

LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN TOURISM NETWORKS

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates how learning toward sustainable development in multi-stakeholder public-private networks. The evidence is grounded in the data from six tourism networks in four European countries. The *process* of co-operation appears more important vis-à-vis achievements regarding sustainable tourism than the *structure* of networks. This process will determine the network's ability to become adept at explicating tacit knowledge among its actors, and to develop the network so it can facilitate the creation of sustainability outcomes.

A leading public actor may assume a "teacher's" role in the network. In these instances, the network runs risk of becoming merely an information dissemination tool. This involves a trap of one-way communication and under-used knowledge utilisation opportunities. Receptivity of the teacher actor is low and the partners do not really collaborate. The teacher actor should make a special effort to create the feedback loops leading to two-way communication, so that a learning strategy of collaboration can take place. The findings also imply that in some networks with a public leader, there is an overly high belief in the ability of information dissemination and classroom education to promote learning about sustainable development although learning about sustainability in the practical level requires concrete results and joint action.

1 INTRODUCTION

Attempts to put the imperative of sustainable development into practice have led to a variety of alliances and partnerships during recent years (Hartman et al. 1999). An overarching trait of these partnerships is that they bridge actors from different public and private sectors of society that have traditionally tended to be more isolated from one another. As these partnerships come about, they face the challenge of learning. Often this challenge is bigger than in homogenous groups, e.g. networks that consist only of business enterprises. In the public-private networks for sustainable development very different rationales and mindsets meet, which make the creation of a common basis for learning more difficult.

The main body of evidence about inter-organizational learning comes from business network settings (e.g. Larsson et al. 1998, Inkpen and Crossan 1995, Lutz 1997). On the other hand, studies of social networks provide some evidence of how ideas and patterns of action develop among groups of individuals (e.g. Scott 1991, Wasserman and Galaskiewicz 1994). However, apart from a few exceptions (Boons 1998 and 1999, Roome and Clarke 1999), there is little data about how knowledge is created, and sustainable development acted upon, in public-private partnerships. The present study attempts to contribute by providing new insights to

inter-organizational learning for sustainable development, grounded in data from six tourism networks in four countries.

The network approach to sustainability is necessary within an industry like tourism, where relatively large number of small actors with few resources cannot pursue sustainable development in isolation. The present study seeks to provide more understanding of how actors at a practical level translate sustainable development and learn to collectively act upon it in a variety of tourism contexts.¹

2 INTER-ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The empirical evidence of inter-organizational learning (Larsson et al. 1998, Inkpen and Crossan 1995, Hamel 1991) is still relatively limited as organization research has only recently begun to take the leap from intra-organizational learning to development of knowledge between organizations (Larsson et al. 1998). Weick and Westley (1996) recommend that *organizational learning* should focus on how organizations or similar groups acquire knowledge as they gain experience, how this knowledge is embedded, and the effects of changes in knowledge on later performance. The notion of embedded is important, because knowledge is embedding in work group structures, roles and procedures, or in individual members of the group.

Interorganizational learning on the other hand can be viewed as a collective acquisition of knowledge and skills. It is considered different from organizational learning because it includes a learning synergy or interaction effect between the organizations that would not have occurred if there had not been any interaction (Larsson et al. 1998). Learning is more complicated when extended to an inter-organizational setting. Knowledge transfer or knowledge creation in an inter-organizational arena means there is not ‘the one organization’ served by learning. Moreover, different members of the network have different motivations, goals and strategies for learning from the cooperation (Hamel 1991). Working in networks requires different skills and worldviews than in traditional market or bureaucratic transactions (Ebers 1999). These issues are accentuated in the sustainable development context, where networks tend to consist of actors from various sectors of society, which means that the language actors use and the approaches they apply to address sustainability may vastly differ. In the context of sustainable development networks there is a need to unlearn traditional polarized ways stakeholder groups communicate, and instead develop bridging dialogue between business actors and authorities or NGOs without the loss of individuality.

¹ Although there is agreed definition of sustainable tourism, there are a variety of understandings. Welford and Ytterhus (1999) suggest that instead of putting all efforts into defining sustainable tourism, we examine the elements of sustainable development - environment, economy, and social and cultural issues - in the context of tourism. While environmental and socio-cultural sustainability seek to ensure that non-renewable physical resources and cultural resources are not consumed in the process of sustainable tourism, economic sustainability represents maintenance of community structures, employment, and human resources at a local level. The various definitions point to the fact that sustainable tourism has come to encompass a set of principles and management methods that chart a path for tourism development that provides local economic viability in ways that protect a destination’s environmental and socio-cultural base for the future (Welford and Ytterhus 1999).

3 THE FOCAL NETWORKS

In the remainder of this paper the term “sustainability networks” is used, even though the networks under study have not reached sustainability. The idea of a sustainability network is used here to indicate a group of actors *heading toward sustainable development* in all or some of its dimensions - environmental, social, cultural, and economic². In particular some of the networks studied emphasise environmental issues whereas others give more weight to socio-economic or socio-cultural enhancement. Networks imply cooperative efforts among business firms, governmental bodies or organizations, persons, or other entities that are interconnected in various ways (Smith-Ring 1997).

The networks we investigated share the characteristic that they operate in the tourism sector and have members from a variety of stakeholder groups drawn from tourism enterprises, authorities, NGOs, business associations, and academia. Some of the networks operate locally whereas others are more geographically dispersed:

- Alcúdia, Ecotourism municipality network, Spain, local
- Calviá, tourism resort’s Local Agenda 21 network, Spain, local
- Finnland Naturlich, farm and nature holidays circle, Finland, dispersed
- Kinsale Chamber of Tourism, Ireland, local
- Sälen mountain tourism resort’s Local Agenda 21 network, Sweden, local
- YSMEK, network for developing environmentally friendlier tourism in Finland, dispersed

3.1 Brief network narratives

Alcudia

Reason for network start & its aim: The municipality of Alcúdia is a relatively new tourist destination of the “sun and beach” type with some other tourist attractions like monuments with historic interests. Some other Spanish examples had shown that uncontrolled tourism growth can lead to environmental degradation. To remain as a quality tourist destination in the future, in 1992 the City Council declared Alcúdia an “Ecotourist Municipality”, showing its commitment to protect the environment and preserve the natural and cultural heritage.

Members: The network is formalized through the establishment of the Ecotourist Plaque Committee and the Board of Tourism. The Alcúdia City Council is taking the chair of these two participative forums and coordinates most of the activities through its Environmental Department. The Board of Tourism consists of the local hotel association and both of the two local business associations. Ecotourist Plaque subnetwork is made up of the environmental delegate, city council technicians, the director of municipal services company and representatives of the Board of Tourism.

Activities at large: Creation of an “Ecotourist plaque” for hotels, restaurants and bars. Criteria consist of measures relating to employee training, waste management, use of recycled products, water and energy savings, waste water treatment and serving local food. Regular meetings of cross-sectoral Board of Tourism to discuss the relationships between the different economic sectors involved in tourism issues. It intends to advise the City Council and collaborates with “ECOTUR Destins” programme, the initiative of the Autonomous Government of the Balearic Islands, which tries to evaluate the environmental situation of the tourist destination and to design an action plan for environmental improvement of the area.

² Here we mean long-term economic sustainability at a regional or an enterprise level, not short-term economic gains. At any event, economic sustainability *alone* is not the aim of any of the networks under study.

Calvia

Reason for network start & its aim: Calvià one of the largest tourism municipalities of the island of Majorca visited by 1, 2 million tourists per year. Calvià is an example of a typical first-generation Mediterranean mass tourism centre of the “sun and beach” type. Due to heavy tourism load since 1960s, carrying capacity of the destination has been exceeded, calling for drastic measures to halt the degradation of the ecosystem.

Members: The Town Council of Calvià started the Local Agenda 21 in 1995, aiming at defining a new integral long-term policy to reorganize tourist and local development on a sustainable basis. The Citizen Forum is made up of 150-160 members of hotel associations, trade unions, neighbourhood associations, environmentalist groups etc.

Activities at large: The work centers around six key thematic areas: Integration and quality of life, Local ecology, Cultural heritage, Economy and tourism, Town-planning system, and Key environmental sectors. An exhaustive study on selected Key Thematic Areas has been conducted with the collaboration of council technicians and external scientific experts. Finally, interested citizens have joined Thematic Committees to discuss the conducted analysis with the experts and to establish 15 immediate interventions, 40 initiatives and 10 strategic action lines for the development towards a desirable scenario of local development. So far the concrete improvements include e.g. halting new building projects, reforestation of a natural park, installation of double water supply system and solar panels in new buildings as well as improvements in waste and water management in the municipality.

Finnland Naturlich

Reason for network start & its aim: Finland Naturlich circle (FN) was established in 1993 by the Agriculture Centre of Pirkanmaa county. For many years the income from traditional agriculture had been decreasing throughout the country and as a response farmers had started to practice various kinds of tourism activities as a side industry. This has contributed to possibility of preserving old country houses and continue living on the countryside. When establishing FN circle, the ambition of county was to raise the quality of the rural tourism facilities in order to improve the marketing opportunities.

Members: The member firms of FN in Finland consist mainly farm houses but also firms offering adventure trips, shipping and bus services located in Pirkanmaa county. In the very beginning the management of FN network was delegated to an independent two-person firm (the so-called FN office). These two people run the daily activities and are responsible for the co-ordination of the network. The funding for the network activity is received from the the Agriculture Centre of Pirkanmaa, EU, some municipalities where the farm houses are located and participating members.

Activities at large: (1) Marketing services of farms and other member tourism SMEs to German-speaking Europe. (2) Improving quality and environmental quality in member enterprises by means of training, information disseminations and peer visits.

Kinsale

Reason for network start & its aim: The Kinsale network originates from 1969. It was set up as a community development initiative to prevent the town from dying. Promotion of tourism was seen as a solution offering an alternative source of livelihood for the locals so that they could continue living in Kinsale. To start with, Kinsale network has been about socio-economic issues. In 1980s environmental issues entered to the agenda. At present, Kinsale faces the question of balancing between increasing tourism and securing the rights of local population, (e.g. affordable housing), as well as keeping the traffic load within acceptable limits.

Members: The focal node in the network is the **Kinsale Chamber of Tourism (KCOT)**. KCOT links together a vast network of business enterprises both directly and indirectly involved in tourism and actors who would not normally fall within the boundaries of ‘the tourism industry’. The Chamber is formally structured with an annually elected executive and a number of committees e.g. Membership, Environment, Finance, Marketing etc. Additional committees and sub-committees arise as the need warrants. Membership is open to anybody in

business in Kinsale. KCOT has links to other networks and agencies that have been active in and continue to constitute the wider Kinsale network. These include: Kinsale Urban District Council, Kinsale Harbour Board, The Tidy Towns Committee, Kinsale Good Food Circle, Kinsale Chamber of Commerce, and crucial to their operations are Cork County Council, Cork/ Kerry Tourism, and West Cork Tourism.

Activities at large: Activities of Kinsale network aiming at improvements in sustainable development at different areas focus on community-level. To name a few, they include actions such as restoration of key historic buildings, setting up a voluntary architectural clinic, or payment by the KCOT for the initiation of second refuse collection for business to keep the town clean, as well as reservation of 25% of housing for Kinsale residents.

Sälen

Reason for network start & its aim: The “Sustainable Sälen” project was launched in 1995 within the framework of Local Agenda 21. The initiative aimed at building a network of tourism businesses that would work with environmental questions of Sälen mountain tourism destination. The main environmental questions relate to threat of erosion of some slopes, waste management, waste water treatment and traffic to and within Sälen area.

Members: Business enterprises from ski resorts from Sälen area, technical office of the municipality, representative of the regional government, Mid University of Sweden, and local agenda 21 coordinator.

Activities at large: The first steps of the project focused on providing an environmental education for the companies together with initial environmental review of the participating businesses with some environmental performance improvements based on the review. For the moment the network is stagnated for two reasons. First, public financing of waste management and transportation development for the destination has not been granted. Second, the LA21 coordinator kept changing frequently, causing several interruptions which made business members doubt the possibility to continue working with this initiative. However, the participating companies have performed a number of environmental projects not directly related to the activities within the network.

YSMEK (The Network for Developing Environmentally Friendlier Tourism in Finland)

Reason for network start & its aim: With the rise of environmental awareness in the society, signals for greening the tourism sector had started to appear early 1990s. As the responsibility for improvement of environmental care in the Finnish tourism industry could not addressed to any one main party, collaboration became the solution. The network aims at spreading environmental improvements to the Finnish tourism enterprise sector with the help of documented pilot examples which can be copied.

Members: Representatives of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, Finnish Tourist Board, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of the Environment, Hotel and Catering Committee, Association of Hotel and Catering Personnel, Finnish Nature Protection Association, Travel Agencies’ Association, Forest and Park Service, and Network University of Tourism form the management group of YSMEK. Pilot tourism enterprises or the like (e.g. pilot mass events organisers) from all over the country join the network for different projects. The environmental co-ordinators of pilot enterprises have set up an informal network, MAYAVAT, for sharing experiences and keeping up enthusiasm for environmental work.

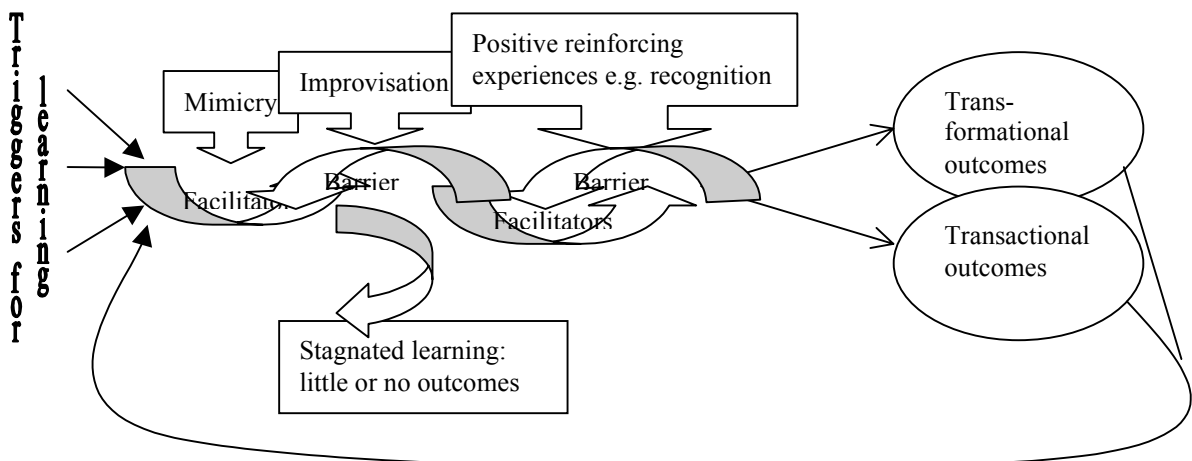
Activities at large: By developing environmental management in pilot enterprises with the help of a specialised consultant, YSMEK collects examples that are worked into guidebooks of environmental management in tourism. So far there are three guidebooks for: (1) conducting environmental review in tourism enterprises, (2) building and implementing EMS (software and paper format) and (3) minimising environmental impacts of mass events. These books are used in teaching in various tourism education programs as well as in environmental projects tourism enterprises in Finland.

The networks face different challenges due to their diverse operating contexts. Depending on their specific context, the sustainability orientation varies from one network to another. Consequently, when assessing actions of tourism networks toward sustainable development, it should be kept in mind that they are often location specific and the scope and impact of their activities varies from one destination to another. For the Spanish networks one essential contextual factor is that mass tourism has already changed the social patterns of the community, or threatens to do so. Kinsale in Ireland is about to face the same problem since its popularity as a tourism destination is constantly increasing. However, these pressures are less in Finland and Sweden where mass tourism has not developed to the same extent as in the southern countries.

Some of the networks (FN, Sälen) operate via enterprise sector environmental performance improvements (“enterprise-action networks”), while others (Kinsale, Calvia) aim at enhancing sustainability in a certain community (“community-action networks”), or seek to cover both levels (YSMEK, Alcudia). The community-action networks tend to concentrate more on socio-cultural and socio-economic questions³, whereas the by enterprise-action networks seek to further environmental management activities in their member enterprises or organizations.

4 LEARNING IN THE TOURISM NETWORKS

A variety of factors can set learning in motion (triggers), and there are different sources of learning during the process. The outcomes of learning in the tourism networks striving to further sustainable development also vary. Due to the empirical scope of the paper and paucity of previous research in the field, the intention is not to provide a comprehensive review of possible triggers, sources and outcomes of learning, but rather to highlight those that appeared



essential to the focal networks. Figure 1 illustrates this process in a simplified form.

Figure 1. Framework for learning in the networks towards sustainable development.

³ For example, they maintain cultural heritage (e.g. renovation of castles or town walls) or support housing for local people due to the fact that prices of a popular tourism destination exceed the affordable level for locals.

Even though the above framework depicts learning as a linear process, linearity was not an underlying assumption of the research. Rather this framework should be seen as a guide to the structure of this paper. A peculiarity of learning is that the same word ‘learning’ refers both to outcome and process, giving rise to a circular concept and concealing rather than revealing the dynamics of the process and the exact nature of the outcome. Consequently when referring to learning in networks, we refer to the *learning process* of the network actors and the *outcomes* of the process (cf. Weick and Westley 1996).

This point is illustrated by the start of environmental work in Kinsale Chamber of Tourism (KCoT). An almost universal aspect of interviews conducted at Kinsale was the story of ‘how Kinsale came last in the Tidy Towns competition in 1979 and turned this into victory by winning the competition in 1986’. This ‘genesis story’ is the commonly held and shared view of the origin of the Kinsale network’s interest in environmental sustainability. During the *process* of transforming Kinsale from a ‘dirty town’ to a ‘tidy one’ the actors in the Kinsale network developed a mode of operating based on ‘self-help’, which can be perceived as one *outcome* of the learning process as well as a key aspect of the process itself.

4.1 Triggers of learning

Learning can be triggered by various events and experiences (Dutton and Duncan 1987). In the networks studied, we recognise negative triggers like failure, or anticipation of a threat, and positive triggers such as the availability of funds or anticipation of better marketing possibilities in the future. Often these triggers are entangled with one another. Nevertheless, failures, crises, or external shifts do not by themselves lead to learning, they only create the need (Gersick 1991). In other words, triggering events do not keep learning going. The learning process needs to be reinforced once it has started or else the system will revert back to the old patterns (Halme 1997). Learning may however lead to transactional and/or transformational outcomes (Human and Provan 1997).

Anticipation or realisation of a decline. In a number of instances, **anticipation** of somekind **of a threat** set learning in motion. In Calvia, the threat of decline in the number of tourists triggered learning. In Kinsale the need to maintain the livelihood of the community was the trigger for networking locally. In Alcudia, the anticipation that tourism might exceed the limits of carrying capacity of the local environment and degrade the area’s reputation as a tourism resort was provoked by bad examples from other Mediterranean resorts. **Institutionalisation of environmentalism** in society and the demands of **customers/market**, on the other hand, have triggered learning in some of the networks like YSMEK, Sälen and FN. In these networks what was anticipated was not a constraint (in the form of a dying village or lowering number of tourists), but a societal trend (expectations of tourism consumers of high environmental quality of attributes).

Money-machine. The **availability of funds** was an important trigger for learning in Calvia and Sälen. The General Directorate of Tourism in Spain offered to fund Calvia’s Local Agenda 21. This process was started in 1995. Later on Calvia successfully used this funding to support various sustainable development projects. The Town Council has learnt to collaborate intensively with Majorcan Island Council, Balearic Autonomous Government and Spanish national government and with the European Commission to seek out financial resources for projects. The coordinator of Local Agenda 21 is also responsible for identifying EU-funded

projects (LIFE, TERRA, Integrated Management of Coastal Zones etc.) and Calvià is collaborating in several European projects.

Sälen is an example where the promise of the money-machine was present, but never realized. In this case the failure from anticipating it has led to stagnation in the network's functioning. The "Sustainable Sälen" network sought joint financing from the local government to improve the waste management and transportation issues in the area, and to employ a regional environmental coordinator. The financial support from local government did not materialise. In combination with several interruptions in the coordination of the project the network lost momentum and stagnated. In contrast, anticipation of the potential for future support provides the main basis that keeps the network together as it develops joint proposals for future funding.

4.2 Sources of learning during the process

After learning in the network has been set motion, it may still revert back to old patterns unless the process keeps moving forward (cf. Hedberg 1981). The following section considers the issues which were seen to keep the process of learning moving.

In some cases learning follows from **improvisation**. Learning moments, like surprises, may only be known after they are experienced. For instance, the beginning of the YSMEK network can be considered as improvisation. When environmental demands for tourism sector arose in the early 1990s no official constituency was ready to take the responsibility for it. Finnish Tourist Board considered it did not have sufficient environmental expertise and the Ministry of Environment considered it had no responsibility for tourism enterprises. Therefore a compromise was reached that brought the main tourism-related actors, i.e. relevant ministries, business associations, and some other constituencies together. This group developed an inexpensive concept for starting to green the Finnish tourism sector. They hired a consultant to undertake environmental reviews in ten pilot enterprises. This review provided the basis for a guidebook for the rest of the industry to utilise. Funding for the consultant was provided by the participating ministries, and a small fee was asked from the pilot enterprises. This improvised model was seen as successful due to the light official structure: hired consultant, voluntary management group and pilot enterprises. The guidebook soon sold out. The management group saw results very quickly - in a year - which compared favourably to their usual experiences of slow bureaucratic programmes. What originally was conceived as a minimal solution to a neglected industry's problem lead to an innovative system of operation.

"So, this makes sense. My own personal view is that this YSMEK group is really the best and most efficient working group where I have ever participated. Compared to the effort and money that society has invested in it."
(Chairman of YSMEK, senior inspector from Ministry of Environment)

DiMaggio & Powell (1991) identify **mimicry** as a significant mechanism for learning. It was observed in our tourism networks both within the network and between networks. Calvià is a model imitated by several other, especially Mediterranean tourism destinations. Kinsale exchanges experiences in an international context⁴. The enterprises of YSMEK actively exchange information and environmental representatives visit other firms (intra-network

⁴ For instance, the idea of restoring and turning the old Desmond castle into a wine museum in Kinsale was based on ideas generated during a visit to Australia.

mimicry). They have even started a sub-network MAYAVAT especially for this purpose. Indeed the whole concept of YSMEK is based on the logic of imitation: YSMEK pilot enterprises serve as demonstration projects and model for other Finnish enterprises.

It has been argued that **positive experience reinforces learning** (Henry and Hope 1994, Ariño and de la Torre 1998). This was observed in a number of networks. In Kinsale, failure (coming last in Tidy Towns competition) was followed by a positive experience (winning the competition seven years later). This can be seen to reinforce learning which had started from failure. It gave a boost to broadening environmental thinking from litter to restoration of cultural sights and areas, an effort which led the network to win the European Environment and Tourism prize in 1995. In YSMEK, the environmental reviews caused the pilot enterprises to undertake a number of environmental improvements often leading to additional benefits in terms of cost savings. In 1993, this was a novel experience in the context of a service-industry. The experience acted as reinforcing factor for environmental learning.

On the contrary, the **paralysing effect of an absence of positive experiences** can be illustrated by examples from FN and Sälen networks. In FN, most of the enterprise members expected to get more tourist customers as a result of FN. This has not occurred and the network is nearly in paralysis even though it still exists. Environmental training seminars, arranged by the network's coordinator have led to few concrete improvements in environmental performance among members the network. Indeed the enterprise members have lost their credibility in FN as a whole. Even originally active members like a lake cruise line now wonder about their continued participation in the network:

"And our interest in them has gone down, because during the past few years not much has happened what comes to us, so we are considering whether we should be part of it in future or not. ... Do they need us, and on the other hand, do we need them, so that we are interested in slightly different things. And then, on the other hand, if they need us, of course we are always ready to serve them and we are of course interested in the customers, but maybe our attitude towards the ring [FN] has changed." (lake cruise line's ship captain, 44)

The failure to abide by a norm of reciprocity may explain in part the failed learning in the networks. The rule of reciprocity suggests that in multi-actor cooperation only those actors willing to give something will receive something in return (Lutz 1999). In FN, the enterprise members expected to be provided with more customers. Yet except for a few active members, most members were not willing to invest in the network. In Sälen the enterprise actors wanted the local agenda coordinator to run the network, and did not spend efforts to keep the network going when the coordinator changed, and public funding was declined. In Alcudia, the enterprise members felt, that the municipality required improvements, but did not engage in similar improvements itself. In other words, the expectations of 'getting' something out of the networks were higher than the willingness to contribute.

"It has to be the local authorities who take the lead...they have said: "You have to do this" [...] But I don't agree that they demand us without demanding themselves who are the ones who created the ecotourist plaque and without applying it, in a very self-critical way." (Hotel association representative)

Small wins are one way of creating positive experiences that support learning for sustainable development. If the first actions of the network are relatively simple the actors have some time to learn new, often complex sustainability issues. Small wins are controllable opportunities of

modest size that produce visible and tangible outcomes (Weick and Westley 1996). Calvia, for instance, demolished 12 degraded hotels in order to create green area.⁵

4.3 Transactional and transformational outcomes of learning

Interorganizational learning can be achieved by transferring existing knowledge from one organization to another, as well as by creating completely new knowledge or skills through interaction among the organizations (Larsson et al. 1998). Learning in the networks can be incremental, but it may also contain more radical frame-breaking experiences, which allows networks to leap from one mode of operation to another (cf. Halinen et al. 1999). One of the basic distinctions is that between revolutionary learning where actors of a group learn something ‘qualitatively new’ in contrast to evolutionary, incremental learning of ‘more of the same’.⁶ In the following discussion we will use the term higher-level learning to refer to the first type and lower-level learning to the latter.

Higher-level learning refers to discovery, exploration, revolutionary learning, or frame-breaking whereas by lower-level learning organizations simply adapt to changes in their environment by readjusting their action strategies through repetition and routine within their own set of rules (Fiol & Lyles 1985; Argyris & Schon 1978). The latter kind of learning is supposed to exploit existing trajectories, and produce innovations of an incremental character.

In terms of outcomes, lower-level learning is also expected to produce *transactional outcomes*, for instance gains in performance or enhanced resource acquisition (Human and Provan 1997), such as joint purchasing of environmental training services. Other examples of transactional outcomes in the networks included the exchange of information about environmental management solutions, access to an architectural advice clinic (for getting information about how to undertake renovations according to old traditions), cost savings, or increased environmental credibility for the firm.

Higher-level learning is more likely to contribute to *transformational outcomes*, i.e. changes in the ways the members think and modes in which they act, or both (Human and Provan 1997). For example, among transformational outcomes were new ideas for business strategy⁷, improved image of the region among the local population and as a tourism destination (as a result of joint efforts from local networking), creating new forms of employment and livelihood for a declining region, new interaction channels with stakeholders, for instance bridges between business enterprises and NGOs or municipality and citizens.

Occasionally transformational outcomes manifest themselves within culture of a network. Cultural elements such as a set of values and beliefs collectively adopted in the network, together with artefacts of their expression such as symbols, myths and metaphors are

⁵ This action was very visible, even spectacular but in terms of sustainable development it is a “small step” rather than a large “win”.

⁶ An oil company that changes its business idea to production of sun and wind power is an example of revolutionary learning whereas a company producing oil with less polluting methods than it previously did is an example of an evolutionary learning instance.

⁷ In the course of environmental review process or environmental management implementation some of the YSMEK and FN enterprises stated that they had gotten ideas for how to systematize their management in other areas than environment and ideas about how they could sharpen their business idea.

important to learning because they act as a storage for past learning and work as an instrument to communicate this learning within the network (Weick and Westley 1996). For example, YSMEK management group refers to itself as a 'coffee club'. This metaphor tells how the management group perceives its mode of operating. The chairman of YSMEK says:

"Maybe the most central thing is this coffee club of ours...which has never been founded by anybody, and nobody is running it or giving us orders, and we can do what ever we like. We meet every two months and everybody brings the latest information from their part, and we talk about how everybody is doing, and then everybody asks, what are we going to do now. Then we get some project started, hire a consultant for that, and hold a few more meetings."

In Kinsale, on the other hand, the overarching issue of social cohesion concerned many of the respondents in different ways, yet for a number of the members of the Kinsale network it was in itself a metaphor for social cohesion and self help. For one core member the activities of the network represent:

'A cohesion and a working together that is unique to Kinsale and that goes through from the chamber of tourism to the sub-committees and I would say that the major social implication is self help, that the chamber inculcates in its members that anything that is good for Kinsale has to be supported and anything that is bad has to be disciplined or opposed, or at worst if it is really blatant, sat upon'. (Tourism promotion officer, KCoT)

In Kinsale, where people had traditionally a culture of dependance on somebody else (authorities) being responsible for living conditions, the concept of self-help was a novel invention. In YSMEK two things were 'something qualitatively new'. First, the mode of working together across different areas of administration, business associations, personal association and an environmental organisation in a voluntary grouping, and the involvement of tourism enterprises on a voluntary basis (in contrast to command-and-control). Second, systematic environmental management *in the service sector* was novel in 1993 when YSMEK started.⁸

Calviá demonstrates 'a collective way of inventing things', a new common mode of working toward sustainable development on the basis of a very broad stakeholder involvement, and with an explicit engagement of all aspects of sustainable development under the planning framework.

"Since we are working on this each day we are more motivated. Specially because of everything we are capable of doing, because at the moment the whole information was available, the debate has reached the street, even among the municipal civil servants it has had a really spectacular welcome, and there are appearing initiatives of any type. That is to say, we have discovered a way of inventing things, and these methods haven't occurred to us before." (Mayor 121)

5 NETWORK STRUCTURE AND LEARNING

The process of learning is defined both by the structure and dynamic established in networks. Next we will discuss about the relationship of two structural issues, leadership (hub) and membership, relating to learning within networks.

⁸ It had began a few years earlier in large industrial companies of heavy polluting sectors, but at that time tourism as non-smokestack industry was not generally considered as environmentally harmful an industry as today.

5.1 Leadership/hub

One of the common denominators to a number of networks of the sample was that they were lead by some focal or “hub” organization/actor whose tasks among other things included information dissemination and training of other members about sustainability (cf. Sydow and Windeler 1998). A hub group was either an appointed management group or another type of coordinating party, and most often consisted of public actors.

Table 1. Leadership locus

Public leadership	Enterprise leadership	Mixed
YSMEK (mgt group)	Kinsale (KcoT) (mgt group)	FN* (coordinator)
Calvia (mgt group)		
Alcudia (mgt group)		
Sälen (coordinator)		

* The establisher and financier is Pirkanmaa Agriculture Centre which is a public body, but the office they set up is not staffed by Agriculture Centre people. The office personnel is private and paid by the Agriculture centre.

The hub actor had assumed information dissemination function in Calvia, Kinsale, HI, FN, Sälen and Alcudia. In some networks the hub went further: in Alcudia, FN, YSMEK and Sälen the hub arranged training. In the YSMEK-concept the management group hires consultant to work with pilot enterprises or organizations, FN coordinator hires environmental educators to give classroom training to member entrepreneurs, Alcudia provides environmental training for hotel and catering enterprises, and in Sälen LA21 coordinator made arrangement with a university to educate business members to sustainable tourism. In Calvia, the hub actor (municipality) sought to engage other actors into thematic working groups⁹, which seem to be turning out to a vehicle for joint learning about different dimensions of sustainable development. Calvia’s “joint awareness-building” model was a contrast to the model of “training provider” hubs, where the hub itself was rather a “provider” than participant. In all networks that applied the teaching mode, the hub consisted of essentially of public actors.

5.2 Membership composition

As to the *membership* composition, in some networks the majority of members are from the business sector, whereas in others public members dominate in number. Table 2 depicts the variation in membership representation in the networks.

⁹ The working groups are: Integration and quality of life, Local ecology, Cultural heritage, Economy and tourism, Town-planning system, and Key environmental sectors.

Table 2. Membership representation

	Horizontal govern.	Vertical govern.	Enterprise size similarity	Enterprise type similarity	Associations	NGO	Academia
Kinsale	dissimilar		dissimilar	dissimilar	yes		
YSMEK	dissimilar		dissimilar	dissimilar	yes	yes	yes
FN	similar		similar	moderately similar			
Sälen	similar		dissimilar	Moderately similar			yes
Calvia	dissimilar	dissimilar	dissimilar	dissimilar	yes	yes	yes
Alcudia	similar	dissimilar	dissimilar	dissimilar	yes	no	no

Explanation of terms in the table:

Domains: government (local, regional & national government), business enterprises (small & large / homogenous & heterogenous), associations, NGOs, academia.

Government similarity: government representation is similar versus diverse. Similar = e.g. only one municipality office, diverse = e.g. different ministries or municipality departments

Horizontal diversity of government representation: number of offices/departments representation at one governmental level (e.g. national level only: ministry). Similar = only one office from one level of government participates in the network (e.g. only one office of local government present), dissimilar = many offices from the same level of government

Vertical diversity of government representation: Levels of government in the network, local/regional/national

Domain-similarity. In studies on interfirm alliances it has been found that differences or similarities in knowledge base, knowledge processing and dominant logic of actors act as ability barriers or ability facilitators in interorganizational learning (Larsson et al. 1998). In multi-actor public-private networks these factors become aggravated since the actors vary considerably regarding their knowledge bases and dominant logics of action (e.g. economic logic vs. administrative logic). In terms of learning about sustainable development it appears that there need to be different types of members to make broader understanding of it available. The diversity of actors increases opportunity for learning through combination of different experiences and re-interpretation of already existing knowledge. On the other hand, the actors of a network need to be able to create a certain amount of common ground in order to act. Therefore a certain amount of domain similarity is called for. Evidences of both are provided by e.g. YSMEK. A diverse management group provides a possibility to make use of a diverse knowledge base and assess many views. At the same time, some of the pilot enterprises acknowledged that development of conceptual understanding and efficiency of tasks implementation were especially clear within domain similar groups of companies. Likewise, companies in Sälen gave indicated to the efficiency of implementation in the groups of actors with a similar professional background, explaining them by easy understanding of the problems and realities of the business¹⁰.

¹⁰ However, the Sälen network's domain similar firms competed for the same customers. Consequently, the competitive aspect created a certain barrier to exchange of in the network, and it appeared that the network would have needed a stronger coordination structure to facilitate between actors whose collaboration is otherwise limited.

5.3 Education in relation to learning in networks

Informational and educational activities only make information available and create an opportunity for learning. These activities provide a potential source of learning in the network context. They are the most typical vehicle public-private networks use to pursue learning about sustainable development, but they do not guarantee learning outcomes.

Our data indicates when the recipients of education are small tourism entrepreneurs, lectures or written materials alone do not come out as efficient sources of learning. Education and training need to relate to the daily reality of the recipient. Even if information is available, it may make little sense to recipient organization that does not share the experience of the context in which the knowledge is created (Nonaka 1994). Learning occurs in the course of action and through experience. Classroom training does not appear sufficient with the exception of actors whose attitudes are very positive to begin with and who are already open to environmental (or a wider set of sustainability) issues. Such actors already have environmental issues in their frame of reference and thus can see the connection between the training and their own enterprise's actions.

FN, for instance provided environmental training sessions over a period of two years. Yet it did not manage to create transformational outcomes at the whole network. It did contribute to environmental improvements among those actors who already were environmentally concerned or had some preliminary understanding about sustainable development issues. In other words, by providing environmental training and education the FN office did not manage to provide an illuminating learning experience leading to a frame of reference to which SME members could attach the environmental or other sustainable development issues. To conclude, transformational outcomes (new ways of thinking or acting) at the network level do not come about through education and classroom-training only, but through shared practical experiences or events in the network. Training which takes a format of hands-on practical activities in the own enterprise have a greater potential even for those less sensitive and aware participants who do not possess previous environmental knowledge or high motivation.

A hub actor/s that "teaches" other members may be an effective form of action toward sustainable development in one way, but it also contains an inherent risk. The risk is that information only flows *one-way*, from the "teacher" to the "recipient", not vice versa. Receptivity of a network member is limited by the strenght of the intent to learn. The adoption of a teacher attitude in a network is likely to motivate receptivity less than those partners with "student" or recipient attitude (Larsson et al. 1998). For instance in YSMEK, despite the fact that the training format as such was successful, there is no feedback channel from the pilot enterprises and pilot event organisers to the management group. Such feedback could provide an opportunity for developing the future strategy of YSMEK.

If the teacher-student model is applied, and the teacher actor does not make a special effort to create the feedback loops leading to two-way communication, the interorganizational learning strategy of *collaboration* is not likely to take place. In the best case such a situation will lead to *accommodation* as the learning strategy, i.e. the recipient actors will integrate the knowledge distributed by the teacher actor. In order for collaboration strategy to occur,

partners should be able and willing to both distribute knowledge to other members and integrate knowledge made available by them (Larsson et al. 1998).

6 CONCLUSIONS

The point of departure for the study was that the imperative of sustainable development requires various types of partnerships, alliances or networks between actors of society. In order to operate through a network mode, participants that have traditionally acted in isolation of each other simultaneously need to learn how to co-operate and to understand the concept of sustainable development and act upon it in practice. The present study investigates how learning toward sustainable development can occur in multi-stakeholder public-private networks. The evidence is grounded in the data from six tourism networks in four European countries. In general, understanding of the meaning of sustainable development in the present networks is fragmentary, and thus actions taken to put it in practice are piecemeal rather than holistic. This state of affairs, however, is not much different from elsewhere in society. The study indicates that piecemeal approaches can occasionally lead to more comprehensive understanding about sustainability, given the right circumstances.

We find that the network learning *process* is *more important* vis-à-vis the outcomes *than* the network *design* (structure). The process may produce exchange-type of transactional outcomes or create completely new knowledge about sustainable development in tourism context, and/or ways of implementing it (transformational outcomes). Yet one structure-related rule of thumb can be proposed: members should be *as diverse as necessary and as similar as possible*. In public-private networks the actors vary considerably regarding their knowledge bases and dominant logic of action. On one hand, there need to be different types of members to make broader understanding of sustainable development available. On the other hand, the actors of a network need to be able to create a certain amount of common ground in order to act. We argue that an optimal amount of domain similarity of actors facilitates learning about sustainable development.

In terms of the network evolution, a dual guideline of *small wins but long-term orientation* could be adopted. Small wins, that is, controllable opportunities of modest size that produce visible and tangible outcomes can be created to support a network's learning for sustainable development. However, it is advisable to adopt a long-term time orientation when starting a network. A network needs time to become adept at explicating tacit and embedded knowledge to one another, and develop the network so it is fit for creating "large wins". Long-term orientation also applies to public fund providers: networks need support over a number years and should not be expected to run on their own after two or three years. Short-term funding has a tendency to lead to fragmentary results, and breed frustration toward possibilities of acting upon sustainable development at a local level.

In sustainability networks with a leading public actor, this actor may assume a "teacher's" role. In some of these instances, networks are merely used as a tool to disseminate information and feed ideas from the hub actor to the recipients. It provides information and training to other actors. This situation involves an inherent trap of one-way communication and under-used knowledge utilisation opportunities. Receptivity of the teacher actor is low. Even in the best case the "student" actors integrate the knowledge coming from the teacher actor, but the partners do not really collaborate. Then a network may be reduced to a mere tool that in essence does not do much more than replace command and control. The teacher actor should

make a special effort to create the feedback loops leading to two-way communication, so that a *strategy of collaboration* can take place. In order for a collaboration strategy to occur, partners should be able and willing to both distribute knowledge to other members and integrate knowledge made available by them.

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