQUAL that partnerships in Round 2 that had previously been involved in Round 1 had benefited from that experience, and were better able to conduct and manage their work. The same was true of partnerships in which a significant core group of partners had prior experience of working together.

Support for smaller partners

- Smaller partners, especially those with little prior experience of working to ESF demands, and in a context driven by innovative goals, are likely to need some specific support if they are to deliver the potential suggested by their expertise.

Sustainable partnerships

- Partnerships that can show success in mainstreaming are most likely to be sustainable

Self-evaluation

- Self-evaluation is an important aspect of partnership work, and especially of innovative projects. There is evidence that projects that practice it experience more successful outcomes than those that do not, though direct causality cannot be proved. But projects require assistance and guidance to deliver it.
- There is a built in tension between on the one hand the desirability of making demands for co-ordinated self-evaluation by projects, and supporting them evaluation tools, and on the other hand the need to ensure that they are not subjected to what was called 'evaluation fatigue'.

Background to the discussions on *partnership*

EU evaluator's comments	National evaluators (from the grid)	Comments from national evaluators' presentations in Plenary Session 2
<p>The implementation of the partnership principle, understood as a mechanism for bringing together various relevant actors for tackling an issue, and for working together towards shared goals, has probably been one of the main successes of EQUAL: although more investigation is still needed, it seems that it has been key to facilitate access, both to 'target groups' and, though to a lesser extent, to the decision-making community. It has also introduced and/or consolidated the capacity to work together between actors on a given territory or around a given issue. Nevertheless, different options are possible for the promotion of partnerships, depending on the aims pursued, in</p>	<p>Preparation of partnerships</p> <p>The adequate preparation of a successful partnership requires:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. That potential partners are involved early,2. that a precise analysis is done on the regional or sectoral labour market situation in relation with the concerned problem areas before the definition of the approach and activities of the project/s,3. that the relevant co-funding agencies are sought in advance,4. that development competence is included as regards	<p>Points from the Spanish evaluation</p> <p>The underlying rationale of the partnership principle has opened up new opportunities in Spain that otherwise would not have existed or would not have been as beneficial for the organizations involved.</p> <p>Partnership working has brought together, in many cases for the first time, a diverse range of statutory, private, voluntary and community-sector organizations to promote new ways of combating discrimination and inequality in the labour market.</p>

particular depending on whether partnerships are viewed as a temporary instrument for implementing projects, or whether they are promoted as such, as new governance arrangements.

Very schematically, these **options/questions** concern:

- **Size:** smaller partnerships can be more effective for immediate action, larger partnerships can allow for the development of relevant networks. Therefore the question is: **What is/are the rationale(s) for requiring work in partnership, and what implications do this have concerning size?**
- **Composition:** institutional representation is important for external credibility, and possibly for mainstreaming, yet partnership composition on the basis of the skills and expertise of each partner is likely to facilitate joint work (here of course the ideal is to combine both criteria). Therefore the question is: **The EQUAL guidelines had required the gathering of all 'relevant' actors: should this requirement be maintained, and if yes, should guidance be provided on how 'relevance' is to be understood?**
- **Decision-making mechanisms:** centralised decision-making can be more effective (provided adequate consultation and capacity building mechanisms can take place), whilst fully participative mechanisms can be slower and heavier but contribute to changing relationships between partners, e.g. public institutions and small organisations. Therefore the question is: **Should participative decision-making be promoted in all cases, or should guidance be provided for the adoption of the most suited decision-making mechanisms in view of the aims pursued?**

Whatever the decisions made concerning these 3 features of partnerships, it seems crucial to promote, in all cases, **sound project management** methods, and to provide guidance in this respect.

organisation, management and specialist knowledge of the fields in which the partnership is going to operate.

Management of partnerships

The techniques to ensure involvement and management must be carefully selected, including proven participatory methods and tools for internal management, monitoring systems and organisational and financial arrangements for networking.

Roles in partnerships

The partners' objectives have to be in agreement with the partnership general objectives and the roles, tasks and responsibilities have to be clear, including adequate mix of public and private structures, of competences and resources and of operative and strategic partners.

The leading partners should organize regular meetings in order to exchange ideas, to get comments from organizations which are competent but which are not being involved in the project. It is necessary to involve the employers more in those regular actions

Verification and evaluation of partnerships:

It is crucial to define and apply self-evaluation systems for the partnerships and to monitor and evaluated project results, in such a way that problems can be identified in time and then the projects can swiftly adapt to this.

It is recommended that results are also related to the participants (e.g.:the degree in which they find a job or go successfully through an education) via a participant recording tool, containing general result indicators as well as generating tables for the year reports.

The partnerships have acted inclusively, drawing all the relevant organisations into the partnerships to provide a holistic approach to the needs of the target groups and being, in some cases, sources of innovation themselves.

The correct implementation of the partnership principle has proven to be a key aspect for the correct implementation of other EQUAL principles, such as the principles of complementarity, innovation and mainstreaming. It has also greatly contributed to improve the quality of the projects as it has enabled a better definition of the objectives, contents and mechanisms of the project.

An evolution of the cooperation between relevant actors within and outside the partnerships has been observed as the programme developed. Some DPs also had informal or "just in time" partners for specific actions or tasks. In this respect it seems that while partnerships seem stable at first sight, they have also evolved organically over time.

Also, new ways of co-operation such as collaboration with organizations outside the partnership were detected as Round One Development Partnerships consolidated. In Round Two, Development Partnerships made a positive effort during the preparation phase, in order to include all relevant partners and stakeholders operating in the sphere of action of the project.

Policy makers were often involved to ensure mainstreaming, although it was observed that this depended very much on the interest and level of involvement of those partners, as their participation in the DP alone does not guarantee a successful mainstream into policy and practice.

A need to increase the involvement of employer organisations in the partnerships, as one of the key target audiences for EQUAL projects was detected. This would raise their awareness of the situation of disadvantaged groups, challenging stereotypes and allowing a better adjustment between supply and demand which has a direct effect on the sustainability of the actions.

The sustainability of total or partial co-operation established in Round One partnerships into Round Two is a very positive aspect of EQUAL.

Given that a high proportion of DPs in Round 2 were effectively based around existing partnerships gives a strong sense of how the partnership principle is likely to be one of the most sustainable outcomes of the programme.

Lessons learned:

Effective partnerships take time to build and consolidate and substantial resources are required for their ongoing maintenance and to avoid internal fragmentation.

A higher level of commitment of policy makers at regional level is a key factor determining ultimate potential to influence policy and practice. In this regard, it is recommended to encourage participation of policy makers in the steering groups and their active engagement in the mainstreaming efforts of the DPs.

The experience in EQUAL has highlighted the following points as key when setting up, developing and seeking to make partnerships effective, representative and inclusive:

- o Choosing the right partners is a key element of its success, with more inclusive partnerships being more effective. This requires not just good internal organisation and co-ordination, but also maintaining the involvement of organisations with different interests and motivations.

- Agreeing clear roles and responsibilities between the partners in the early stages of the project, taking into account each partner's time, expertise and resources, in order to maximize their participation.
- Frequent, focused and clear communication will help to encourage commitment and to manage expectations.
- Partners need to be clear about what is expected of them, as well as what they might expect to gain from being involved.
- Agreeing clear objectives and a realistic timetable provide partners with a clear idea of where and how to channel their resources and efforts.
- Undertaking consultation with the beneficiary target groups to inform the design and delivery of the projects.

The debate on *partnership* – comments, conclusions and issues set alongside the EU evaluators' questions



Size of partnership is a balance – if too small there is a risk that it may fall due to a weaker partner – too large and it becomes difficult to achieve agreement. However appropriateness of membership is more important.

Guidance should be offered, including some examples of how decision-making might be achieved – but guidance only.

It depends on what is to be delivered

Size will depend on objectives

The size of the partnership depends on the problem it aims to resolve.

- To my idea – mainly based on a study on local learning centres for DG EAC - we should differentiate between countries with a long partnership tradition (NW member states especially) and MS which don't have a long tradition in this field (SE). For the first group, partnerships might be viewed as a temporary instrument (other partnerships will take over), while in MS without a partnership tradition it is important to build forth on them to establish a developing ground for activities in certain fields.

Smaller partnerships are much more effective. As proposed already in the meeting, it should be advisable to differentiate between two levels of partnerships: a core team and a larger group of more loosely attached partners, who get their main information from one or two of the core members.

They can be but this should not be the rule

Tool oriented projects do not require numerous representatives but direct contributors.

7-12 partners can be the most effective.

What are the implications for the desirable size of partnerships?

-Smaller partnerships can be more effective for immediate action

organisational and institutional policy and practice

- Sustainability of the partnership is helped by mainstreaming success. A partnership that sees its outcomes accepted into mainstream policy or practice may well remain in existence longer than one whose outcome fail to interest the mainstream.
- Sustainability of the concept of partnership is more important than the sustainability of the DP itself
- Broader – less formal – partnerships have more potential to be sustained than the formal/contractual DP partnerships.

- Pre-existing partnerships had more success than those created specifically for EQUAL
- **But** EQUAL partnerships could be the beginning of a longer-term partnership

- In the second round of EQUAL the creation of partnerships was easier because partners had found common ways of working together in round one.

- The size of a partnership is less important than the quality of the partners, the agreement that they make, and the experience that they bring to it.
- Large partnerships were difficult to create and manage due to the relatively short life of an EQUAL DP.
- A two-level partnership may be optimal, with an operation core of highly involved partners which acts as a locomotive, dragging along a looser network of less involved partners.

- Suggestion for two-level partnerships: Operational core/Network-based
- Size not important: More critical is the quality of the partners and the agreement and the experience they bring.
- Smaller DP member organisations find it difficult to be fully involved.
- Need for direct training intervention on the creation and management of partnerships.

Too many members and a project might not succeed at all.

- Larger partnerships can allow for the development of relevant networks

Management of partnerships

Top-down element is essential

Management has to follow aims.

I agree that participative decision-making should be promoted. (several other respondents were in agreement with this)

Guidance should be provided. (Several respondents signalled agreement with this)

Should participative decision-making be promoted in all cases, or should guidance be provided for the adoption of the most suited decision-making mechanisms in view of the aims pursued?

- Often smaller partners in a Development Partnership find it more difficult than larger organisations to become fully involved, perhaps due to having less time and resources.
- Some evaluators felt that the provision of direct training for partner organisations could help to facilitate the creation and management of partnerships.
- There is often too great a focus on principles and not enough on product development. That can result in the focus being on managing the project rather than the partnership and its results.

Roles in the partnerships

Composition is crucial: organisations with responsibility for labour-market policy, and NGOs representing client groups

It is important to balance public and private partners, but they should be evolved on the basis of their skills and expertise.

It could be useful to give guidance on different ways to participate in a project: a. direct involvement in the development of the project; b. networking-level involvement to prepare networking process.

In the EUR10 it would be preferable to attach most of the decision maker power with a partner which is already experienced in EU funded activities (in Malta for this reason all leading partners are public sector), while in most of the EUR15 a more democratic decision process might be chosen. To my opinion it is very difficult to provide for guidance (except tailor-made guidance) in this field.

Representation requirements should be kept at a minimum.

The EQUAL guidelines had required the gathering of all 'relevant' actors: should this requirement be maintained, and if yes, should guidance be provided on how 'relevance' is to be understood?

- Involving employers in partnerships has not proved easy, but approaching them through their representative organisations and professional bodies had proved useful.
- Even when an employer is involved in a partnership, care should be taken to ensure the commitment of the company as a whole, and not just one interested individual within that company. If the involvement is due to one person, and that person moves to a different job, then the involvement of the company may cease.
- The organisation of employer-specific events is a good way of involving employers – they like to meet other employers.
- Agreement on the need for involvement of employer organisations as an aid to direct employer involvement.

- as wide institutional representation?

These are not mutually exclusive. A balance of skills, expertise and representation is important.

Employers will only be motivated to take part if they see a clear value-added to them

This is important both for assuring performance and for mainstreaming.

Partnership should be based on skills and expertise, not on wide institutional representation.

This is the better option.

- as involving partners on the basis of their skills & expertise?

Verification and evaluation of partnerships

Self-evaluation systems are desirable, but the requirement should not duplicate/ overload with programme-level evaluation.

Self-evaluation cannot be forced on them

Monitoring has to be simple to use

Participant recording works well if it is carefully developed to suit the needs of different participant groups – it does not work well in all instances e.g. projects that aim to build capacity and perhaps do not have any direct beneficiaries.

DP evaluators need support with regard to approaches, tools and standards.

With regard to standardising DP (project) recording of results via a 'participant recording tool' (National evaluators' proposal) : Yes, but it's worth considering how to allow for specific approaches by individual projects. Standardisation would suffer, but.....

Such a tool is vital.

Needs a working, clear database and monitoring system.

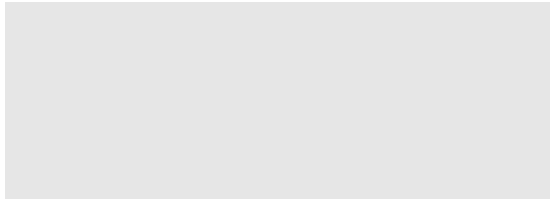
No, this kind of tool would be too heavy, in particular in education projects.

How do you make sure that projects apply self-evaluation and they do not treat it as an additional bureaucratic requirement (especially in countries where the evaluation culture is rather low)?

Of course self-evaluation is important. Regarding EQUAL; however, I would prefer putting the focus on the identification of successes

- The different levels of evaluation should be coordinated in order to avoid 'evaluation fatigue' amongst partnerships
- Partnerships that carry out self-evaluations were found to have had more successful outcomes than those that did not. However, causality could not be proved – it could be the case that the more innovative DPs also were more committed to self-evaluation.
- **1st round – partnerships too large** and cumbersome. Lessons learned. (Italy)
- 2 tier management to maintain efficiency in DP work and maintain effectiveness and efficiency. **Core and Evolving** (adding of partners as mainstreaming increases in prominence).
- BUT all key partners must be committed from the start.
- Policy based goals but in meantime support from the authorities

(good practice) and the identification of solutions for problems encountered. Of course, it is also necessary to monitor working processes and the participation of final beneficiaries and whatever information which could easily be gathered on gross results would be useful. At the other hand, the task of identifying the net result of the DP's belongs to the external evaluator. EQUAL is a kind of laboratory: sometimes how results are reached is much more interesting than the result itself.



Empowerment

Key conclusions

The following broad themes came through the discussions in the workshops and the written comments provided by those participants who chose to contribute them:

Empowerment and effectiveness

- Participation and efficiency need to be balanced in the interests of administering and effective project. This makes it difficult to pursue an empowerment agenda in projects that have demanding goals and are expected to deliver mainstream results.
- Few of the evaluators taking part reported instances of direct involvement of target groups in projects' decision-making processes.

Empowerment and institutional change

- EQUAL appears to have provided widespread experience of the empowerment of small organisations and NGOs, many of them acting as representatives of target groups.
- There has been less experience of personal empowerment, and that which has been noted is likely to be the result of top-down rather than bottom-up influences.
- The values of empowerment take time to embed in public policy and private practice, and those who are expected to foster and support it themselves need help and guidance.

Levels of empowerment

- There was evidence in some Member States of some scepticism about the value of focusing on empowerment of target groups, except in respect of attaining equality of opportunity.
- In other contexts there was strong support for the contention that empowerment needs to mean more than mere outreach and consultation. There were also interesting references to definitions of empowerment involving 'attorneyship on own behalf' and 'overcoming victimhood'.

Background to the discussions on *empowerment*

(The EU evaluators did not make any specific points on empowerment, subsuming their comments into what they had to say on partnership)

National evaluators (from the grid)

Comments from national evaluators' presentations in Plenary Session 2

Empowerment as a quest for effectiveness

The mere inclusion of the target groups not being enough, the partnerships must try to involve all partners under a perspective of effectiveness in all phases and activities, including the definition, management, implementation, adjustment and monitoring of the projects.

Empowerment and institutional change

Promoting empowerment entails changing working culture and even the orientation of the values in the institutions. This change affects technical skills and attitudes of leaders and practitioners. Therefore, the application of the Empowerment principle requires systematic training.

Some means used to bring about the necessary changes are:

1. the spread of good practice
2. the application of systems for involving beneficiaries through discussion of problems, objectives and actions
3. the integration of target groups in the Thematic Networks.

Understanding and awareness of the level of empowerment

Correct understanding of the importance of the Empowerment principle entails also the comprehension of the level and approach of empowerment.

Empowerment means:

- responsibility-taking by the players
- promotion of active citizenship expressed in involvement in the decision-making processes,
- engagement in the initiatives of the targeted individuals
- acquisition of skills and capacities as a result of the initiatives.
- improving the position of the target group consisting of those with a weak position in the labour market and in the development of various processes and networks

Points from the Spanish evaluation

Partnership working has enabled small organisations to be empowered through their active involvement in a partnership, reinforcing their capacity for collective action around employment and training issues. The experience gained through the implementation of the projects has favoured the movement towards more participatory and inclusive decision-making procedures. However, the prevalence in some cases of a more "centralised" model with a strong core steering group which drives the DP's activity were still observed in Round 2.

The greater involvement of voluntary and community organizations in Round 2 is likely to increase programme impact in terms of capacity building and empowerment.

In terms of beneficiary empowerment, a strength identified by the evaluation team in application of the partnership principle is the widespread practice of including organisations that represent the beneficiary groups in the partnership. In general, the DPs recognise the importance of the active participation of the beneficiaries and the groups that represent them. This not only improves access to "hard to reach" groups, but also allows them to shape and delivery the activities, contributing to the development of new ways of tackling discrimination in the labour market. The majority of the DPs have involved organisations representing the target groups within the partnership or have engaged with them for a particular task or activity. Direct beneficiary participation has also taken place and has proven to be very positive, although in some cases it has been observed that the information gathered did not directly feed into the implementation of the project.

The debate on *empowerment* – comments, conclusions and issues set alongside the EU evaluators' questions

<p>→</p> <p>Comments on these questions from participants</p> <p>←</p>	<p>Questions from EU evaluators on empowerment</p>	<p>Conclusions and issues raised from the workshops</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Empowerment as a quest for effectiveness</p> <p>Effectiveness must be sought i.e. effectiveness in progressing towards the project's main goals, and not only on effectiveness in accomplishing activities</p> <p>Involving all partners at all stages needs to be reconciled with the role of a leader who is responsible for administration and money. There is a contradiction..</p> <p>Very difficult. There must be a balance between participation and efficiency.</p> <p>Very difficult to do in mainstream programmes.</p> <p>This should be dependent on the type of project.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Few evaluators reported the direct involvement of target groups in the decision-making process, but some reported the involvement of groups or agencies representing those target groups. ▪ One evaluator had found that 'reference groups' (similar to focus groups) had been useful to re-orient the direction of the partnership.
<p style="text-align: center;">Empowerment and institutional change</p> <p>The impact of empowerment on changing working culture and the values of an organisation defines the concrete problem of empowerment within a project.</p> <p>Decision-makers have to be incorporated into the work of a project, otherwise no change happens.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong experience of empowerment of small organisations/groups/NGOs • Personal empowerment – danger of tokenism • Concept of top-down empowerment is difficult to comprehend • New values of empowerment take a long time to embed – public sector actors need help and guidance to play their part

Understanding and awareness of the level of empowerment

It is important to see that an employment strategy should empower not only the individuals that use the service from public institutions, but should also cover those who represent the public institutions.

Empowerment is something that can be present in a project at different levels of intensity.

Improvements in the position of the target group may be longer-term, and not always amenable to immediate assessment.

In the two MS of which I know most (NL and MT) the principle of empowerment does not get much attention. There are two reasons for this:

1. In both countries, especially in NL, there is already a wide experience with a lot of organizations that are connected to EQUAL; some organizations involved are also representing the target groups. Empowering these even more is not always necessary.
2. Empowering the target groups themselves is not always considered a useful strategy. Most important exceptions are – both in NL and MT – connected with Equal Opportunities.

- Empowerment: not just outreach and adhesion to actions, but involving people
- The idea of “attorneyship on own behalf”, overcoming of victimhood

Innovation

Key conclusions

The following broad themes came through the discussions in the workshops and the written comments provided by those participants who chose to contribute them:

Mechanisms in new programmes

- The most consistent statement was that innovation requires a more focused approach, and that it should be encouraged in relation to national public policy priorities.
- It was also suggested that it should be more goal-oriented than has been the case in the past, and that this might be achieved by providing a themed background that could encourage exchange between projects, and by requiring the use of the Log Frame approach.
- It was noted that a good deal of innovation in EQUAL has happened as part of the mainstreaming process itself. This is consistent with another view expressed: that there should be no specific encouragement for innovation, but that it should be woven automatically into all ESF projects.
- Counter to this was the view that innovation requires strong encouragement through top-down programming and bottom-up financial encouragement for innovative work.

Defining innovation

- The strongest demand was for innovation to be recognised as a relative term, and for flexible definitions to be adopted.
- The clearest specific definition adopted was: ‘What is done must be new, and must be better than what has been done before’.
- There was a demand for innovative effort to be diverted from exclusively working on fresh product, action and policy prototypes to attempting to improve the form and use of those already developed within innovative projects.
- There was also support for the view that innovation in the policy sphere of EQUAL and the ESF could be improved by learning from other spheres (like medicine) where experience has been accumulated over a long period of time.

Implementation

- It was suggested that innovation must be seen as taking place alongside partnership and mainstreaming, and cannot be isolated from them. In fact that innovation without an active mainstreaming strategy is meaningless.

Monitoring, evaluating and mainstreaming

- There was concern that there are not yet adequate, shared tools for monitoring and evaluating innovation in an ESF environment. Most particularly, participants felt the need for better means of cost-benefit analysis, and believed that this should be applied to projects as a matter of course. Without it, the products of innovation will remain difficult to recommend or sell to potential users.
- This also meant that better means should be shared of measuring both tangible and intangible outcomes.
- These tools also need to recognise the fact the innovation is a medium-term process. It cannot easily be evaluated in the short-term.

Background to the discussions on *innovation*

EU evaluator's comments	Partnership & Empowerment National evaluators (from the grid)	Comments from national evaluators' presentations in Plenary Session 2
<p>The principle of innovation has been at the core of the EQUAL community initiative. Although evaluation reports have focused on different aspects of the implementation of the principle, which makes it difficult to generalise findings, it can be said that the 'obligation to innovate' has sometimes generated a change in the practices of DP actors, in terms of developing tools for constantly monitoring their actions and being responsive to change. It has also yielded important results in terms of improved targeting of actions, as well as governance, institutional and</p>	<p>1. Formal mechanisms in the new programmes</p> <p>There is a need for formal mechanisms to facilitate innovative labour market thinking and the testing of new ideas in order to improve employability and adaptability of the labour force and to promote enterprise, and ensure an inclusive labour market.</p> <p>Future programmes should consider to include a line, axis or programme space for the encouragement of innovation with clear objectives of experimentation (as differentiated from objectives exclusively focused on impacting the</p>	<p>Points made in the German evaluation</p> <p>Amongst 840 declared innovations 380 have been recognised by Evaluation as 'potentials' and rated as innovative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to some extent: 20% - to a medium range: 60% - to a high /very high degree: 20% <p>Factors promoting innovation development</p>

organisational changes, particularly in some specific sectors or towards specific target groups. This points to the need to promote innovation in well defined areas, perhaps not invested much by policies so far.

But taking seriously such a principle poses some questions for the next programming phase, amongst which:

- **Is experimentation to be promoted only in areas where there is a clear policy demand?**
This is good for mainstreaming, but not necessarily for civil society and the advancement of rights. And innovation has sometimes been much more vigorous in sectors or on issues where policy was not developed, or even where there was a rather adverse policy context (e.g. asylum seekers);
- What is the **right balance** between funding innovation and maintaining mainstream funding for actions against discrimination?
- Promoting innovation also makes it important to address issues concerning the architecture of programmes: What kind of **programme flexibility** is required for dealing with justified changes in workplans or partnership composition? How can co-funding requirements be adapted to support innovative projects? What is the time horizon for innovative projects?

beneficiary population), in order to search for and try out the utility of the innovation.

This entails that the funding of innovative labour market interventions should be considered on a more focused themed basis, in order to improve potential for future mainstreaming of innovations. The themes to develop innovative projects should be the ones on which the current national relevant policies are not sufficiently involved yet

2. Definition and flexibility of the innovation strategies

From one side, the innovation strategy at the local as well as the national level has to be clearly defined. The definition can be reinforced for example via a memorandum of understanding. A defined set of priorities entails concentrating resources into a limited number of innovative projects and objectives. But it has to be flexible, so it can be changed in the mid-term review and ensure as much as possible operational freedom and flexibility in the promotion of innovative and trans-national experiences.

Staff of the managing authorities needs to internalise innovation in order to be able to assist the projects, to communicate with other departments and agencies and to support the dissemination of results.

3. Correlation with the implementation of other principles of innovation

Partnership often features an innovative character. Partnership and trans-national cooperation have a great potential to raise adequate and well managed innovation and the networks, generated by the partnerships, can be particularly suited to the generation of complex approaches towards solving labour market policy problems.

But, in order to promote the potentials resulting from the more informal logic of the network, the formal funding processes shouldn't hinder the content-related development processes.

The Thematic Networks should focus their activity on promoting experience exchange among partnerships and promoting the upgrading of the narratives of those experiences by means of producing model syntheses of participants' experiences and innovations. This entails the implementation of an open system of product validation

- Networking in general	33%
- Networking skills of partners	33%
- Well engaged strategic partners	26%
- Impulses from transnational cooperation	19%
- Specific institutions for networking	17%
- DP-evaluation	10%
- Involvement of potential users at an early stage	8%
- Good contacts to enterprises	6%
- Specific competence within the DP	6%

Factors inhibiting innovation development

- Diverging interests between partners	11%
- Lack of networking skills & missing experience	11%
- Lacking contacts to enterprises	10%
- Weak involvement of strategic partners	10%
- Discontinuity of personnel & partners inclusion	7%
- Missing relevant partners	6%
- Unprecise & insufficient basic analysis	6%
- Wrong partners	2%

The debate on *innovation* – comments, conclusions and issues set alongside the EU evaluators’ questions

<p>→ Comments on these questions from participants ←</p>	<p>Questions from EU evaluators on innovation</p> <p>Formal mechanisms in the new programmes</p>	<p>Conclusions and issues raised from the workshops</p>
<p>Innovation needs clear definition on different levels: process, project management, products.....</p> <p>While innovation oriented programmes are very needed, and by definition should be flexible in terms of management and financial requirements, they should include financial efficiency and effectiveness as criteria to judge their products.</p> <p>A more focused approach is needed, but selection of topics should be driven by public policy.</p> <p>A lot of innovation takes place in the mainstreaming process.</p> <p>There should be no formal line/axis for innovative measures – innovation should be part of the definition of priority.</p> <p>Without being on a national agenda no innovation happens.</p> <p>Should be goal-oriented towards solving issues – using the Log Frame approach.</p> <p>Innovation is not an absolute concept, it must be related to its contexts.</p> <p>To my opinion, in most of the EUR15 (and also maybe in MT and CY) there are already a lot of initiatives coming from the national governments combating discrimination on the labour market; as a consequence of this, EU involvement (ESF) might be restricted to innovative actions. The only exception might be the activities directed at asylum seekers.</p>	<p>What is the right balance between funding innovation and maintaining mainstream funding for actions against discrimination?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovation is a difficult, complex and relative concept across Member States. • If innovation is to be successful it should be in line with current policy development, therefore assuming a relevance from the early stages of the project. • Themes to be specific and agreed in advance with recipients and decision makers. • Radical innovation could be encouraged through a dual approach: top-down programmes and bottom-up incentives (bonuses for really innovative projects) • Funding of innovative labour market interventions should be on a more focused, themed basis in order that learning can be developed more effectively across projects.
<p>Definition and flexibility of the innovation strategies</p>		
<p>Need for common understanding of innovation, but avoid restrictive terms</p> <p>Yes, although you could reserve a certain amount for supply-driven innovations</p> <p>Yes, as otherwise there will be little long-term effect.</p>	<p>Is experimentation to be promoted only in areas where there is a clear policy demand?</p> <p>- <i>This is good for mainstreaming, but not necessarily for civil society and the advancement of rights.</i></p> <p>- <i>Innovation has sometimes been much more</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key issue: focus on clear political demand but need to identify themes for innovation – what will it mean in 4/5 or 6 years? • Staff in managing authorities – conflict of interest between selection role and counselling role. Staff cannot be friend and foe at the same time.

Too many principles to be implemented at the same time. Innovation and partnership combined is too demanding. More flexibility to projects.

Policy demand is necessary if we are serious about mainstreaming.

Don't just continue to develop prototypes but work on some that has been developed.

Supporting civil society is a different story and calls for support in building advocacy capacity.

What is innovation? Innovation strategy is difficult to draft as innovations usually evolve during a project.

Learn from other sectors in approach to product development e.g. Medical.

First of all it should be possible to meet demand for innovation. Then we can take care of areas where such demand does not exist.

Innovation should be measured as a mini project starting with the problem it aims to solve.

Innovation is not necessarily linked to policy demands. Maybe, the EU should even especially stimulate innovation in fields of interest where the Commission has policy priorities but where national governments have no effective strategy. In these fields there is also the most room for innovation.

Innovation should at least be an important selection criterion. Sometimes projects without direct beneficiaries (e.g. developing a method, an IT product, a communication strategy or a centre) should be preferred to projects with participants, because a negative result from an experiment can seriously damage the position and motivation of a participant.

vigorous in sectors or on issues where policy was not developed, or even where there was a rather adverse policy context (e.g. asylum seekers).

- What is done must be new and must be better than what has been done before.

Correlation with the implementation of other principles of innovation

Of course, it should be possible to change work-plans (at least when not involving a larger budget) and change some of the partners when necessary (when at least the general strategy and methods of the programme and the leading partner stay the same).

It should be a good thing that national (and regional/local) governments adjust their funding (and administrative) requirements as much as possible to those of the EU. In this way also the amount of absorption of the budget will be greater.

This is an over-emphasis in the ESF. Why fund things that can be funded by national money?

What kind of programme flexibility is required for dealing with justified changes in work-plans or partnership composition?

How can co-funding requirements be adapted to support innovative projects?

- Do not set innovation aside from partnership and mainstreaming.
- Mainstreaming and innovation are two sides of the same coin.
- Innovation without mainstreaming does not make sense – it is a waste of money.

Monitoring, evaluating and mainstreaming innovation

Distinction between development phase and test phase.

Cost-benefit analysis should be required.

Times change rapidly – innovation may be old in a couple of years.

Policy-makers should somehow be involved in the work of projects. It is an everlasting problem that administration is reluctant to accept new methods and ways of working suggested from the outside.

Compare costs and benefits.

I would not focus on the themes but on supporting an innovative environment.

Innovation is a medium-term process. It is important to have specific monitoring tools for it.

As a general rule, it takes three years for a project to confirm its sustainability.

This does not mean that evaluation should wait until three years after the start of the project. *Ad hoc* evaluation is always necessary. Frequently the work processes of a DP teach more about the strength of an innovation than its results.

What should be the time horizon for innovative projects?

- Define how to measure it both for tangible and intangible outcomes – (we may be thinking about the concept in different ways.)
- Important to work on the way to measure innovation through the experience of other countries (benchmarking),
- Important to have comparison between cost and benefit for the instruments/practices to enable organisations to sell their 'potential' innovation to buyers. Need to think about cost – effectiveness and practicality.
- Innovation could be on systems/policies e.g. social policy/inclusion and labour policies. (This is less concrete and more difficult to measure but important not to lose the potential of EQUAL)

Mainstreaming

Key conclusions

The following broad themes came through the discussions in the workshops and the written comments provided by those participants who chose to contribute them:

Mainstreaming strategies

- EQUAL projects were felt to have been widely effective in horizontal mainstreaming, but much less so in vertical mainstreaming.
- Much current practice the wrong way round – DPs should be encouraged to articulate mainstreaming objectives at the start, and then devise dissemination methods.
- It was widely noted that Monitoring Committees could only be of limited use to projects in securing national policy audiences. It was acknowledged that in some Member States there are great difficulties in involving political decision-makers in reviewing and exploiting product and policy from innovative projects.
- Where there has been success in involving senior people from national organisations and agencies, this has often been achieved through national thematic groups and networks rather than by individual projects.
- Another important function of thematic networks has been to enable products of groups of projects to be collected and formatted for presentation to potential users. This has given them both coherence and credibility.
- Mainstreaming needs to be planned from the start of a project, and must start early if it is to have any realistic chance of success.

Mainstreaming plans

- The differences between dissemination and mainstreaming were emphasised – mainstreaming being a complex matching of product and policy innovation to demand and policy structure.
- There was support for the idea of targeting mainstreaming more systematically by specifying a precise field of activity, developing an action plan that identifies policy gaps and needs, conducting a pilot implementation phase and creating specific evaluation criteria.

- There was also support for creating a peer review approach involving projects with similar approaches and products as well as policymakers and representatives of possible implementing organisations.
- Projects should be encouraged to develop impact indicators and appropriate monitoring mechanisms to track them throughout a project’s life.
- It was suggested that managing authorities need to play a more active role in developing both the market for mainstreaming projects’ results, and a ‘trademark’ to provide credibility for ESF-funded projects.
- The Commission should consider drawing up a discussion document highlighting good mainstreaming practice.

Networks and themes

- It was noted that widespread difficulties are currently being experienced in monitoring and evaluating the mainstreaming process. Some of this appears to be due to the difficulty of establishing consistent means of validating good practice, some to the difficulty of evaluating innovation, and some from the short timescales against which such evaluations have to be conducted.
- In this context, the importance of encouraging and supporting peer review was emphasised.
- There was also acknowledged to be a need to put more effort into developing hypotheses (or indicators), and to co-ordinating a culture of self-evaluation with specific external evaluations of products and processes.

Background to the discussions on *mainstreaming*

EU evaluator’s comments	Partnership & Empowerment National evaluators (from the grid)	Comments from national evaluators’ presentations in Plenary Session 2
<p>Although progress is ongoing, the implementation of the EQUAL mainstreaming principle has faced numerous obstacles, above all due to the difficulty to mobilise relevant policy actors. Generally speaking, and whatever the implementation models opted for, horizontal mainstreaming has been more effective than vertical mainstreaming. Secondly, mainstreaming has been more effective at the local and regional levels than at the national level in most of cases. Following the Commission’s</p>	<p>1. Mainstreaming strategies: Policy oriented organisations require to be resourced in order to devote sufficient attention to the potential mainstreaming of learning and innovation from pilot programmes and initiatives. A Mainstreaming Policy Group can be a useful resource for raising awareness of mainstreaming potential within key policy-making organisations and for building relationships between organisations and the programme. The impacts will</p>	<p>Points made in the Irish evaluation A number of key success factors have been identified: 1. A focus on the development of a physical product. 2. A number of key, committed individuals driving the project. 3. Sufficient capacity within the potential mainstreaming policy organisations to take part in</p>

second communication on EQUAL, which insisted on the need to give more guidance and for Member States to define a strategy, the mainstreaming principle has received considerably more attention in most Member States than in the previous stage, which should give rise to more results in the second round. Nevertheless, some **questions** are still unresolved, which condition the effectiveness of mainstreaming in the next programming phase:

- How can the **concept of mainstreaming** be rendered more understandable and more operational?
- What could be the role played by members of **Monitoring Committees** in the mainstreaming strategy?
- How could all stakeholders be **mobilised** and involved at the different levels of implementation?
- How can **DP-level mainstreaming** be organised to secure more effectiveness? and

How could the **validation of good practice** be improved?

be more significant and will become apparent over time if the appropriate individuals can serve effectively as members of the group and act as conduits into their respective organisations for the stimulation of mainstreaming activity. Various strategies can help from the very beginning of a project in a participatory way to sustain mainstreaming through, for example:

- the utilisation of advising techniques and territorial assistance, in order to create and spread learning areas among operators;
- the concrete experimentation of a different way to participation and responsibility in the relation between privates and public entities;
- the initial choice on mainstreaming contents where to work on.

2. Mainstreaming plans

There is a need, from the projects' point of view, to draw up a mainstreaming plan that includes specific objectives, with more support from the Program structures and a greater commitment to mainstream from the policy influencers within the partnership.

To carry out mainstreaming activities it is necessary to differentiate between dissemination and mainstreaming activity.

Choices have to be made between the various modalities and strategies of mainstreaming and dissemination:

- 'Passive': seminars, workshops, dissemination through sites or public places, etc.
- 'Active': training trainers, tutoring, exchanges, etc
- Networks of agents to integrated strategies for:
 - online coaching,
 - on-the-job training/consultancy,
 - certification of products, entities or practitioners

3. Collection and presentation of results and products:

It is important that public authorities provide solutions to compile best practices via websites or databases where all results, developed methods and tools are available and that experiences gained are embedded. The ways of dissemination need to be adapted and designed according to the envisaged external users.

Beyond that, the development of concepts for the plausible and comprehensible presentation of innovative developments including new, more suitable programme instruments, that actually allow a new approach to be copied, needs to be accelerated further.

4. Mainstreaming by networks and

project development phases and facilitate the mainstreaming of an idea or product.

4. A generally small DP where a good working partnership has developed with appropriately senior representatives from all the partners playing a proactive role in the development and delivery of the project.
5. A high level of promotion of the initial project at both local and national level.
6. The understanding of potential mainstreaming impacts at the outset of the project, in order that activity can be focused throughout on achieving those impacts.

- Impediments to generating mainstreaming impacts: Transfer of ownership - where organisations that are prime targets for mainstreaming are not directly involved in a project at developmental stage, difficulties arise for them in accepting the finished product.
- Other issues such as ownership and intellectual property rites sometimes arose in these instances. The lack of capacity within potential organisations themselves to devote time to examination of potential mainstreaming of ideas was also cited as a constraint.

Developments Encouraging Mainstreaming:

- Two thematic networks were established in Ireland focused on the Employability and Adaptability pillars. These provide a co-ordinated framework for projects within a given thematic field to work on a strategic basis to impact on policy and practice. Events have been held since 2002 bringing similar DPs together to share learning from their projects.
- The Mainstreaming Policy Group was also established to provide a resource for raising awareness of mainstreaming potential within key policy-making organisations. The group has played an important part in building relationships between organisations to mainstream ideas originating from the EQUAL programme.

A number of recommendations with regard to mainstreaming were recommended:

1. Policy making organisations should allocate responsibility to key individuals for

themes:

Attention should be devoted to the development and strengthening of mainstreaming mechanisms via thematic networking, preferably linked with the nationally funded development programmes and objectives.

In fact, networks (formal and informal) are useful to:

- experimenting with new ways of partnership,
- transfer know-how,
- development of common products and proposals,
- horizontal and vertical mainstreaming,
- enhancement of political pressure.

It is recommended to organise mainstreaming by thematic areas and product families, identifying complementarities between the most outstanding ones and using as models those that, having important overlap areas, can become tools to upgrade the institutions' interventions for mainstreaming.

5. Experimental interventions for mainstreaming:

In order to mainstream the project results into general policies it is recommendable carrying out experimental interventions, seeking to influence on the evolution of the policies, companies and structures.

The implementation of these interventions should be coordinate on those fields in which a combination of the following essential factors is produced:

- the proximity of the beneficiaries,
- the access to the people having influence on political decision making, in particular those local, regional or national administrations most directly concerned with the processes and results of the projects.

mainstreaming innovative ideas into their policies and practices and ensure that sufficient resources are set aside for this purpose.

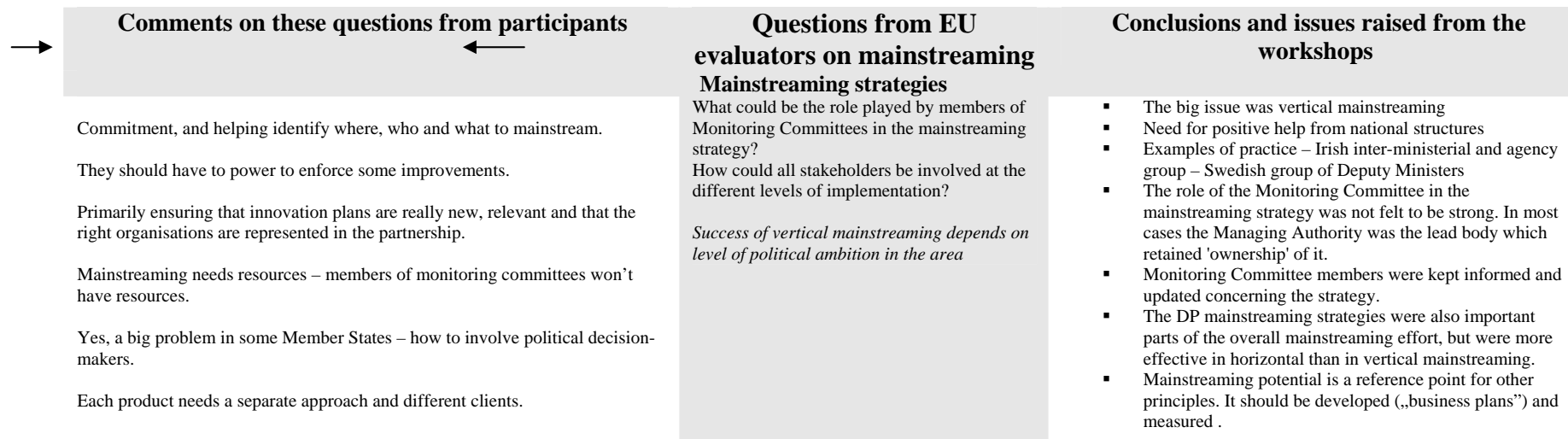
2. All project partners must take on a proactive role in the development and implementation of a project and be designated tasks to undertake. Sufficiently senior employees from policy making organisations should be involved in initiatives with mainstreaming potential in order that they can effect change in policy and practice if an opportunity for taking on board new learning arises.

3. A Mainstreaming Policy Group, involving all key national policy makers, plays a valuable role in encouraging mainstreaming, and should be maintained (or introduced in other member states) if a similar programme continues post-2007, with resources to support further development of projects demonstrating significant mainstreaming potential.

4. Project partners should have a clear vision of the mainstreaming outcomes that might potentially be generated on its completion, and sufficient time should be allowed for the realisation of these outcomes.

5. Funding of innovative labour market interventions should be considered on a more focused, themed basis in order to improve potential for future mainstreaming. A base of projects should be funded concurrently focusing on a specific labour market issue, for example the promotion of lifelong learning, of self-employment opportunities for disadvantaged target groups, or for managing diversity in the workplace. Learning can then be developed across projects, task-groups formed involving organisations with policies of relevance to the theme, and formal interaction processes established throughout the project development and implementation phases.

The debate on *mainstreaming* – comments, conclusions and issues set alongside the EU evaluators’ questions



Concentrate main efforts on basic horizontal mainstreaming.

It is very important to start early to ensure success of mainstreaming.

One big danger on mainstreaming is adding to the bureaucracy of EQUAL by regulating mainstreaming. Mainstreaming is for the biggest part a creative activity, finding the right channels to reach your target group and really sell the innovation to them.

How can DP*-level mainstreaming be organised to secure more effectiveness?

Mainstreaming processes have to start very early to give DPs better chances of results

* 'Projects' in the programmes

- Some evaluators had found that the involvement of senior people in national organisations had been useful.
- The involvement of senior people in national organisations had been better carried out by NTN than by DPs. DPs had been better at horizontal mainstreaming, but had rarely been very successful at vertical mainstreaming.
- Mainstreaming had been successful when it was able to 'piggy-back' on national priorities.
- To facilitate vertical mainstreaming there was a need to formalise and format products so that they appeared more credible to decision-makers. Often the outcomes and products from individual DPs lacked sufficient credibility, and hence this work was better done through NTN or similar organisations.
- A successful means of bringing the obstacles faced by EQUAL target groups to the attention of employers had been the organisation of 'consultation dinners', where representatives of target groups had sat down with representatives of employers to simply discuss the obstacles. In many cases this was sufficient to bring about some beneficial changes in policy and practice.
- It was considered important that the issue of mainstreaming was not left as an afterthought, to be tackled once the main (Action 2) work had largely been completed.
- Technical support resource focusing on engaging potential mainstreaming organisations in mainstreaming innovative labour market policy approaches should be considered.

Don't overburden projects – keep cost in mind.

It's not the same as information-sharing, publications etc. People don't understand the different concepts behind mainstreaming.

Let different partnerships work together with a peer review approach, involving policy-makers as well.

And it should include a methodology to achieve successfully the incorporation of a certain activity or methodology in a stakeholder's structures.

Important! Dissemination and mainstreaming is not clear even for Managing Authorities and National Support Structures, let alone for projects.

Mainstreaming is a comprehensive process and all methods should be used to ensure success.

It is important that the actors that ESF projects are addressing actually take part

Mainstreaming plans

How can the concept of mainstreaming be rendered more understandable & more operational?

Mainstreaming = not only a marketing action

- Experimental thematic fields, for each OP according to its related objectives, could be considered, in the priority, ... enabling mainstreaming? "Success requirements:
1.targeted measures/interventions
2.action plan meeting existing policy gaps & real needs
3.a pilot implementation phase should allow revisions and adjustments.
4.implementation flexibility
5. specific evaluation criteria to meet.
- One Member State had found that luck – i.e. being in the right place at the right time with the right outcome – had contributed largely to the success of their mainstreaming effort.
- Others, however, felt that with a good strategy and a correctly designed CIP, the outcomes would largely fit into the national policy needs. In other words, good planning should succeed in putting the right outcome in the right hands at the right time.

either in the project, or in the mainstreaming group. They must feel that they own the result.

The Commission could draw up a brief discussion document and include examples of mainstreaming good practice across Member States.

Collection and presentation of results and products

Dissemination strategy should be product specific.

Integrate users needs and demands from “start to end” • Utilise dissemination strategies which are pro-active towards actors with established credibility and potential influence with relevant target audience

- Project-level impact indicators must be established by partners at the outset of each project, with monitoring mechanisms are put in place to ensure that partners are pursuing their realisation. (IRL 3)

- Slow progress is being made in developing adequate methods and tools to identify good practices and disseminate them.
- Managing authorities need to develop the market and trademark the measures.

Mainstreaming by networks and themes

Linking with national programmes is a precondition for successful mainstreaming.

Evaluation should be incorporated in the projects, at least in the test phase, preferably by using control groups etc.

Not by thematic areas – these are too big. It should be done by product target groups.

The national and the ESF actions must be very closely combined, otherwise there will be no mainstreaming.

Websites, databases etc. might be important for mainstreaming, but for real mainstreaming personal contact with potential target groups for the innovative concepts is much more important.

Peer review is important to evaluate the innovation developed.

Validation of good practice is indeed not easy. The real impact of an innovation can only be measured after some years. However, most innovative concepts are developed on the basis of former concepts which have proved itself. There must be some hypotheses on the first output, results and effects of the innovations. These hypotheses should be validated, partly by self-evaluation and partly by specific external evaluation of the value of the innovations (i.e. another type of evaluation than the actual ones).

How could the validation of good practice be developed/improved?

- There are currently difficulties being experienced in monitoring and evaluating the whole mainstreaming process.

How could the evaluation of the mainstreaming principle be improved?

Experimental interventions for mainstreaming

serious study of the needs of the actors targeted for mainstreaming needs to be done.

Transnational co-operation

Key conclusions

The following broad themes came through the discussions in the workshops and the written comments provided by those participants who chose to contribute them:

Transnational co-operation and innovation

- There was some support for the view that transnational co-operation should be undertaken mainly on the basis of the contribution it can make to national priorities, but there was a countervailing view that its main objective should be to help improve the quality of individual projects.
- It was suggested that transnational co-operation would be easier to organise if it were restricted, on the Interreg model, to neighbouring regions and Member States.
- It was suggested that the Commission should organise a European online observatory of innovative labour market projects.

Approaches to transnational co-operation

- Discussion was mostly concerned with project-level transnationality, and there was very little mention of competing models (thematic partnerships, bilateral national or regional relationships), and was therefore largely with exchange of experience and information.
- There were some suggestions that it should be viewed more widely – as contributing to a European space for knowledge, as a vehicle for building networks and as a focus for activities that are under-developed in particular Member States.

Organising transnational co-operation

- There was support for the idea that transnational co-operation should be flexibly organised, but within a firm structure of support and evaluation.
- It was suggested that there should be a common structure for evaluating transnational co-operation, and that if this could be incorporated into self-evaluation systems it would be helpful in enhancing the quality of partnerships.

Background to the discussions on *transnational co-operation*

EU evaluator's comments	National evaluators (from the grid)	Comments from national evaluators' presentations in Plenary Session 2
<p>The implementation of the transnationality principle has gradually improved over time in EQUAL, and though it has faced many obstacles, it has given rise to a proportion of good transnational partnerships and important results, both in terms of joint development of “European products” (e.g. new tools, new methods) and in terms of contributions to local projects and innovation, through the structured exchange of information and experience and the exchange of staff and beneficiaries. In addition it has sometimes increased the credibility and visibility of DPs' activities at the national level, thus facilitating mainstreaming. The contribution of the principle to the construction of a European society, especially through the development of practitioner networks and the exchange of beneficiaries should not be under-estimated in our view.</p> <p>Nevertheless, with regard to the next programming phase, it seems important to stress that different aims with regard to the place of transnationality give rise to different modes of organisation: even though these different aims (European production, contribution to national projects, development of European networks etc.) can in principle be pursued in parallel, they may give rise to different choices in terms of implementation, in particular with regard to the type of promoters, the timing of transnationality and the themes chosen.</p> <p>It is therefore important to ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is transnationality meant for, what are the purpose or purposes of funding transnational projects? - Who are to be the direct and indirect beneficiaries? and - What are the consequences of these choices for programme design? 	<p>1. Trans-national cooperation versus innovation</p> <p>Trans-national cooperation point of departure should be the mature idea of a joint innovation development or the clearly defined and specific contribution that the trans-national cooperation can or should make to innovation development. It should be integrated in innovative projects at the very beginning as a coherent part.</p> <p>Other formula can be that specific projects are devoted to trans-national cooperation and are connected with the local innovation projects, but are developed in autonomous way favouring exchanges and focusing on transferring foreign experiences.</p> <p>It is recommended to consider the possibility that TCO is realised on the basis of an specially reserved budget line within the innovation programmes.</p> <p>2. Trans-national cooperation approaches:</p> <p>The trans-national cooperation approach has to be develop in a flexible way:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in some cases designing trans-national cooperation as a prior collaboration (conceived for the development of common methodologies or for the exchange of ideas), • in others designing an ex post collaboration (to exchange/disseminate good practices, connect projects and policies, or as a continuation of the national project through a trans-national extension of it). <p>The trans-national cooperation can be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a voluntary contribution to a project • an independent project that evolves around the transnational component. 	<p>Points from the French evaluation</p> <p>Transnational Cooperation Partnerships allowed as to compare situations between French projects and others situations, and projects could be reproduced for others' target groups.</p> <p>Transnationality confronts all other realities, especially when there are exchanges of trainers, staff, trainees or others.</p> <p>So transnationality adds value to a local project.</p> <p>DPs in Round 1 had a positive opinion of their transnational cooperation partnerships:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two-thirds thought that it had been a source of innovation. - 18 of the 51 regional actors that the French evaluator met said it had encouraged the emergence of innovation in the French projects. - But an expert group only singled out a few projects which were both innovative and good transnational projects. So, there is no automatic link. <p>Transnationality had some positive effects on the integration of the principle of gender equality :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Many DPs learnt about gender equality in their transnational partnerships, especially when the partners were already advanced in this area. - This remark is confirmed by the fact that the CIP Equal in France didn't adopt the theme H (Reducing gender gaps and desegregation) but treated it as a transverse theme. So when

Whatever the choices made, there are **basic requirements** to follow to secure effectiveness:

- Ensure that partnerships can work on common and specific issues or with common and specific target-groups;
- Ensure the cross-national consistency of programme and call schedules, budget sizes, validation procedures, in other words tight and on-going co-ordination between Member States;
- Rely on common instruments (e.g. European database);
- Take into account that transnationality requires time to develop, even in the case of highly focused and well constructed partnerships;
- Provide guidance to partnerships at all stages of design and implementation.

An additional question is, therefore: **How, and to what extent, are these requirements to be taken into account in the next programming phase?**

It is recommended to avoid an over-specialisation limiting the relationships among partners.

3. The organisation of trans-national cooperation

Good coordination at European level is important, so as to ensure that the conditions for the production of concrete products are adequate and will go beyond the mere enrichment of experience for entities and practitioners.

This means that:

- there is more uniformity in the transnationality conditions in the different Member States insofar as deadlines for both completion and financing are concerned
- it is considered limiting the size of the Trans-national Cooperation Agreements.

The existing instruments and procedures used for seeking and selecting partners should be maintained and strengthened but procedural rules reduced.

Innovative and transnational projects should:

- be subject to a monitoring and evaluation process
- be allocated with adequate resources of time and finance.

It has to be promoted greater consensus between the parties concerning the purposes, aims, planning and distribution of responsibilities, resources for definition and implementation of the activities, etc.

Information and experience from transnational projects has to be accessible for local operators and institutions.

French DP have transnational partners of this theme H, it's interesting to share points of view on gender equality.

- The transnational angle acts as a lever. It allows the mobilization of local actors more easily : local communities and elected representative.
- Even if it's difficult, when the transnational cooperation partnership is based on a common issue, the quality of final results is so much better.

The added value of transnationality differs from one DP to another and includes common tools (Website, technical guides for firms, training packages...), staff exchanges, training on gender equality or age discrimination in firms, methodological transfer...

The five degrees of transnationality defined by the European Commission are exactly the kinds of partnerships that we can see :

- Exchange of general information, experiences, and materials in order to give idea and learn about the specific national situation.
- Parallel development of innovative approaches, methods, materials in each project nationally
- Import, export or adoption of innovative approaches, methods, materials from one partner to the other.
- Joint development of innovative approaches.
- Exchange of trainers, staff, trainees or others

In addition to language and cultural barriers, we can underline some difficulties :

- Sometimes, transnational partners don't have the same goals. Out of the 13 cases studied, 8 had problems finding a mutual problematic. It is easier when partners are the same kind of structures (firms, communities...) or in the same area (insertion...).
- Transnational cooperation needs time to build a rapport with each other, to develop the project and to implement it. Unfortunately, the dead lines are not usually the same.
- A high turnover of staff is also proving to be another major problem. This makes it difficult to build a long term relationship with counterparts in other countries.

Recommendations for the future programme:

Specify the aims of transnational cooperation partnerships compared with the five levels identified by the European Union.

In order to have a better added value and to be a source of innovation, the transnational project must be a real part of the local project. This enables the project to:

- benefit from a larger context – and not only the local and national situation,
- improve initial diagnosis,
- discover new ways of working and good practices,
- avoid having too many partners as this can, sometimes, make project management more difficult,
- to ensure an optimal integration, the transnational and local projects should start at the same time,
- be really selective when choosing a partner in order to ensure a “win-win” situation.

The debate on *transnational co-operation* – comments, conclusions and issues set alongside the EU evaluators’ questions

Comments on these questions from participants — →	Questions from EU evaluators on transnational co-operation	Conclusions and issues raised from the workshops
<p>This is a very demanding requirement in most cases.</p> <p>The usefulness of transnational co-operation should be decided project by project.</p> <p>Transnational co-operation is good for innovation, but it should be up to the project to decide.</p> <p>A concrete objective for transnational co-operation should be established.</p> <p>It is a formality, and in most cases it wastes money and produces no Europroducts.</p> <p>The main objective of transnational projects should be to mainstream their results to national projects dealing with the same issues.</p> <p>As far as I can see, there is no antithesis between TCO and innovation. TCO can stimulate innovation and innovation can stimulate TCO.</p> <p>The main idea of Transnationality is improving on projects. Because at the national level (although this does not seem necessarily the case in the bigger member states) there is already some kind of co-ordination (the same actors involved, the same common background), transnational co-operation can provide for new ways of looking at innovative activities, can help other project solve their problems, can provide new ways of dissemination and mainstreaming, can stimulate the DP partners etc.</p>	<p>Transnational co-operation versus innovation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Positive information from DPs about impact of transnationality on their national objectives and products ▪ Applications for transnationality should be judged on basis of potential contribution to national objectives ▪ Feeling that transnationality should be an option with extra support in the new programmes ▪ Transnationality was considered to be easier to apply in the next programming period when the partnerships or organisations involved are in relatively close proximity, as in Interreg programmes, rather than in some of the far-flung transnational partnerships found in EQUAL ▪ By organizing a transnational good practice database of “mainstream cases” and methods and tools for vertical networks (actors – policy makers) on a national (regional) level ▪ Organizing a European online observatory for innovative labour market interventions
<p>It should contribute to building a European space for knowledge.</p>	<p>Transnational co-operation approaches</p> <p>What is trans-nationality meant for, what is the purpose of funding trans-national projects?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Creation of "European products"?</i> - <i>Improving national projects?</i> - <i>Contributing to build a European Society?</i> <p>Who are to be the direct and indirect beneficiaries?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most discussions focused at DP transnationality – most transnationality focused on exchange of experience and information – some cases of joint product development • To continue transnational cooperation with exact goals • and integrate the transnational project into the local project

So far programmes are national - there must be some national product.

Transnational co-operation should not be too easy to get financing for – it would be good if potential partners specify their concept in advance and then provide its utility.

Transnationality should need to be open to different possibilities (innovation, exchange, building networks.....)

(only the partners with a national ESF project?)
What are the consequences of these choices for programme design?

- *Should national and trans-national activities be planned simultaneously?*
- *or should it be possible to work only on a trans-national product?*

- To position each country on areas not very developed by national or local policies
- Transnational co-operation adds real value when there is clear synergy between transnational and national objectives.

The organisation of transnational co-operation

Uniform rules tend to limit flexibility and hinder co-operation.

There should be a common structure for evaluating transnational co-operation

The national support framework could present an issue to test through exchange of experience..

I would suggest to be very flexible on organizing TCO. At the other hand, there should be some kind of incentive for TCO, because otherwise DP's will be too occupied with their own business. This stimulus might be financial, but can also be the product of a good communication on the advantages of TCO.

How can programme organisation ensure compliance with basic requirements for effectiveness:

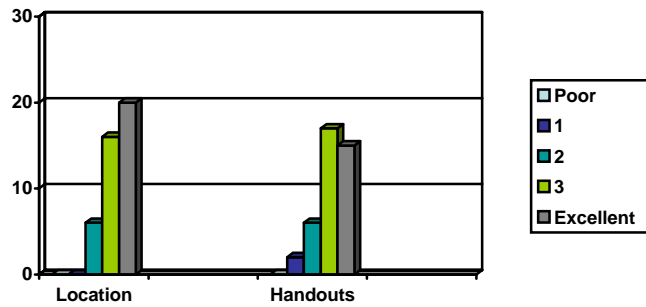
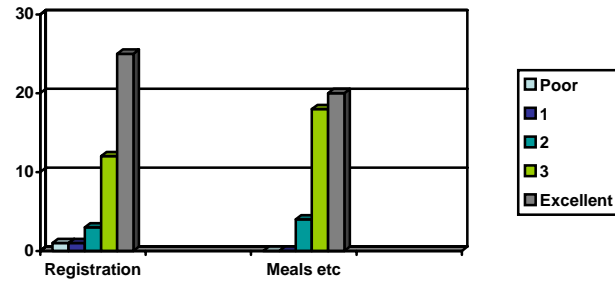
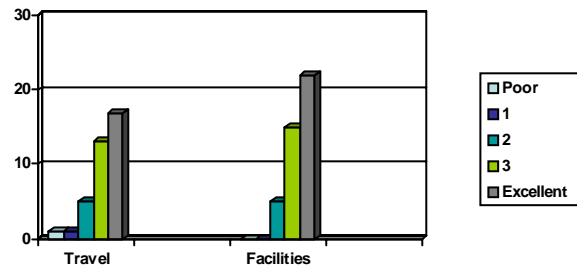
- *Work on common issues?*
- *Tight co-ordination between MS?*
- *Common instruments (database)?*
- *Giving time to trans-national partnerships?*
- *Providing sustained guidance?*

- Stimulate the use of self-evaluation systems to enhance the quality of partnerships (NL1)
- **Success" requirements:**
flexible CWGs, consultations, Opinions
active participation in SCs,
systematic monitoring
feed-back in the on-going evaluation

Annex

Evaluation by participants - Prepared on the basis of 42 evaluation sheets filled in.

1. Conference arrangements

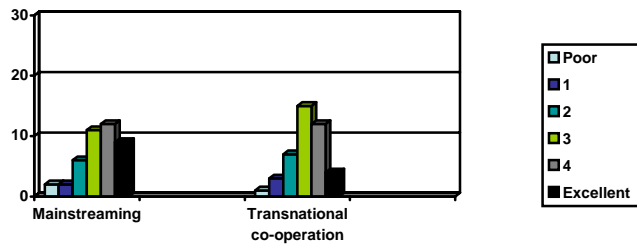
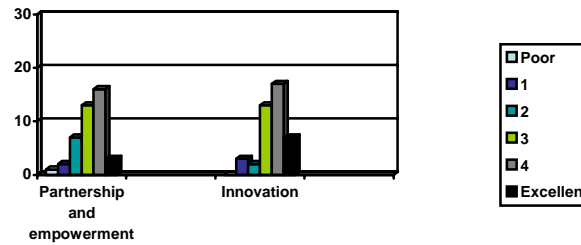
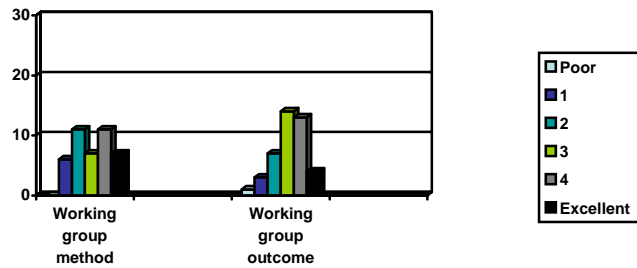


2. Conference and working groups' content

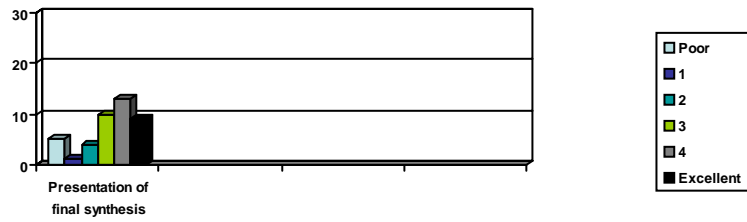
Plenary 1



Working groups



Final Plenary



3. Overall expectations

