



Guide for the formation and operation of the informal local networks and the transnational cooperation forum

Transnational Cooperation Project “Wetland Life”

2023

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Introduction

The present guide was elaborated within the framework of the Transnational Cooperation Project entitled “WETLAND LIFE”, of the Operational Programme of Maritime and Fisheries 2014-2020, for the support of Fishery Local Action Groups in the implementation of the Subaction “Formation of informal local networks and transnational Cooperation Forum”.

The aim of the guide is to provide information and practical tools to all interested parties, for the effective function of the informal local networks and the transnational cooperation forum.

It was elaborated by the executives of Aitoliki Development Agency S.A. in collaboration with the Fishery LAGs participating in the Transnational Cooperation Plan.

1. “Wetland Life” Transnational Cooperation Project

1.1 Project objectives

The transnational cooperation project entitled "Wetland Life" aims to network areas protected by the Ramsar treaty and the Natura 2000 Network, with the ultimate goal of promoting the protected areas and highlighting the production/development activity, through networking, promotion of their local characteristics' actions, raising awareness of the student community, vulnerable groups and the local population.

The specific objectives of the project concern:

- the formation of productive and effective collaborations/networks between the professionals and organizations active in the protected areas, which will constitute the endogenous mechanism of strengthening and highlighting the protected areas
- the training of participants in informal local networks
- raising the awareness of the new generation about protected areas and ecosystem protection, with an emphasis on sustainable fishing
- raising the awareness of vulnerable groups and their experiential contact with the wetland
- the highlighting of local characteristics of the protected areas and the creation of conditions for their tourism exploitation
- consultation at local level for the sustainable development of protected areas.

1.2 Participating FLAGs, Wetlands and TCP Budget

The “Wetland Life” transnational cooperation project is implemented by the following eight (8) FLAGs:

- AITOLIKI DEVELOPMENT AGENCY S.A. (Lead Partner FLAG)
- ACHAIA S.A. – DEVELOPMENT AGENCY S.A.
- S. EPIRUS – AMVRAKIKOS DEVELOPMENT AGENCY S.A.
- OLYMPIA DEVELOPMENT AGENCY S.A.
- KAVALA DEVELOPMENT AGENCY S.A.
- TRICHONIDA DEVELOPMENT AGENCY S.A.
- RODOPI DEVELOPMENT AGENCY S.A.
- FLAG SAMOKOV

The wetlands per FLAG participating in the TCP, are presented in the following table:

AITOLIKI DEVELOPMENT AGENCY S.A.	National Park of Messolonghi - Aetoliko Lagoon (Kleisova Lagoon)
ACHAIA S.A. – DEVELOPMENT AGENCY S.A.	National Park of Kotychi-Strofilia wetlands (Prokopos Lagoon)
S. EPIRUS – AMVRAKIKOS DEVELOPMENT AGENCY S.A.	Amvrakikos Gulf (Tsopeli Lagoon)
OLYMPIA DEVELOPMENT AGENCY S.A.	Kaiafas and Kotychi Lagoons
KAVALA DEVELOPMENT AGENCY S.A.	Nestos River
TRICHONIDA DEVELOPMENT AGENCY S.A.	Trichonida Lake (Amparia Panetoliou)
RODOPI DEVELOPMENT AGENCY S.A.	Vistonida Lake
FLAG SAMOKOV	Iskar River

The total budget of the TCP amounts to 223.375,00€ and is divided per partner as follows:

AITOLIA	ACHAIA	ETANAM	ANOL	ANKA	TRICHONIDA	ANRO	SAMOKOV
50.000,00	34.375,00	20.000,00	45.000,00	20.000,00	19.000,00	10.000,00	25.000,00

2. Network and Networking

The definition of the term "network" given by Chisholm states that "a network is a set of autonomous organizations working together to achieve goals that they could not achieve individually otherwise".

According to Brass et al., the network is described as "the set of nodes that reflect the presence or absence of some kind of relationship between members", pointing out that the number and content of relationships that can develop

between nodes is unlimited and the only limits that can be set are "the limits of the researcher's imagination".

The term networking, apart from the simplicity of cooperation and the partnership of organizations and bodies, based on common interests and goals, also includes the aspect of achieving "social synergy". Therefore, a network represents communities of ideas and vision, which interact on the basis of not only shared interests but also their conflicts. In this way, a form of mutual trust and value is created, which is adapted to the needs of each individual.

Through networking and partnerships, there is an opportunity to exchange good practices and valuable know-how. It is a given that we cannot be good at everything, so through a constructive partnership we can fill in our gaps, either in terms of knowledge or experience. In this way we become more efficient, as responsibilities are shared and overlaps are avoided.

2.1 Network categories

The term "network" has an expanded content and covers a wide range of subcategories, which are divided, depending on their content, into the following:

- knowledge networks
- business networks
- sectoral networks
- networks of social change
- service delivery networks
- vertical networks
- horizontal networks
- complementary networks

"Knowledge networks" have the function of producing, disseminating and sharing information, with the side benefit of learning and strengthening each member of the network.

"Business networks" are defined as a group of at least three businesses that cooperate in order to achieve specific objectives, and the results of this activity will have an identifiable and measurable impact on their members. They have a limited number of members, who have agreed to work together in some way to

achieve specific business goals, which will likely lead to enhanced competitive advantage and/or the creation of mutual financial benefit.

"Sectoral networks" are organized around a very specific area of interest, the non-governmental sector, while the majority of them operate through donations.

"Networks of social change" are those that appear in political situations, in which multiple and conflicting opinions about potential issues and their proposed solutions are expressed. Therefore, in this case, it is the defenders of different views who ultimately shape the political landscape.

"Service networks", are some autonomous organizations that operate mainly in the field of health and humanitarian services. Their main source of funding is usually the state mechanism.

In "vertical networks" members develop some degree of specialization in a specific sector of the production chain. They are based on input-output relationships, where each member develops a specific expertise in his/her field, serving the efficient production and distribution of a specific category of products to final markets.

"Horizontal networks" consist of companies, which produce the same or similar products and compete with each other. They are usually formed with the aim of joint promotion, research and development of new products, joint supply of raw materials, etc.

"Complementary networks" consist of firms, which do not compete with each other, nor are they linked together in a production chain. They usually consist for the promotion of common interests of different business sectors, for the formation of integrated products and services packages, the creation of information centers, etc.

2.2 Network characteristics

The characteristics of networks are differentiated into those related to their structure and those related to their operation. Their general characteristics, according to Liebler & Ferri, are formulated as follows:

1. Common strategy and common strategic goal: attachment of members oriented towards a common vision and primary purpose of the networks,

beyond the limited expectations and abilities of its individual members.
Activation of each organization in an autonomous network

2. Incorporation of multiple structures, in which the structure of the network differs, depending on the domains perceived
3. Center of information-ideas-resources-action for the network members: contribution of the competitive advantages of each actor in the network, with the aim of creating added value to the final result. Much emphasis is placed on the diversity of expectations, contribution and benefits that a network produces. The exchange of knowledge and information are particularly important actions of most networks, with the result that the core of a network is essentially the relationships between its members.
4. Activity affecting the overall network: network activity has external effects (e.g. effect on the community) and internal influences (e.g. effect within network boundaries)
5. Horizontal organization: the network structures are not hierarchical and there is equality among its members
6. Voluntary participation: each member voluntarily chooses his/her participation in the network
7. Decentralized network: non-centralization of force and power sources, regionalization
8. Member management and trust: management and control by members through agencies
9. Self-regulating: all members determine the rules governing the network, procedures and processes
10. Cognitive: informed organization with self-awareness, awareness of current data and knowledge of the current situation
11. Division of labor is a prerequisite: network members are specialized in tasks and abilities
12. Collaborative spirit: in the sense that each member is involved in a mutually influencing process
13. Autonomy of members: in this case, members are independent in their decision-making and self-reliance
14. Deliberative initiative: decision-making and management are constructively executed

2.3 Main network functions

The main functions of networks, according to Gilchrist, are the following:

1. Exchange of information
2. Developing relationships of support and unity
3. Developing a sense of common purpose on the basis of shared values
4. Providing a place - a step for public discussion and dialogue
5. Transformation and formation of a collective view on issues that are relevant to the participating members of the network

Moreover, Sawhney & Parikh, with systems theory and computer science as criteria, approached the functions of networks, focusing mainly on the power of information. In this approach they found that the "intelligence" of a network depends on its functionality. Based on this finding, they ascertain that the functions of the networks are as follows:

1. Coordination, that is the management of information in such a way as to respond to a need
2. Processing or forwarding of information from the core to the appropriate destination
3. Maintaining and collecting data for faster and easier access
4. Processing and converting raw information into a valid and usable result
5. Interaction and facilitating the exchange of information
6. Management and harmonization of the activities of multidimensional and multiform organizations towards a common goal
7. Learning / training and capitalizing on experience to improve the ability to act and intervene
8. Intuition / detection and ability to interpret the indications of the operating environment

2.4 Creation of networks

The most important role in the creation of a network is played, on the one hand, by the determination of the network's goals and operating framework, and on the other hand, by the procedures for approaching agencies and individuals. Furthermore, the investigation of the special characteristics, interests, needs, knowledge, skills and abilities of interested parties, also contribute to the better functioning of the network.

The same applies to approaching businesses and organizations, with the aim of detecting their needs in new jobs, new specialties, training programs and exploring the possibilities of their cooperation with the network. In addition, an equally important role is also played by the development of information, counseling, training, professional guidance and employment promotion services through the cooperation of agencies, even executives, and the networking of groups at an interregional level.

Therefore, the mechanisms of communication, cooperation, mutual information and activity of the groups and finally, the determination of alternative action scenarios according to the data of the feedback processes, must be determined. The dynamic of the network, therefore, depends on and is strengthened by the participation of new members, the completion of the "support circles", but also the design of new circles.

3. Purposefulness of the TCP informal local networks

Informal local networks aim at the networking and cooperation of businesses and organizations, which can highlight, strengthen and exploit the advantages and development potential of wetlands and their broader area of reference.

Through the networking and cooperation of the participating bodies, the following will be achieved:

- defining common objectives for wetlands
- action planning for informal local networks
- taking initiatives
- formulating proposals related to the enhancement, promotion and exploitation of wetlands

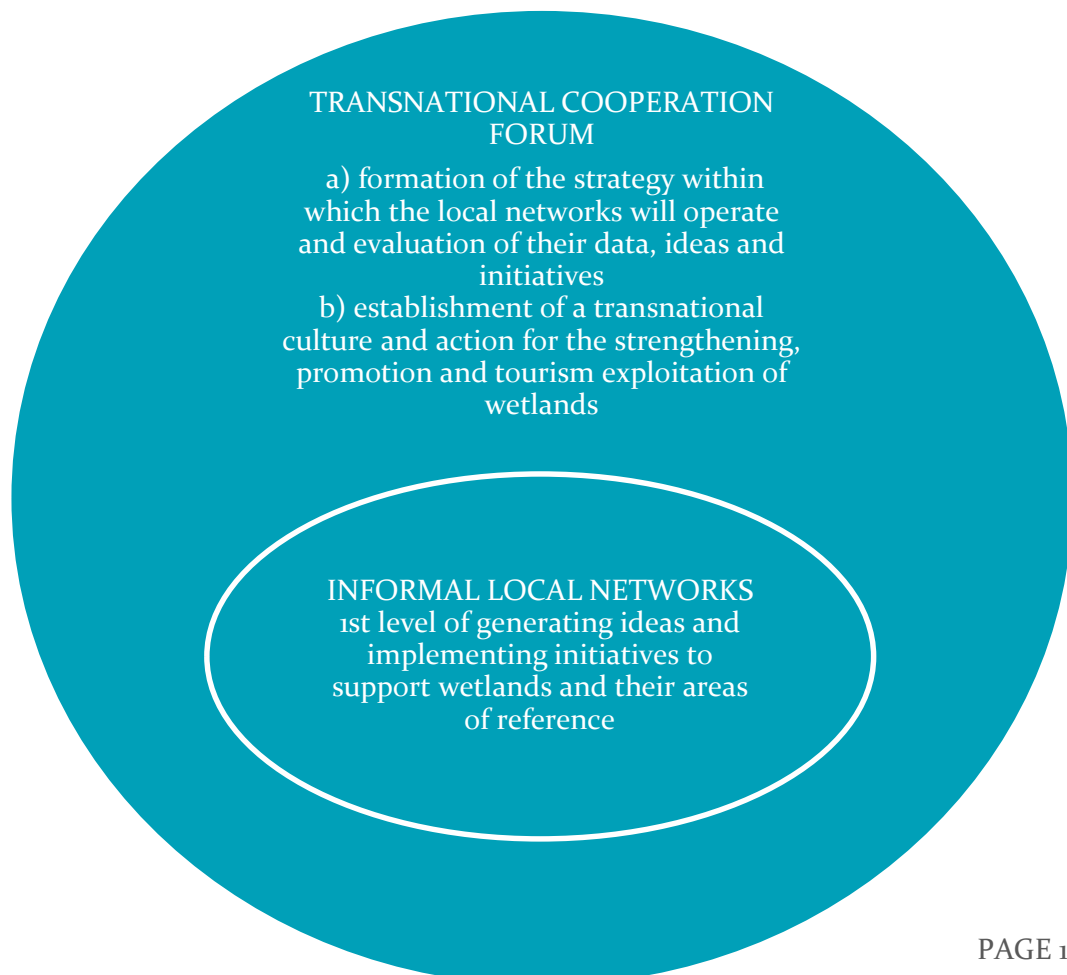
The *informal local networks* will be created to evaluate and utilize the data of their area and will participate in the formulation and implementation of the project actions, which are developed at local level. The work that will be carried out in each informal local network will be the raw material for the work of the *transnational cooperation forum*. The role of the transnational cooperation forum will be coordinative, with corresponding objectives to the ones of the informal local networks, but at an interregional and transnational level.

With the combination of informal local networks and transnational cooperation forum, an attempt is made to create an interdependence between the local and interregional/transnational level, where the local level will be the first level of generating ideas and implementing initiatives to support Wetlands and their reference areas, while the interregional/transnational level will have a mainly coordinative role, seeking on the one hand to shape the framework of the strategy, within which the informal local networks will function, through the combination of data evaluation, ideas and initiatives of the informal local networks and on the other hand to establish an interregional/transnational culture cooperation and action for the strengthening, promotion and tourism exploitation of Wetlands and their reference areas.

In this way the following are ensured:

- common action framework of informal local networks
- participation of the regions in the strategic choices
- activation without limiting the dynamics of each area.

RELATION BETWEEN INFORMAL LOCAL NETWORKS AND
TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION FORUM



3.1 Internal organization of informal local networks and transnational cooperation forum

3.1.1 *Formation of informal local networks and transnational cooperation forum*

The functioning of the informal local networks and the transnational cooperation forum requires the formation of a Networking Advisory Committee (NAC). Each Fishery LAG will appoint a person (executive – external expertise) for the operation of the informal local network, who will be responsible for the organizational and advisory support of the operation of the informal local network in his/her area.

All the persons (executives - external expertise), who will constitute the NAC, will be responsible for the organizational and advisory support of the transnational cooperation forum operation.

The NAC action is divided into two phases:

- a) formation phase of the informal local networks and the transnational cooperation forum
- b) operation phase of the informal local networks and the transnational cooperation forum.

3.1.2 *Networking Advisory Committee (NAC) responsibilities*

In the phase of setting up the informal local networks and the transnational cooperation forum, the NAC will undertake the following:

- the preparation of the present Guide for the formation and operation of informal local networks and transnational cooperation forum
- attracting participants and informing them about the informal local networks and the transnational cooperation forum, with each executive being responsible for his/her region.

In the phase of the informal local networks and the transnational cooperation forum operation, the NAC will undertake the following:

- providing organizational, administrative and advisory support to informal local networks and the transnational cooperation forum
- continuous communication and information with the participants, with each executive being responsible for his/her area

- attracting participants and informing them about the informal local networks and the transnational cooperation forum, with each executive being responsible for his/her area
- search for cooperation opportunities among participants, in order to achieve added value in the professional activities of each participant

The NAC will meet either in person or by teleconference, taking into account the health conditions and capabilities of the participants. The meetings of the NAC may coincide with the meetings of the Project Management Committee (PMC).

3.1.3 Responsibilities of the informal local networks and the transnational cooperation forum

In the context of the project implementation, the informal local networks, along with the members of the NAC and the transnational cooperation forum undertake the realization of the following actions:

- training actions for the participants
- good practice transfer from the transnational partner
- creation of interpretation signs in the wider areas of the wetlands
- realization of wetland experiential contact actions for vulnerable social groups
- undertaking actions to highlight cultural elements of wetland areas
- realization of conferences on environmental and development issues
- setting development priorities for wetland areas

3.2 Network participants

The informal local networks are mainly addressed to representatives of the business community (fishermen and non-fishermen) and institutions/bodies of the Fishery LAGs areas of intervention, who will be the main contributors to the networks. The participation of collective and sectoral bodies, such as environmental bodies, wetland management bodies, local government, the student community, vulnerable groups and the local population is considered important and they are potential participants in informal local networks.

3.3 Identifying, attracting and informing participants

The promotion, in order to identify and attract participants is performed both online (mass media, e-mail) and in person, so as to reach a larger pool of applicants.

Projection objectives become effective when they are governed by the following characteristics:

- attracting attention: it must compete against other networks for the interest of potential candidates
- triggering and maintaining interest: it must communicate in an attractive and interesting way information about the purpose of the network, the benefits of participating in a network and its effectiveness
- encouraging action: the message must be conveyed in a way that not only focuses the attention of candidates on it, but also encourages them to read to the end, as well as promotes a sufficient number of potential network participants

Attraction of participants in the informal local networks of the TCP is proposed to be carried out in the following ways:

- online recruitment by sending e-mails to potential interested parties
- social networking websites, with a relevant posting of call for interest on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. as well as on the websites of the Fishery LAGs
- press releases in local newspapers and blogs
- phone call, via mobile or landline
- personal contact

Information of participants will be carried out by the members of the NAC, who will be responsible for recording the participants' training needs, in relation to the general goals of the TCP, as well as for the recording of their contact details, through a printed form for recording the participants' data and training needs.

More specifically, during the recruitment of participants, the following will take place:

- reception - registration of participants and investigation of training needs
- personal and professional account

- information about the TCP actions and objectives, the importance of their participation in the network, the advantages and benefits of cooperation and their activation to participate in collaborative actions
- information about the educational actions to be taken by qualified persons, both to improve their knowledge and to achieve the goals of the TCP

Following the finalization of the educational actions' thematic units and the timetable by the TCP, participants will be informed by the NAC members about the training program, the way, place and time of its conduct, either by telephone or electronically.

3.4 Training of participants

The educational actions aim at the transfer of knowledge, innovation and good practices and lectures, workshops and seminars will be used for their implementation.

The timetable of the participants' training as well as the thematic sections of the educational program will be drawn up by the NAC members, taking the following into account:

- the forms for recording the participants' data and training needs
- the availability of participants
- the availability of specialized scientific personnel
- the TCP needs

Each informal local network will determine the subject of the training actions it will participate in, according to the needs and capabilities of participants. In this context, the following academic subjects are indicated:

- digital marketing
- social media marketing
- innovation & fishery
- innovation & tourism
- networking good practices
- fishery & tourism good practices
- financial instruments
- corporate social responsibility
- environment - culture & nutrition

- fishing tourism
- local quality networks
- sustainable fishing
- highlighting the identity of the area through fishing activities and wetlands.

Training activities will be carried out either online or in person, depending on the prevailing health conditions and the participants' capabilities. It is considered necessary to digitally record the training activities, so that they become accessible to all participants in the informal local networks and the transnational cooperation forum.

The participants' training will be carried out in appropriately configured places, adequately equipped (podium, speakers, microphone, wi-fi connection, projector, laptop).

The number of training activities foreseen for each Fishery LAG is indicated in the following table:

AITOLIA S.A.	6 training activities
ACHAIA S.A.	5 training activities
ETANAM S.A.	4 training activities (2 in Preveza & 2 in Arta)
AN.OL. S.A.	6 training activities
AN.KA. S.A.	6 training activities
TRICHONIDA S.A.	3 training activities
AN.RO. S.A.	1 training activities
SAMOKOV	-