

Policy/Knowledge Networks

Processes, Promises, and Pitfalls



**Ronald Sultana – ELGPN meeting – Budapest
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Key points



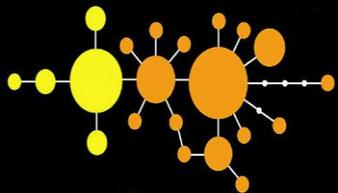
- Networks, self-reflection, and the ELGPN
- Recalling the objectives of the ELGPN
- What do we know about 'networks'?
 - Why networks?
 - Network types
 - Network functions
 - Network characteristics
- Networks and the policy making process
- Successful networks
- Pitfalls to avoid

Long Term Objectives of the ELGPN

- Support for policy development
- Policy sharing
- Information gathering
- Policy analysis and research
- Use of reference tools
- Exploiting project outcomes
- Strengthening representative structures

Introducing Networks

- **Networks:**
 - structures that link individuals or organisations and
 - share a common interest on a specific issue or a general set of values
- **Networks: particularly good at fostering 3 functions:**
 1. **Communication** – horizontally and vertically
 2. **Creativity** – due to free and interactive communication
 3. **Consensus** – like-minded: rallying around common issue



**“Power does not reside in institutions, not even the state or large corporations. It is located in the networks that structure society”
(Manuel Castells)**

Why networks?

"To gain more efficient use of internal resources through access to external resources"

Motivating factors:

- Quest for personal and organizational learning
- Need to gain critical mass to influence policy (MS/EU levels)
- Observed or perceived synergies with other entities
- Desire to gain credibility, legitimacy
- Desire to find and develop new projects
- **Whole greater than the sum of the parts**



Individual network members will remain active if they perceive that the network's activities have added value to their own work...

Some network types

- 'Policy communities'
- '*Transnational advocacy networks*'
- 'Epistemic communities'
- 'Knowledge network'

New organisational form:
- neither 'market'
- nor 'hierarchy'

ELGPN: a Policy/Knowledge network'?

- Member state –driven
- Responding to EU-wide policy signals
- National and supra-national relevance
- Relationship to other bodies (EU and non-EU)
- Role in validating sets of norms and practices.



ELGPN as a resource for national policy makers—impact beyond MS?

Characteristics of a Policy/Knowledge Network

- **Balance between:**
 - *Goal-orientation*: planning and execution strategies for working towards realistic goals.
 - Preserving a *culture of informality* (distinguishes PKN from other forms of organization): sharing between groups of like-minded actors
- **Knowledge networks therefore:**
 - resemble a 'family', but
 - with a structure of professionalism

- Post-1989 governance: horizontal sharing of power
- Greater awareness of problems with policy transfer



Functions for Networks

- **Filters:** which information is worth paying attention to?
- **Amplifiers:** make little understood ideas more widely known
- **Convenors:** bring together groups of people
- **Facilitators:** help members carry out tasks more effectively
- **Community builders:** promote & sustain values/standards
- **Investor/provider:** resources to carry out key activities



Policy/Knowledge Networks and the EU

At EU level: 'soft' policy instruments

- Open Method of Coordination
- Platforms for knowledge sharing
 - knowledge clusters
- Platforms for policy learning
 - peer learning activities
- Peer pressure... 'shepherding'?



- Multi-level gov: EU as hub of many specialised policy networks
- Whose knowledge counts?
- Whose definition of policy problem matters?
- Whose policy solutions prevail?
- Knowledge interests: 'expert' knowledge / 'practitioner' knowledge?
- Technocratic – emancipatory rationalities...

Networks and the Policy-Making Process

Stage of the policy process	Key objectives for actors aiming to influence policy	How networks can help
Agenda setting	Convince policymakers that the issue does indeed require attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marshall evidence to enhance the credibility of the argument • Extend an advocacy campaign • Foster links among researchers, CSOs and policymakers
Formulation	Inform policymakers of the options and build a consensus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collate good-quality representative evidence and act as a 'resource bank' • Channel international resources and expertise into the policy process • Build long-term collaborative relationships with policymakers • Bypass formal barriers to consensus
Implementation	Complement government capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance the sustainability and reach of the policy • Act as dynamic 'platforms for action'
Evaluation	Collate quality evidence and channel it into the policy process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide good-quality representative evidence and feedback • Link policymakers to policy end-users
Underlying	Capacity building for CSOs aiming to influence policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a dynamic environment for communication and collaborative action • Provide support and encouragement • Provide a means of political representation

Which Networks influence Policy?



Network characteristics:

1. A unifying, clear purpose
2. Interactive communications: information flows, feedback, no monopolies
3. Autonomous actors: individual entrepreneurs, multiple leaders, fluid structure
4. Capacity for simultaneous action, from multiple nodes
5. Dynamic culture: creativity and risk-taking, collective action
6. Shared interests / values: base level of cohesion

What makes a Network successful?

- Key group of people who push it
- Supportive institutional 'nest'
- Resonates with real 'local' needs
- Strong internal networking: regular 'massage'
- Representation from different sectors
- Members feel they are getting 'something'
- Partnership in transnational projects



Challenges to networking

- Access can be unequal
- Transaction costs may be high
- Sustainability is often problematic
- Members tend to have several other duties ...
- Institutions are overburdened...
- Hierarchical institutional culture formalises process [culture of informality is essential to create commitment and a feeling of shared identity and ownership...]
- Lack of experience in working together and in networking – within and across sectors...
- Danger of becoming insular policy communities dominated by vested interests – legitimacy concerns.

