















This course support is a product of the project
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Empowering Practitioners in Social Work from Rural Communities

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COURSE 1

DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL AND COMMUNITY NETWORKS

1. THEORIES ABOUT NETWORKS AND NETWORKING

Establishing networks or **networking** is one of the most important skills required in almost all areas of activity, due to its potential to solve the most diverse problems in a much more effective way than in individual or institutional ways.

Networking is a barometer of community capacity development (Arpinte and Cace, 2008), demonstrated by the active, involved and open attitude of community members, who become interested in community issues and participate in common in identifying solutions to solve them. Linking members of a community can help them mobilize much faster, focusing on major local decisions (eg turning a virgin place into a children's recreation area or transforming a building abandoned in a community centre for children or the elderly club).

Moreover, European networks have great potential in promoting quality and innovation, exchanging good practice and disseminating innovative results, and thus contributing to the realisation of a European area in their thematic field.

The term **network** has its origins in the field of technical sciences (network transport infrastructure, as in the case of railway or road networks) being further promoted by modern information and communication technologies (eg. the Internet – the net of nets) and highlighting the image of an **interconnected structure**.

The shortest representation of the network concept is that it represents *a system of social connections between individuals or organizations*. Networks are specific structures for inter-relationship, interaction and cooperation between individual actors, initiated and developed by people, based on a common interest.

The network is a social structure, made up of individuals or organizations, called **nodes**, which are linked or connected through one or more specific interdependence relationships (Gotea, 2010). These links may be friendship, common interest, financial exchanges, antipathy, common beliefs and values, knowledge or even prestige, spatial proximity, occupation, offering or receiving services or varied combinations thereof. Therefore, we could consider that a network is a moral relationship of trust (Fukuyama, 1999).

Ferreol (1998) highlights the fact that there are **two main types of networks: the individual (personal) network** that represents the whole of an individual's ties or relationships with others, and **the social network**, which is defined by all the connections between the individuals of a given population. In other words, a social network is a set of individual networks that interact at certain times, depending on the context that calls for them, with the goal of producing social effects or changes that are beneficial for all involved.

Creating **personal networks** are not only helpful for individual problem solving, but also compensate institutional deficits, when precarious or missing institutional resources are substituted

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by personal relations. Personal networks relating to a specific occupational group are also highly important, being a basis of a **professional community**. In this case, experts make technical knowledge available to the other members, promote the transfer of know-how and advances in decision-making and responsibility.

The concept of network is based on another concept: **cooperation**. While cooperation refers to the working ties of individual organisations, network refers to the huge number of cooperating partners. Specific forms of cooperation, particularly in connection with a social dilemma demand trust as a matter of necessity, being understood as a mean the reduction of complexity. From this perspective, there are other specific networks - **institutional networks** - understood to be *a specific cooperation of several organizations, designed to cover a longer period of time for the attainment of jointly stipulated objectives and added value for the individual participants*. These networks are functional because they respect the independence of institutions and still constitute a system, characterized by common intentions, human-orientation, the principle of independence and voluntary participation as well as the principle of exchange.

An important role in forming a more sustainable partnership is the identification of **key network stakeholders** - those individuals or institutions that actively participate in the establishment, development and sustainability of the network and are interested in achieving the planned results. Properly assessing the skills and expertise of new network members gives it more efficiency and even the added value it needs to differentiate itself from other networks. Each partner in a network should identify its core competencies and indicate the services and contributions it is capable and willing to bring to the network.

2. ABOUT NETWORK ANALYSIS

A social network can be defined as a structure of social relations of units and the linkages between these units. Ties have different degrees of formalised character. For example, in working relationships, people initially have formalised ties while within the voluntary organisation, interactions are characterized by less formal ties.

In the context of social action, links and connections established between actors are complex and pursue multiple goals such as: information exchange, material resources, encouraging human solidarity, empowering network members, political mobilization, comparative analysis, support and personal assistance in professional crisis situations etc. In this way, depending on the context, we can differentiate between information links, exchange links, support links, friendship links, etc.

The network analysis is based on *an examination of relationships and it focuses on the ties and interactions between a specific number of elements or actors*. Direct and indirect social ties reveal opportunities or are obstacles to the actions of the actor. The qualities of ties and commitments are included among the relational characteristics of networks, among which are:

- their reciprocity,
- the diversity of the content of ties (multiple or single),
- their homogeneity or heterogeneity,
- the strong and weak commitments,
- the latent and current ties,

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- their intensity (frequency of contact),
- their duration (stability) and frequency,
- the access opportunities linked to ties,
- the communication channels,
- the ties of different roles.

Even simpler forms of the visualisation of ties may also help in gaining awareness of one's own networks and their structure.

3. WEAK TIES – STRONG TIES

In a survey on the search for employment (1974), Granovetter discovered that a large number of jobs were gained on the basis of informal contacts. He found that the majority of *job seekers acquired the information leading to their new jobs through weak ties with acquaintances* and not through strong ties with close friends. These results underscore the thesis of the strength of weak ties, which appears as a result of the bridge-building function and connect islands and social circles.

Şoflău (2007) highlights two major network types:

- ❖ **the closed network**, where social relationships between members are very tight, characterized by a high degree of communication, closeness, familiarity, intimacy, frequency of meetings, trust and cooperation, with strong connections between its nodes, which implies a certain weight in to evade common rules without being excluded, and also to easily apply sanctions.
- ❖ **the open network**, in contrast to the closed one, is characterized by weak social relations, less communication and cooperation, reduced meeting frequency, less intimacy and proximity, with fairly easy and multiple outcomes and the application of sanctions with difficulty, precisely for this reason.

It has been noticed that individuals who manage to create bridges between closed networks, even if they establish weak links with the members of these networks, will nevertheless have countless advantages over the one who is constrained by the dense social relationships around him.

The degree of display of criteria such as time span, emotional intensity, intimacy and alternative assistance, can determine whether social ties that form within a network are **strong or weak**.

- ✓ **Strong connections** can be defined as permanent, capable of emotionally connecting, based on reciprocity and, most of the time, having a supportive function (eg, ties with friends that have an exceptionally persistent character).
- ✓ The **weak connections** are less intense and reciprocal and serve the purpose of obtaining information.

The main objectives of the networks set up at community level are as follows:

- **Bonding social capital** - that is to create ties, increase confidence and enhance relationships between people who know each other in their primary affiliation groups (relatives, neighbours, consciences). This objective is to ensure the cohesion of the groups and to keep people together.
- **Bridging social capital**, between closed networks - that is to create links between individuals or organizations, institutions, with others outside the community, which they do not know but

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with which they can share common interests or are willing to share economic opportunities. This objective contributes to improving community-level collaboration capacity and participation in community life in formal associations or informal groups but, above all, contributes to increasing trust in out-of-court bodies (institutions, other social groups). In this way, partnerships, cooperation and collaboration initiated at the local level are an important way of access for poor communities to attract external resources, to develop and improve their own resources, and to solve the problems identified locally.

In networking, **trust** is a particularly important and significant factor for developing sustainable and reciprocal links between network members. At the same time, participation in networks is thought to induce members to become cooperative, collaborative, and solidarity-minded, and contributes to increasing the level of public awareness.

It appears as an obvious conclusion that in the absence of credible engagement with each other, members of a community may lose profit opportunities for everyone or for the entire community. The dilemma of collective action can be overcome only in communities where trust, reciprocity and social relations between people are considered normal and practiced sine qua non.

4. ABOUT SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social capital refers to:

- ✚ relationships between people,
- ✚ interactions, cooperation and mutual collaboration,
- ✚ existing organizations in the community that offer the opportunity to engage, relate and show solidarity to those in difficulty.

The network of interpersonal relationships existing in the community can be an important resource in the process of community development, as well as the relationships that the community has with the outside, such as, for example, the relationship with the sons of the village. They can be attracted to the process of community development by engaging in promoting the message, attracting specialists from outside the community for exchange of experience, etc.

Social capital refers, also, to the **collective value of all social networks** (people know about) and the tendencies to do things for the other members of the network that derive from these networks, meaning reciprocal rules. Social capital results from time spent together, from meetings with friends or even from going to the market. It occurs through parties between u, waiting for a friend's child at school when parents are not available, knowing what is happening at school etc.

The basic idea of social capital (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000) is that the family, friends and collaborators of a person are an important asset, to which he can resort to crisis situations or personal needs, the same situation being true for groups. Those communities endowed with a diverse and rich network of social networks and civic associations are in a much stronger position because they have the necessary leverage to fight poverty and vulnerability to resolve conflicts or disputes in the community and, to take advantage of the opportunities.

For example, participation in a group of volunteers can generate as externality that group members learn to trust each other, although they have not explicitly proposed this, it was not the purpose of their interaction. Subsequently, they also learn to trust other members of society.

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5. BENEFITS OF NETWORKS in creating social capital

From a professional-theoretical perspective, **networking** can be understood as the process of building up ties by people and groups and as a fundamental basic attitude of professional action. Bourdieu defines social capital as a network of ties.

What does the concept of social capital now mean for network actors? Their opportunities for action do not depend on their material equipment (economic capital) or the number of staff (human capital) alone, but also on the tie resources (social capital) built-up by them.

One important function of ties that is also relevant to professional action lies in the fact that **they open up new ties**. The flexible use of contact networks guarantees the acquisition of relevant information which is required for remaining up-to-date. In planning processes, they function as resource networks. They include the efficient utilization of resources, simplifying the provision of instructors, the finding of relevant contacts and expertise.

When working in cooperation with others, the contact network of the partner is often also envisaged. The other party contributes its potential network of ties (i.e. its contacts) to the working partnership. These newly emerging structures enable access to specific groups of addresses.

Contacts may assume the role and function of door opener. Contacts open up further contacts. Networks require social capital but the work on ties connected with it leads to a growth in labour and in some cases, to congestion.

6. EUROPEAN NETWORKS VERSUS TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION PROJECTS

It is not the number of partners which constitutes a network (Bienzle, 2007). Although the greater the number of network partners, the greater the need for network coordination, like: clear consultation, the flow of communication more strongly institutionalized and formally coordinated, jointly defined standards and competences.

European networks and cooperation projects may have several similar characteristics as:

- normally built from the bottom-up, because they respond to a need in the field.
- partnerships funded for a limited period of one to three years.
- funding is granted for the implementation of a specific work plan.
- bring together partners with complementary expertise for a specific purpose and to share tasks accordingly.

But, the most important difference is a strategic one: their approaches are different.

Fig. 1 - Typology of European Networks as opposed to Transnational Cooperation Projects¹

European Networks	Cooperation Projects
European scale (>10 partners)	Transnational scale (>3 partners)

¹ According to Holger Bienzle, Esther Gelabert, Wolfgang Jütte, Katerina Kolyva, Nick Meyer, Guy Tilkin (2007), *The Art of Networking. European Networks in Education*, “die Berater” Unternehmensberatungsgesellschaft mbH (Disponibil la www.dieberater.com).

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Pooling strategic knowledge	Generating concrete innovation
Process-orientation	Product-orientation
Strategic impact on the field	Delivery and use of products or services
Multiple and complex objectives	Few and concrete objectives
Separate strands of activities with high degree of autonomy	Interlinked work packages contributing to the main outputs
Multiple target groups	Clearly defined target groups
Partnership which includes key players who represent the field	Partnership of practitioners with complementary expertise
Enlargement strategy of partnership	Closed partnership with possible associated partners
Sustainable structure or fabric of relations	Temporary cooperation structure

Networks are about shaping practices and policies, aim at personal and organisational learning and sharing experiences and learning for actors inside and outside the network. According to Bienzle (2007) networks should concentrate on either policy or practice and by setting themselves one or very few of the following tasks:

- to evaluate and make available to practitioners innovation and good practice in the field;
- to conduct research or make comparative analyses in order to provide the field with an overview of the state of the art;
- to support existing thematically related projects in content and management aspects and to act as incubator of new projects;
- to make recommendations to policy-makers at national and European levels with the aim of mainstreaming innovative practices.

7. ESTABLISHING AND SETTING UP A NETWORK

Setting up a network involves:

- ✚ long preparation,
- ✚ strategic thinking and
- ✚ a highly dynamic multi-player team.

The set-up phase of a network covers the period starting with the conceptualization of an idea as a result of needs analysis and ends with the formulation of the network's future role and position in the sphere of rural social work. The most challenging aspects of setting up a network is **building its distinct profile and identity**.

This phase of the network it will help partners to define the path they will be taking in the formulation of the three **main network functions: networking, learning, and shaping policies and practices**.

Prior to setting up a network, it is first necessary to build a profile and its own identity, based on some absolutely essential and necessary elements that need to be clarified at this stage:

- *Network strategy*: what is the target group / public targeted by network activity, what is the network's scope of intervention, what other similar initiatives will be relevant to the development of their network?
- *Network identity*: will it be a dissemination network in which it will insist on the selection and transfer of best practices? Will it be a resource network where action will focus on developing and conceiving content and research? Or will it be a policy and advocacy

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development network where partners will analyse existing policies in their area of activity and use lobbying techniques?

- *Network Coordinator*: Who is responsible for the coordination, management and visibility of the network?
- *Partnership*: what other stakeholders will support network activity?
- *Tools and methods* to be used in network work.

There is no one method for setting up a network. Nevertheless, it is good to keep in mind that when a network structure is an entirely new initiative, the design and set up strategy for the network will be a longer and more demanding process than in cases where the network is a follow-up to preceding cooperation activities.

A. *Creating the network strategy:*

When mapping its strategy, a network in rural social work field should consider *the potential interests of any targeted institution* related to social services, namely local municipalities, local NGOs, schools, other governing bodies and special interest committees and the needs of the disadvantaged people themselves.

Moving on, the network partners will need to map and *make a list of other already existing initiatives for social services* or other social inclusion initiatives developed on the territory covered by their network: other local/national/ European networks or associations, informal/ formal initiatives, volunteer or government driven action, projects and campaigns, events and publications

Next step is to identify their *network's orientation*, based on a needs analysis in their field, by identifying areas of concern, priorities in their area of action, specific requirements and the expectations of their potential target groups and policy contexts. Three guiding questions for the needs analysis stage:

- ✓ Which of the network aspects will be innovative for them? The network's involvement with the diversity of expertise and geographical representation, the network's advocacy skills, its potential to promote their work to wide audiences, the media and press etc.
- ✓ Which support mechanisms could the network offer them? An arena for learning new methods, a forum for knowledge sharing, an observatory to monitor new trends, new methodologies and tools for their work; a platform for further networking and disseminating etc.
- ✓ What is the future network's target public? Learners; learning providers; associations involved in education; bodies providing guidance; authorities at local regional and national level; research centres; enterprises; non-profit organisations; voluntary organisations; higher education institutions; umbrella organisations etc.

Considering that networks are expected to provide content support to other projects and partnerships, and to facilitate interaction among them, it is important step for network partners to **identify similar existing initiatives**, to bring them together and create a platform of knowledge sharing and content development based on their geographical areas diversity and their variety of expertise.

In order for a network to succeed in its set up phase, it is important that its partners identify all other networks that have operated in a similar field.

B. *Types of Network*

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According to sociologists and different researches in the field, there are 3 types of networks: dissemination networks, resource networks, policy development networks.

- ❖ A *dissemination network* supports and promotes the exchange of good practice among actors. Such a network should also trigger innovation in the field through the efficient promotion of the exploitation of the results of other projects, initiatives and research outcomes. In this case, it is very important that the partners involved should have a high degree of promotional and dissemination experience and capacity, ideally at European level, and good knowledge of the field.
Dissemination networks can be compared to a market place full of merchants and clients. Each participant becomes involved with the objective to either 'buy' or 'sell' knowledge (most of the time they are doing both). Such a network, being a market platform, requires a strong ability to market, strong selling skills and promotion expertise.
- ❖ A *resource network* contributes to the development and exchange of research outcomes in a specific area, and thus to become one reference point for the field. It often focuses on anticipating field trends, comparative studies, curriculum development and is mainly concerned with the advancement of its field through continuous research. Its main activities include conferences and publishing, statistics, evaluation studies and feasibility studies, annual reports etc.
- ❖ A *policy development network* focuses mainly on the shaping of policy in its field. They are interested in shaping agendas by influencing legislation and guaranteeing the representation of interests at the regional/ national/European level or to contribute to the drafting of legislation and policy action. The typical outputs of these networks are: policy statements, policy analysis and positions, awareness raising activities, campaigns, high press attention etc. Bienzle (2007) considers that participants in a policy network are like delegates and politicians in a parliamentary assembly: they advocate and support public interest in their specific field. Their main focus is to change policies, to increase budgets, to raise awareness, to attract the attention of the public and the press, and to involve policy makers in their action. They need a high degree of eloquence, policy analysis skills and a clear agenda. Their arguments need not only to be strong but consistent and pertinent.

C. *Selecting the network coordinator*

The network coordinator and the *coordinating organisation* play an essential role in providing direction for the network and its management and quality control. All partners must decide in the setup phase which institution and person(s) are best suited for the coordination of the network. In this case, Bienzle (2007) recommend some preliminary questions that might be useful to ask before deciding on the network coordination:

- ❖ Does the coordinator have strong leadership and communication skills?
- ❖ Does the coordinator have a solid track record in the management of complex projects?
- ❖ Does the coordinator have the ability to mobilise other actors and resources in the field?
- ❖ Is the coordinating institution influential in the thematic area of the network?

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- ❖ Does it have a sufficiently strong institutional capacity?
- ❖ Does the network rank high in the priorities of the coordinating institution?

At the *individual level*, the network coordinator should fulfil three categories of requirements: management skills, expertise in the field and interpersonal competences.

- ✓ *Management skills* refer to the ability to plan, organise and monitor the network activities, the ability to get things done, considering the pressure of time related to the work plan, the ability to react flexibly and adapt to changing requirements and challenges, the ability to delegate responsibility. His/her institution should be able to support him/her at times of difficulty and periods of crisis management.
- ✓ *Expertise in the field* is considered for a coordinator in order to be able to assess the value of contributions and to make decisions which are relevant to the field. Likewise, the institution he/she belongs to needs to prove a sound record of experience in the specific field concerned, and ideally have an excellent reputation in the specific thematic area.
- ✓ When it comes to interpersonal competences, the network coordinator must be a good communicator, to encourage people come together in order to share experience, to learn from each other and jointly make an impact on the field. He should demonstrate awareness of intercultural differences and respect for diversity.

D. Forming the network partnership

In order to create a solid partnership, it is crucial to identify the key players in the field helps to gain strategic knowledge about the main actors in the specific area of action. These key players could be the strongest allies or competitors.

The mapping (searching and pre-selecting) of the key players in a specific field will lead to the making of a list of influential organisations and people that will be either helping the network's set-up or could eventually end up being further involved in the network's development and sustainability. The key players in the network's field of interest should potentially include people and institutions of the following areas of expertise: service providers, NGOs, research institutions, innovation centres, public authorities, media and press, other networks etc.

The important challenge in identifying key players in a specific field is trying to *combine and balance*: geographical representation, expertise, transversal aspects (gender, age, ethnic group, disadvantaged groups, special needs, etc.).

In a network structure each partner has a specific (and quite unique) task that is vital for the network's success. Partners should decide among themselves the profiles and the number of partners that will be needed to fulfil each function according to their needs.

E. Different forms of participation in a network

The network promoters have to decide whether future network actors will take part in the formal network partnership with a *contractual arrangement* (formal partners), or if they will contribute to the network and receive in-kind benefits *without contractual arrangements* (non-contractual actors).

When designing a network, it will be helpful to have in mind two concentric circles: one, consisting of the core partners, and the next, consisting of the supporters. What supporters do?

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- ✓ to learn from good practice for the formulation of new approaches;
- ✓ to participate in the development of new models addressing specific needs in the field;
- ✓ to network intensively with stakeholders and institutions with the view to solving a specific problem;
- ✓ to identify present and future needs where network cooperation could be beneficial;
- ✓ to promote the institution and its work and increase visibility.

COURSE APPLICATIONS²

Activity 1: Mapping existing contacts

Aims:

1. To identify the range of participants contacts in rural social work field;
2. To analyse the nature of the relationships and the potential relationships;
3. To evaluate the viability of setting up or developing a potential network of intervention and support at community level.

Task description: work in pairs of 2 persons (A and B):

- ✓ A draws a series of circles, like a target;
- ✓ Then A is putting himself in center, record relationships, showing greater or lesser proximity in terms of role and influence they have in setting up or developing a potential network of intervention and support at community level in social work field;
- ✓ Describe relationships to B;
- ✓ Change roles and repeat the application.

Activity 2: Describing a network (research exercise)

Scop:

Identifying participants perception about the setting up or developing an intervention network at community level in social work field;

Task description:

To describe a network they are currently involved or interested in setting up in the near future.

Activitatea 3: Visualising a network in rural social work sphere

² The proposed applications were inspired after the book of Bienzle, Holger - **Resource Pack for Networkers** – created in the framework of the project *ComNet – Competences for Networking in European Education* (2007 – 3485/001-001), implemented with funds from European Commission. For more details you can access www.networks-in-education.eu.

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Scop:

1. To produce a visual representation of a network and to explain the network to a colleague;
2. To identify the key players and the personal and professional relationships that exists;
3. To identify and to represent the nature of the ties (weak and strong) between them;
4. To identify potential gaps and partnerships;

Task description: work in pairs of 2 persons (A and B):

- A draw himself in the center of a paper and record his key players that could be attracted in the process of setting up or developing a network; He must use different colours to show weak and strong ties;
- A must describe the drawing to B, which will have the big task to ask questions in order to help A to develop as full a picture of the network as possible;
- When B will have a clear understanding, change roles.

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COURSE 2

EFFECTIVE METHODS OF EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF INTERVENTION IN SOCIAL WORK SERVICES AT COMMUNITY LEVEL

1. GENERAL CONCEPTS ABOUT IMPACT EVALUATION IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE.

Social workers all over Europe play a fundamental part in transition process towards a sustainable future, as agents of social change. The development of strong, vibrant, and healthy communities has long been a tenet of the social work profession.

Social workers represent the voices and needs of target groups and disadvantaged communities to policy makers at local and national level.

Object of social work is to assist a person, family and group of people in determining, solving or reducing of social problems by developing person's own resources and involving in support systems, but the professional activity of social worker is focused on the achievement and promotion of practical solution of individual's social problems and enhancing individual's quality of life, social inclusion, the ability to help oneself.

1.1. Social Impact tells the story of the change we bring to people's lives

When asked to measure your Social Impact, do you feel you are being pressed for yet another time-consuming report - without the resources to do it? However, nowadays, every organisation can (and should) measure their social impact. The real benefits derived from the process happen within the organisation. If we have a way to tell the whole story of our impact - not just the numbers of how many people walked through our doors - we have an incredibly powerful tool that **will**:

- improve our credibility and encourage people to believe what we say,
- inspire our staff and volunteers,
- encourage us to continuously improve our services,
- communicate to other stakeholders how good we are,
- form the basis of powerful publicity materials and funding applications,
- help us to make an even greater difference.

Every organisation - no matter how small or new - can measure its social impact. That being said, it is often better for small organisations to start by measuring just one indicator, perhaps related to just one activity. Once used to this, more indicators can then be added.

1.2. What does Social Impact mean?

How does the term 'social impact measurement' make you feel? Scared, confused, overwhelmed? But what does the term 'social impact' really mean? Well, let's break it down, into its two elements - 'social' and 'impact'.

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The word 'impact' we understand. There are consequences to actions we take. We create change in something else. If I crash my car into someone else's the impact changes the car I drove into - it causes a dent in the other car (and mine too!).

So what about the 'social' element? We already do 'social'. That is the reason for being, the purpose, of the organisations we work in - to address a social need we have identified in our communities.

If I asked you to tell me about your social aims you could probably come up with a response fairly easily. But what if I asked you what is the social impact that your organisation achieves?

Well, if the impact we have consists of the consequences of our actions, then our social impact is simply the consequences of the actions we take to address the social needs we have identified. Put even more simply, 'social impact' is the change we bring to the lives of the people and organisations we work with.

Rather than asking about the social impact your organisation achieves, what if I asked you to give an example of how your organisations has changed someone's life? Your 'social impact' is how the lives of your clients are being changed.

'Social Impact Measurement' is just a new approach to doing something we have always done - talk about how the organisation is impacting the lives of the people or organisations we work with.

Evaluation can be an excellent learning tool as well as a means to improve performance social worker activity and demonstrate accountability.

2. REASONS FOR MEASURING SOCIAL IMPACT

Impact evaluation in social work practice helps to fulfil social workers function to evaluate their practices in working with people, groups, or communities. It should be a routine part of social work practice to perform a needs assessment, quality assurance, evaluation of intervention programs and practices, assessment of social programs. If there is no such social work practice assessment, then social workers can reflect on the fruits of their work only by reference to altruistic imagination, i.e., to assume that the clients' situation has improved as we have so much work invested and dedicated ourselves to others.

Assuming that the goal of social work practice assessment is to evaluate whether and to what extent social work professional intervention has led to changes in client or client system, it becomes clear that the key issue of social work practice evaluation is the question of efficiency, or in other words, does social worker's activity reaches its goal?

Why measure social impact? Find the main reasons below:

- **You could** report back to funders on time with quality reports (accountability)
- **You can** use the strength of your impact measurement, and results, to attract new funders (fundraising)
- **You can** use findings from your impact measurement to improve your activities, leading to better results for your participants (learning & improving)

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- **You have** powerful data/stories to use to promote your organisation (marketing & communication)
- **You can** use findings from your impact measurement to share with other organisations in the sector and collaborate (collaboration)

2.1. Identifying the changes to be measured.

Your organisation may already have a vision and mission statement, along with aims and objectives. If it does, you're halfway there. However, it's worth checking if it needs updating. This part of the Social Impact Measurement process is the planning process that should underpin every organisation – defining its values, vision, mission, aims, and objectives. Your organisation may have different names for these steps. It doesn't matter - the important thing is that you have defined the detail of what you wish to achieve.

Values

Values embrace your whole organisation. Whatever you do will always be guided by your values. They act as an internal guidance system. Think about your own personal values. If you are asked to do something outside of your own values, you feel uncomfortable and it is likely you will not do it. The values that are important to your organisation are reflected in everything it undertakes - how it manages its staff and volunteers, treats its clients and stakeholders and the quality of the service it provides.

Typical organisational values might be:

- ✓ providing 'value for money',
- ✓ caring for customers,
- ✓ being trustworthy,
- ✓ being profitable,
- ✓ striving for the highest quality.

We may also have values that relate to our social aims - those that drive the work that we do, such as:

- ✓ caring for local community,
- ✓ concern for the environment,
- ✓ creating opportunities for disadvantaged people,
- ✓ being a supportive employer,
- ✓ re-investing profits back into meeting social aims.

Your values will be unique to your organisation - the things that are important to you

Vision

A vision statement explains how different your community will be in the future because of the work you do. It should inspire, creating a mental picture for each reader to help them imagine what your organisation will be doing. It should excite people about your organisation.

If you don't have a vision statement yet, try to think in terms of 5 or 10 years' time. Imagine how you would like things to be, what your community will look like once the social problem you are addressing has been eradicated.

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Of course, there does need to be an element of realism. As worthy as the vision to ‘bring world peace’ would be, unfortunately it is unlikely to be considered realistic in the next 10 years. At the same time, however, your vision statement should challenge your organisation. There is little point to a vision statement you can achieve too easily. Dream bigger dreams!

A vision statement can be as detailed as you want it to be. However it needs to be simple enough to be easily understood; and must describe where the organisation aims to be in the future, and form the basis for decision-making in the future. Use simple language and avoid jargon. Make it easy to remember and you can teach it to all your staff, volunteers and board members and get them to buy into the vision too. That way, everyone will be working towards the same goal and everyone knows what your organisation aims to achieve.

It is often hard to write a vision statement. However, once you have something, you can keep coming back to it, updating as necessary. The following phrase may inspire you: *We want a society where....* Although you may not keep that phrase in your final vision statement it will help you get started.

Mission

What are the key things you wish to achieve? A mission statement needs to communicate the essence of an organisation to anyone interested. While the vision statement looks at the future picture and the values statement talks about what guides the organisation, the mission statement gives a more pragmatic view of what it is currently doing.

It should answer the following four questions:

- who are you?
- what do you do?
- who do you do it for?
- where does it happen?

The Mission Statement should use simple words, ones that people can remember and use. It should not be too long - one or two sentences at the most. The words and phrases used should sound good as well. It should also show the uniqueness of the organisation by stating how it is different from other organisations.

Aims

Aims and Objectives describe what an organisation will do in order to meet its vision and mission. The vision statement outlined the larger plan for the future of organisation and the mission statement gave a brief description of what the organisation is and what it will do.

The aims go into more detail and start to specify the changes that the service or product will bring to the lives of the people or organisations they work with.

You may have some general organisational aims which might include statements like the following:

- to become financially sustainable,
- to be better than other organisations at what you do,
- to produce the highest quality service on the market.

You will also have a series of social aims focusing on the benefits that the services or products you offer will bring to other people, to the community and the environment. They beat at the heart of an organisation. They are what drive it to succeed.

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Aims will use terms like:

- to enable,
- to empower,
- to improve,
- to promote.

They are general and client-focussed: What change will your organisation bring to their lives? Thus, measuring our social impact is about how successfully we achieve our aims.

Objectives

Once an organisation has set its aims, it is important then to break these down into smaller, achievable chunks. These are called objectives and are the measurable activities that your organisation will undertake to meet its aims. One aim may have several associated objectives - activities that need to happen in order for the aim to be met.

Objectives are the action points required to achieve the changes you want. They describe what you will do, by when you will do it and what you will need to achieve it.

An objective may begin with a phrase like:

- to provide,
- to setup,
- to support,
- to deliver.

Once you have done all of these steps you will have a complete picture of your plans for your organisation over the coming years. Then, of course, you need to get on with planning your services and delivering them.

The final two steps in this process may need to be repeated as you go down to further levels of detail within your organisation. You may need to specify aims and objectives for a section of the organisation, or a programme within that section, or an activity within that programme. Beware! Different organisations use different words to describe these processes and groupings.

3. METHODS OF MEASURING SOCIAL IMPACT

So, if we know what changes we are bringing, how do we measure it? Traditionally organisations have measured the things that are easily countable. Often these are called 'outputs' e.g. How many people came on our programme, how many clients attained a qualification, how many progressed to a job or further training etc.

'Social impact' is about telling the story of the changes we bring to people's lives and. Sometimes these are harder to measure and are thus sometimes called 'soft outcomes'. Moreover, little of it can be counted in the same way. We have to find another way to measure it.

If we have written out our social aims then we have statements about what we are trying to achieve, such as:

- to empower young people to achieve their potential,
- to enable older people to play an active part in their communities,
- to promote healthy eating.

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The key to the process is a four step model to turn your aims and objectives into '**indicators**'. These consist of descriptors that show how this may be recognised at various levels. Recording these at the start and finish of the change process will indicate the distance travelled during that process.

The measurement of social impact can take place at different levels (micro, meso and macro levels), from delivery agencies, organisations working directly on the ground to address social issues, to funders and networks that are looking to measure results across the organisations they support.

Macro level social work is interventions provided on a large scale that affect entire communities and systems of care. Mezzo social work happens on an intermediate scale, involving neighbourhoods, institutions or other smaller groups. Micro social work is the most common practice, and happens directly with an individual client or family. These three levels of social work practice at times overlap and always influence each other, so it is important to understand the distinctions between these social work approaches.

Systematic monitoring and evaluation of his or her practice with each and every case, particularly through use of single system designs; this is the heart of evaluation-informed practice.

A varied range of qualitative and quantitative measures are applied to measure outcomes. In a community services setting, quantitative methods are seen as 'surface analysis' whereas qualitative methods are primary, and can provide information regarding the way organisational systems and context influence a program, and facilitate deeper understanding.

Thus a combined approach to measurement involving the right mix of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, which are relevant and can be flexibly tailored to meet the needs of the diverse range of organisations, is an appropriate approach to take.

The **methods** used by social workers to evaluate their practice outcomes involve:

- **Single-subject designs**
- **Group designs**
- **Data collection/statistics**
- **Client satisfaction surveys**

Single-system designs (SSDs) vs Group are a family of user-friendly empirical procedures that can be used to help professionals to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the services they provide to clients and to guide practice.

Both approaches apply components of the scientific method to their approach to research. The difference between group and single-subject designs lies in the manner in which the principles of the scientific method are put into operation in designing studies.

Statistics in its singular sense refer to the methods adopted for scientific empirical studies. According to Croxton and Cowdon, "Statistics may be defined as a science of collection, presentation, analysis and interpretation of numerical data".

Client satisfaction surveys - client satisfaction can be important indicator of the quality of social work services. Surveys are the most popular method because they are a fairly inexpensive way of collecting large amounts of data in a confidential manner. However, surveys should be used with caution because they can create a false sense that the results are statistically significant.

Instruments used in impact assessment

- **interviews and written questionnaires** used to know the degree of satisfaction of the beneficiaries with regard to the services received



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- *conversations* with recipients to obtain key data on the impact of interventions
- *field observation method* to obtain a detailed description of the beneficiary's behavioral activities. The data were collected on-site on the basis of fact sheets drawn up by experienced people. The following aspects were observed: the framework of intervention, verbal and non-verbal communication of beneficiaries, documents, etc.
- *the monitoring of some aspects of the intervention* by the social worker, the main responsibility of which is the observance of the plan and of the deadlines.
- *internal reports* prepared by the social worker to identify progress and problems.
- *periodic meetings* to jointly address the issues that have arisen, and what has been done to achieve the objectives.
- *constantly comparing the plan* with what is happening in reality and updating it.
- *statistics*.
- *the logs*. The logs recorded and watched the work done by the social assistant for each intervention plan
- *people who can provide key information*. This type of approach was based on the research of secure information received from those who best know the needs and patterns of the community, resources and services. Key people have been public officials, administrators, and community social workers. Thus, information has been obtained from different perspectives, and at the end a meeting will be held that all involved to conclude what steps to follow.

Barriers inhibiting evaluation:

- administrative support
- caseload (number of clients served)
- lack of training
- time constraints.

It is important that agencies strive to create a culture of evaluation where in evaluation is an integral part of practice and encouraging dialogues on barriers and benefits, creating positive climate for evaluation as one component of implementing EBP.

4. WHAT TO MEASURE (WHERE TO FOCUS?)

When Focus we identify three main ways in which you can measure social impact that can be used alone or in combination:

- **Monitoring** - the systematic and continuous assessment of the progress of a piece of work over time, which checks that things are 'going to plan' and enables adjustments to be made in a timely way, integral to day to day management
- **Evaluation** - Evaluations complement ongoing monitoring activities by providing more in-depth, objective assessments of the relevance, efficiency effectiveness, impact and sustainability of programmes at a particular point in time
- **Research** - Systematic Investigative process employed to increase or revise current knowledge by discovering new facts, it is divided into two general categories; 1) Basic

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Research is inquiry aimed at increasing scientific knowledge, and 2) applied research is effort aimed at using basic research for solving problems or developing new processes, products, or techniques.

5. PLANNING THE PROCESS, DEVELOPING DATA COLLECTION TOOLS AND COLLECTING THE DATA

Planning an evaluation can be broken down into a step-by-step process to ensure you think about all the necessary aspects. This planning process should ideally be undertaken by a team, consisting of social worker, community representatives, and other stakeholders.

7 Steps to measuring social impact

- **Step 1:** Decide on your overall approach to measuring social impact by developing a vision, deciding how to measure social impact (whether to use monitoring, evaluation and/or research) and who to involve.
- **Step 2:** Clarify the scope and objectives of the impact assessment activity by answering the following questions:
 - Why are we conducting this evaluation?
 - What will it be used for? Who wants it?
 - Who should be involved in the evaluation? What will their roles be?
 - How will the community be involved in the evaluation process?
 - What type of evaluation is appropriate?
 - What resources are available?
 - What is the timeframe?
 - How big should it be?
 - Who will manage it?
 - Do we need an advisory and ethics committee?
 - Have we considered participatory and empowerment evaluation principles?
 - Are we focusing on measuring the goal, objectives or activities?
 - What does the community want the evaluation to find out?
 - What do other stakeholders want the evaluation to find out?
 - What do we want to know? What are the evaluation questions?
- **Step 3:** Select/develop indicators that will identify what has take place as a result of running your activities and to what extent. Indicators can be used to give you concrete, measurable definitions of what evaluation activity success looks like. They can be used to measure the objectives or activities, and help you to be precise about what you are measuring and how you will measure it. However, you should always remain flexible and open to information and unexpected outcomes that may not fit neatly into the indicators you have developed!

Indicators should be SMART:

SPECIFIC - Clearly defined and relating to a specific objective or activity

MEASURABLE - Something tangible that can be measured easily; where possible it should include a target number or percentage

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ACHIEVABLE - A realistic target for the project to achieve

RELEVANT - Relevant to answering your evaluation questions

TIMEBOUND- Provides a timeframe: by when will you be able to say whether the indicator has been achieved?

➤ **Step 4:** Plan your data collection by selecting the right data collection method

- What qualitative data and quantitative data will I use?
- What data is important?
- What data is relevant considering the scale and the users of the evaluation?
- Where will the information we need come from?
- How many sources will the information come from?

Quantitative data is 'numeric' data that quantifies the changes that have taken place as a result of social worker intervention. The typical example is pre- and post-program assessment scales, which measure in numerical terms the change in beneficiaries' wellbeing, behaviour, values or capacity. Other types of quantitative data include statistics from surveys or other relevant sources such as government records, media monitoring reports, or program files, which can provide data at both an individual and community level.

Qualitative data is 'non-numeric data': data that is not based on numbers. It can be found in many different forms, for example:

- Transcripts of interviews and focus group discussions
- Your own observation journal
- Surveys
- Photos
- Videos
- Reports
- Books
- Newspapers

➤ **Step 5:** Develop data collection tools to collect high quality data

There are a range of data collection techniques you might use. Your choice depends upon the size and scale of your evaluation, what is logistically feasible, and what is appropriate for the beneficiaries. Some techniques are described below.

Focus Group Discussions

Holding semi-structured discussion groups with groups of stakeholders (staff, beneficiaries) will allow you to focus on particular questions relevant to the evaluation. A focus group is a small, facilitated discussion group (usually less than 12) on a particular topic for the purpose of research. It is a good way of obtaining richer qualitative data than you will generally get from a survey, and is not as time-intensive as conducting individual interviews.

Sometimes you may need to conduct the discussion in the participants' own language, with the help of an interpreter, or a bi-lingual staff member. You would usually want to check with participants that it's okay to record the focus group, because recording the discussion can provide excellent qualitative data and quotes that can be used in your report. The recording should be transcribed soon after the focus group for later analysis.

Key Format Interview

For more in-depth qualitative data collection, you may prefer to interview individuals separately. This might be because it's logistically easier than convening a focus group, or because

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there are tensions or conflicts between stakeholders and you think they'd feel freer to talk one-on-one. Interviewees are chosen because they are relevant to the evaluation: staff members, community leaders, beneficiaries. The purpose of the interviews is to measure the quality of the intervention and the degree of satisfaction of the beneficiaries.

Key informant interviews can be structured, where you collect responses to the same list of questions in each interview; semi-structured, where you have a list of questions to guide the interview and use as prompts but not necessarily follow to the letter; or informal, where the interview may take the form of a casual conversation about the results of the interventions.

Informal interviews are sometimes more appropriate when working with refugee communities, particularly if you haven't yet built much trust with the community, if they are suspicious of research, or if they are reluctant to set aside time to answering evaluation questions. You can record informal interviews in your evaluation journal: just make sure that you are upfront with the community about the fact that you are conducting an evaluation and those opinions and insights they share will be used as part of that process.

Participant feedback forms – These are usually used to measure participant satisfaction on evaluation activity. Activity can easily be added to in order to collect some more detailed qualitative data. For example, you can add one or two open-ended questions asking beneficiaries about why they think the evaluation activity is valuable, or to describe in detail the changes that have taken place in their lives as a result of the social worker's intervention.

Surveys

They are used to identify statistical trends in views or behaviour among a group of people or community. They can provide both numerical data as well as qualitative responses and may be given on paper, online, or verbally through asking questions and recording answers.

Surveys can be tricky to design. Things to consider include what demographic information you will need for sufficient statistical analysis; how to layout the survey for ease of answering and ease of analysis; and how to phrase questions to ensure that they are easy to understand, interesting to answer, and yield valid and reliable responses.

Informal interviews are one type of informal feedback, in which you deliberately initiate the conversation with particular stakeholders. Other types of informal feedback may arise unexpectedly through conversations or discussions during meetings, and should be recorded by the social worker in the evaluation journal.

Document Analysis: Different reports, situations, databases can be used.

Research - For example records from other organisations; statistics from government departments; literature review of academic articles or an analysis of the impact of other programs; policy initiatives and the political context.

Creative methodologies - Consider other creative methodologies, especially when working with participants who may have limited Romanian language, or young people. Role plays, artwork, photos and evaluation games can all be used to collect data from beneficiaries.

Photographic or film documentation of project activities is a valuable source of monitoring data. Photos and film can be used as raw data in some types of qualitative analysis. We have following the 3 minimum rules for ethical evaluations in all our data collection:

1. Do participants understand:
 - What the research will be used for?
 - That their participation is voluntary and valued?

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- That their responses will be treated confidentially?
- 2. Have participants given informed consent to participate in the research?
- **Step 6:** Collect and manage your data through effectively deploying data collection tools, ensuring the data you collect is high quality and secure, and selecting the right software for your organisation.
Deciding on data analysis techniques:
 - What method of analysis will we use? Qualitative or quantitative?
 - Who will analyse the data?
 - Do we need expertise?
- **Step 7:** Use the data you collect: effectively analyse and learn from your data to improve the delivery of your activities, your fundraising and your accountability back to stakeholders.

You may not have the time or resources to write up a comprehensive evaluation report but still want to be able to share with others what you have done, and what you have learned in your evaluation. In this case, you can use the Annual/Final report file to share your evaluation findings with community members, management and your colleagues in a quick and easy way.

In other situations it may be necessary to write up the evaluation findings in a more comprehensive report. In this case it should be written in clear, simple language so that it can be understood by all involved in evaluation activity. A short report would usually include the following sections:

- ❖ EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Key findings or recommendations
- ❖ BRIEF ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Evaluation activity goal and objectives, timeframe, stakeholders and what the activity did
- ❖ EVALUATION METHODOLOGY: Evaluation questions, data collection method and description of the evaluation process
- ❖ FINDINGS: Brief results of the data analysis, eg. statistics from feedback forms (perhaps using graphs), most common themes from qualitative analysis, illustrative quotes from your transcripts
- ❖ DISCUSSION: Discussion of interesting findings, for example, the themes that emerged from coding your qualitative data; any issues or questions that the evaluation raised
- ❖ RECOMMENDATIONS: For the intervention activity or future research

Generalisation from specific impact evaluations - Impact evaluations are usually of specific interventions in a specific context. It is not necessarily the case that the findings can be generalized to the same intervention in different contexts. A theory-based approach helps understand the context in which the intervention did or didn’t work, and so help generalize as to other contexts in which the same findings may be expected.

Data sources - Good quality data are essential to good impact evaluation. The evaluation design must be clear on the sources of data and realistic about how long it will take to collect and analyze primary data.

Time - The time required for an impact evaluation depends on whether primary data collection is involved. If so, 18 months is a reasonable estimate from inception to final report. If there is no primary data collection then 12 months may be feasible.

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Peer review - An independent peer review should be undertaken by a person qualified in impact evaluation.

6. MANAGING AND USING THE DATA IN FUTURE INTERVENTIONS IN SOCIAL WORK FIELD

There are **many different ways to use the data resulted from evaluation impact:**

- Social work organizations/agencies using evaluation to improve practice.
- Incorporating skills sets in daily activities.
- Use the data as an opportunity for learning (what we call a 'learning event') e.g. monthly meetings and/or in an annual retreat
 - It could share data with key stakeholders e.g. through an annual report
 - It could use data for communications and marketing e.g. in a newsletter
 - Connecting these skills and knowledge to agency goals, outcomes, and strategic plans.
 - Focusing on evaluation in the field can help build capacity regarding evaluation.
 - Reflective practice.

When professionals in the social work profession ensure that they are providing the best care for their beneficiaries, society is much healthier as a whole. Continual evaluation of practice can increase the efficacy of the profession and, by encouraging social workers to better their professional practice, can increase the wellness of our society.

COURSE APPLICATIONS:

Activity 1: Designing the evaluation plan

Aim: To analyse the stages of the planning process of the plan to assess the impact of social worker intervention in the rural community.

Task description: Design a plan to assess the social impact of your intervention activity using the seven steps described in the training course.

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Activity 2: Guide for assessing the impact of social services

Category 1: Planning the process of assessment the impact of interventions at community level	
1.1	Do you consider it necessary to assess the impact of social work interventions? Motivate your answer.
1.2	Have you drawn up an assessment plan for the social work interventions?
1.3	What impact assessment methods have you used so far?
1.4	What kind of resources have been allocated? (Financial, personal)
1.5	How long have you devoted to the evaluation process?
1.6	Who else did you have with you? (Colleagues, volunteers, partner organizations)
Category 2: Effectiveness of the Impact Assessment Plan	
2.1	What do you think were the strengths and weaknesses of your social work interventions Impact Assessment Plan?
2.2	From the data you have, do you consider that the implementation of the social work interventions impact assessment plan has led to the achievement of the expected results and information?
2.3	Have other unexpected results of the social work interventions been identified?
2.4	Did the information identified following the implementation of the impact assessment plan have led to a change in social work intervention?
Category 3: Involvement and participation of community institutions in the process of impact evaluation	
3.1	Do you think that other community institutions need to be involved in the process of impact evaluation? Motivate your answer.
3.2	Which public or private institutions (firms, NGOs, local church) at the community level have been involved in the impact evaluation process?
3.2	What were the issues and challenges that arose from the partnership with these institutions?
3.3	How could the partnership process be improved?
3.4	What can motivate the representatives of these institutions to participate?
3.5	To what extent has other institutions involvement encouraged the initiation of new social programs and interventions in the community?
Category 4: Involvement and participation of community people in the social work intervention process	
4.1	How did people in the community get involved in assisting vulnerable groups?
4.2	Are you aware of a particular social problem of vulnerable groups that was resolved by people in the community? How has it been solved / approached?
4.3	Did you inform local community members about the results obtained from the implementation of the impact assessment plan? What were their reactions?
Category 5: Long-term impact of the social work intervention process	
5.1	What do you consider to be the long-term benefits that the social services you provide bring to the community?
5.2	Are you considering developing new social services at community level?

Activity 3: QUESTIONNAIRE³ **regarding the degree of satisfaction of the beneficiaries**

In order to be able to respond as efficiently as possible to your needs, our institution's representatives want to find out your honest opinion about the services that they are currently offering and how they might be of use to you in the future. So please be kind enough to give ourselves a few minutes of your time to answer the following questions:

1. What services are provided to you by our institution?

2. To what extent do the services provided meet your needs?

- a- largely;
- b- to a lesser extent;
- c- do not meet my needs;

3. List some of your needs that are satisfied with our services:

4. Do you have other needs for which you want help? If so, specify what they are:

5. To what extent are you satisfied with the quality of the services provided by our institution?

- a) very satisfied;
- b) quite pleased;
- c) not too satisfied;
- d) completely dissatisfied;

6. Do you think that our social worker can understand the issues you are facing?

- a) Yes
- b) No

7. Do you think that our social worker has a respectful attitude towards you?

- a) Yes
- b) No

8. What are the people (or person) within the City Hall with whom you work best?

³ The proposed questionnaire was inspired after the book *The Organization Manual* (Vasiliada Association), (ISBN 978-973-7763-98-3), Publisher: Mitropolia Olteniei, Craiova, 2008, collective work.



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9. You can tell why you think it was a good collaboration?

10. What has changed in your life as a result of receiving the social services we provided to you?

11. From your point of view, what services, among those provided to you, should be improved in our work?

12. Make 3 recommendations for the City Hall's social welfare office to improve its service delivery:

Thank you!

Date of completion of the questionnaire:

Name and signature of social worker:

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GLOSSARY

Outcomes are the changes, benefits, learning or other effects that happen as a result of services and activities provided by an organisation or project.

Outcome indicators are well defined pieces of information that can be assessed or measured to show whether outcomes have been achieved. According to the Development Assistance Committee definition **impact** is "The positive and negative, intended and unintended, direct and indirect, primary and secondary effects produced by an intervention"

Social impact relates to the long-term positive changes, for individuals, communities and society as a whole, resulting from activities or services provided by development-sector organisations.

Impact analysis - is the set of techniques for assessing the meaning and magnitude of the impacts a set of activities produces on individuals / institutions. Impact assessment (sometimes called the assessment of consequences) is a particular type of assessment whereby we can see, on the one hand, whether the measured intervention achieves its final objectives and, on the other hand, if the fulfilment has a real effect on the issue to be resolved. In addition to the baseline assessment function, impact analysis also has the role of assessing the causes / mechanisms that either solved the problem or, on the contrary, did not allow the expected results to be obtained.

Measuring Social Impact - When we use the term 'measuring social impact' we are referring to the measurement of both long term social change and what happens along the way to this change, from details about the social problem you are addressing, to details about the activities you run and the short medium term results of these activities.

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COURSE 3

HOW TO USE ICT TOOLS CREATED DURING THE EPSWRA PROJECT

1. BASIC CONCEPTS IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The spectacular development of information technology and the use of computers in all areas of activity generate a special interest at all levels of society. Lately, thanks to tremendous advances in hardware (personal computers) and software (friendly graphical user interfaces), the number of users has multiplied from one year to the next.

Information technology (IT) often referred to as *Information Technology (IT)*, as it was defined by the Information Technology Association of America (ITAA) is responsible for the design, development, implementation and management of computer information systems.

In short, IT means the use of electronic computers and software for collecting, storing, processing and transmitting information in an organization, institution, branch of activity, nationally and internationally.

As objectives of the thematic unit we can list:

- Presentation of the functional structure of a personal computer
- Description of the physical components of the personal computer and the role of each
- Representing information in computer memory
- The operation of a personal computer
- Using information networks calculated using the following
- Presentation of software applications in society
- Introducing aspects of the legal and security environment for computers

Within this thematic unit we aim to:

- Knowledge of the physical components of a computer personal
- Know how to represent and store information in your computer
- Conversion of whole and real numbers to base 2
- Performing arithmetic operations on base 2
- Knowing how memory is stored in the memory
- Knowing the operation of a personal computer
- Identifying software applications in the company
- How to use information networks with computers
- Know some of the legal and security aspects of their computers

2. USING YOUR COMPUTER AND ORGANIZING YOUR FILES

Currently, communication between the user and the computer is usually done through a **graphical user interface** on the workstation screen, one or more windows displaying different

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graphic objects: menus, buttons, dialog boxes, icons, etc. appear. To send a command to the application, the user uses a *mouse* to select one of the objects on the screen and one of the mouse buttons. The most common user graphical interfaces are currently Windows (Microsoft), XWindow (for Unix or Linux operating systems) and Macintosh (Apple) operating system.

In this thematic unit, at first we propose to introduce some possibilities of using the basic functions of a personal computer (PC) and its operating system. Students will be presented with a computer desktop, from where we can view the basic information of the computer we use, we can then customize this desktop, update or change the date, time, geographical keyboard, sound volume, Print Screen

Window is a rectangular area of the screen that contains files (text, graphics), graphic symbols for files, folders, drives, or various controls, such as command buttons, text boxes, lists, checkboxes.

Window components as well as the organization of information on external media, work with logical disks, folders, and files will also be presented.

At the end of this topic, students will know how to work with icons, files, folders, folders (create, modify, name, delete, move, copy, print, archive, etc.) operating system.

It is very important that you also have a computer virus scan, so we plan to describe how to install and uninstall programs, such as an antivirus, or other useful applications specific to each student's activity.

3. WORD PROCESSOR "WORD"

Word Processor WORD is part of the Microsoft Office package, one of the most popular programs.

Word Processor WORD is a multifaceted text processing application that allows us to create any type of document, from simple letters to newsletters, Internet HTML pages, brochures, newspapers, books or reports that include diagrams, photos, tables, etc.

Because the WORD application is efficient, fully equipped and provides many tools we need to produce documents, we want to present some of the facilities offered:

- quick menus,
- creating and correcting documents even during typing, finding synonyms using dictionaries;
- working with several documents open simultaneously;
- printing of documents;
- text block operations;
- search and replacement operations;
- formatting the document at character and paragraph level and administering predefined or user-defined format styles;
- formatting the page-level document (setting margins and how to arrange the text on the page, page numbering, creating headers and footers, creating footnotes and ending notes;
- writing and managing the tables (creation, modification, formatting);
- creating lists marked or numbered ;



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- arranging text in columns;
- inserting objects into the document (images, equations, charts);
- mail handling (letters and postal tags).
- creating large documents, adding sections, making the contents,
- creating and reviewing web pages in word, hyperlinks.

Within this module, we aim to learn the following:

- launch the Microsoft Word program and navigate through the program window,
- to use common tools such as menus, toolbars, or dialog boxes,
- open a new document and enter text, and use document templates and expert Word applications,
- to use basic editing operations in Word, using different work techniques,
- to use correction and research tools such as spelling mistakes, grammar, finding synonyms,
- to create a Word text - the basic ways to change the layout of the text: alignment, tabs, paragraphs, fonts, the use of borders, colors, setting the edges of a page, numbering, row spacing, formatting styles, header, footer, columns
- to create and format tables in Word,
- to insert graphic elements into a document,
- to work with large documents, making a table of contents, page breaks,
- create World Wide Web pages, add hyperlinks.

4. MICROSOFT EXCEL

The Microsoft Excel program is an integral part of the Microsoft Office suite of applications. Microsoft product, the MS-Office family works under the Windows operating system. It is a unitary soft product which, through the complete integration of applications, ensures:

- the correlated operation of component applications;
- the common graphical interface, standard for all applications;
- shared use of data and resources;
- data compatibility in case of transfer from one application to another;
- easy communication between all component applications based on the Object Linking and Embedding (OLE) standard.

Excel Program - is a spreadsheet program with graphical presentation possibilities. It provides us with worksheets, diagrams, database operations, simulation lists and programming possibilities, all in a software environment.

The programming technique is minimized, an application created with such a product having a particularly high flexibility.

A performance spreadsheet must meet the following minimum requirements:

- simultaneous working with multiple tables;
- the possibility of searches, from the result of a calculation, to the values that generated it; use commands and editing and formatting commands;
- the possibility of graphical representation of data in tables and of defining graphical objects;

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- Using predefined functions to perform a variety of operations (mathematical, statistical, financial, search, etc.) calculations;
- organizing and managing data in databases (sorting, query, filtering, etc.);
- use scenarios for estimating results;
- Calling the *Visual Basic for Applications* (VBA) component to generate applications
- the possibility of using DDE (*Dynamic Data Exchange*) and *Object Linking and Embedding* (OLE) and import / export from / to other applications .

Within this module we aim to go through the following:

- launching Excel, closing and familiarizing yourself with this program window.
- create new workbooks and open existing files,
- data types used in Excel,
- manipulation and use of predefined formulas and other formulas,
- performing calculations using functions,
- viewing, editing Excel worksheets,
- creating, saving and printing diagrams.

5. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

One of the most important components of the Internet is e-mail or e-mail. Internet addresses differ from *http* or *ftp* addresses by having a "@" symbol in their composition. The left side of the symbol is the name of a mailbox in a computer. The right side of "@" is the address of the computer on which that mailbox is located. As with web addresses (*URLs*), this computer address can tell us which organization it belongs to, or which country is the sender of a letter you receive.

E-mails can be sent to even more people at once, so e-mail can also be used for news. To send someone an email, we need to know the email address, and of course we will need an email transmission program, which can be *Mail*, *Elm* or *Pine*, if we work in *Unix*, or *Internet Mail*, *Netscape Mail*, *Eudora Pro* or *Pegasus*, if we work in *Windows 95*.

We will refer to the *Internet Mail* program , which is very simple to use and has a friendly graceful interface. Working in other programs under *Windows 95* is similar.

If the first e-mail programs could only convey text, newer programs (including *Internet Mail* can also work with special characters in the form of binary information packages, or as images, programs or documents for text editors. the *Insert file* option (often called *Attachment* will be specified and the file to be sent will be specified).

On shipment, messages are currently filed in a recipient called the outbox, and the recipient in the Inbox. Their actual transmission over the Internet through the Internet Service Provider is made immediately if the connection is direct or slower when connected by a telephone call. To make the transmission, in both cases you will need to press the *Send and Receive* button .

After making a regular PPP connection, a window will appear indicating that the mailbox is checked and a message exchange takes place between your computer and the Internet provider's server.

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Incoming messages can be placed in separate containers, created according to certain criteria (subject, sender's address, etc.) from the *File- > Folders* option . Besides these, there are four standard containers, namely:

Inbox - received messages, which are not redirected to other containers;

Outbox - messages to be sent;

Sent Items - sent messages;

Deleted Items - deleted messages, whether received, sent, or deleted before being sent (that you changed your mind).

There are also a number of places in the Internet where we can get free e-mail access (so a personal address) within web pages.

6. ELECTRONIC PRESENTATIONS

Microsoft PowerPoint is an application used to create *presentations* designed to help you make visual *exposures* to an audience with *slides* . "Presentation" is a way of representing informational content (notions, data) using text, graphic and sound by means of *slides* , which are performed automatically or interactively.

The presentation consists of a sequence of pages called slides (*slides*) that have a particular content (eg, speech) and the essence of the subject is processed and visually. The file created with the *Microsoft PowerPoint* application is called a **presentation** and has the extension . **PPT** .

Trainees will know to:

- launch and close the program,
- will know how to work with the PowerPoint window,
- different ways to create a presentation,
- also to open, save, close an existing presentation,
- display a presentation in different views,
- to print a presentation, apply a design template,
- align text, change font attributes, presentation colors,
- adding an object from WordArt.

7. SOCIAL MEDIA

Social environments are a very important factor in education and it is useful to think about their characteristics and how they relate to our classroom. The new generation of "digital natives" needs teaching-learning strategies that oppose traditional patterns and reversal roles, enabling young people to communicate and collaborate, providing a true audience for their work results and being open and transparent. Globally, many countries are trying to create such learning environments. This means that by adopting the use of social media tools for learning and teaching, we can begin to build a trend that can contribute to reforming our school systems.

The reality of the current situation is that almost all of the internet has become a social network and, in large part, all new content that is published online allows social interaction. This

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could include comments, the ability to edit a page, or just a personal recommendation, such as a "I like" on Facebook.

So instead of looking for a definition of social media, it's probably more useful to think about some common features of socializing pages. Generally speaking, social environments have at least some of the following features:

- challenges traditional patterns,
- allow people to communicate,
- facilitates collaboration,
- offers an audience,
- reverse the hierarchy and are built from bottom to top,
- are open and transparent.

Social media tools can also be used to encourage collaboration. Google Apps for Education and Google+ provide effective (and free) collaboration tools to help with learning and teaching. Google Docs (which is part of the Google Apps suite) provides tools for Google Apps real-time collaboration for students and teachers through text-processing documents, spreadsheets and presentations. Up to 50 people can collaborate in real time in a document.

These tools can facilitate the proper management of school activities, the visibility of their outcomes, and the acquisition of collaborative skills, a vital skill in the current job market. Google+ also offers a videoconference solution with up to ten participants to allow face-to-face collaboration beyond the time zone, geographic area, and classroom walls. Together with other similar video conferencing services, such as Skype, it offers the valuable experience of the presence of experts in the classroom.

Social media can also be used to provide a true audience for student work. A good way to start could be, for example, producing a Wikipedia page about school. Editing such a Wikipedia article can form the basis of a cross-curricular project and, at the same time, contribute to the image of the school. This type of activity is also extremely effective for acquiring skills as well as motivating students. How often do they normally come to publish in the world's largest encyclopedia? Blogs used in class or like electronic portfolio can also be used to generate audience for youth work.

The use of social media should be included in school policy as a whole. An essential element here is to make sure that you have permission from parents to post online information about their children (if this is what is intended). If you do not want to share photos of their children or their names, then there's still a lot of things that they can share online about their school (for example: school life events, anonymous activity examples, and so on).

Young people are involved when they learn about or with things they are familiar with or that are relevant to them. As all the experienced educators know, one of the ingredients of a successful lesson is to try to use real and authentic data rather than the data to which young people can not relate. Social media is highly relevant at the moment for young people and the use of these tools in education can develop effective learning contexts.

Whenever we talk about safety on the internet, we also need to talk about responsible use. Unfortunately, some people still think that the only way to keep children safe online is to block access to parts of the internet through web filtering. The reality of this is that this does not eliminate real dangers (perceived or not) and also makes it almost impossible for educators to provide Internet safety patterns and responsible use. The fundamental requirement for keeping children and young

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people safe on-line is to make sure that they have received adequate education on how to use the tools and services properly.

When trying to include socializing environments in learning, it is important to stress that these are just another tool that teachers can use to motivate students and improve the teaching process. One way we can encourage young people to behave responsibly when using social media is that teachers themselves provide a model for responsible use of socializing tools during their classroom practice.

Teachers can set up structures to help students use social media, involving behavioral modeling, working with children, developing rules, and ultimately leading independent learning (backed by social media tools) built around an atmosphere of trust and respect in class.

8. EDUCATIONAL PLATFORMS

The learning process has come to a new extent with the development of the e-learning industry. Therefore, platforms that incorporate Learning Management Systems (LMS) have become extremely numerous, and options for those interested in such a method are multiple. This series of articles aims to analyze, in turn, the most widely used and widely used LMS platforms, highlighting the advantages and disadvantages of each and its distinctive features.

Moodle is one of the most widely used LMS platforms today, representing a good choice especially for the academic environment. This platform is open source and is constantly modified and improved. The name "Moodle" is an acronym for the Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment (structured learning environment on various modules including one topic).

On the one hand, this e-learning platform is extremely flexible, as it can bring any kind of change and can be tailored to the needs of each type of user. Functions performed by Moodle can be multiplied by the integration of external applications and through diverse development plugins. On the other hand, however, for inclusion of these additional options, users need to have coding knowledge. Also, in order to achieve the desired educational goals, it may be necessary to have a third party intervening to properly configure the platform.

The platform can be downloaded for free, with the license under the aegis GNU General Public License. The projects available on this platform may be used for both commercial and non-commercial purposes, without the user covering additional costs for obtaining the authorization. However, in order to benefit from certain options, additional fees may be required. For example, to include the ability to make video calls, users should pay an annual supplement of \$ 600.

A great advantage of the Moodle platform is its availability in many languages. The Moodle team has begun translating the program and the resources it offers into over 120 languages, giving users the ability to talk in their own language. As a result, this program is used in the governmental environment in many countries, such as Spain, Russia and Colombia.

Moodle allows teachers to test students through written themes and exams. The main difference between Moodle and other platforms is that, in addition to choosing between multiple predefined answer variants or short answers, students can upload larger files, such as documents, files, pictures, audio and video clips. Teachers have the opportunity either to leave comments on the subject, or to organize discussion groups among members of the same group on this subject. Therefore, this platform is distinguished by its high level of interactivity.

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Moodle users have the opportunity to choose the role they want to play within the platform, three types of educators being noted here. These are Course Creator, Teacher and Teacher without editing rights. The first type of user can create the content of the course, the second can modify and add activities and evaluate the students, and the latter can evaluate the students, but they can not intervene by modifying the activities. Students can see the content, but they can not modify it, and those who are simple visitors can not attend classes usually.

Moodle is available on any device, and can be used on any device connected to the Internet.

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