DOES EXOCOP NEED KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT?

A quick glance at the map and you can clearly see how sharing learning and knowledge between the ExOCoP participating countries could become a significant issue: borders, countries and even oceans separate partners, and that's just the geographical divide. Political differences abound on penalty and penal institutions in general and on complex topic of reintegration of (ex-) offenders in particular. Politics and society influence the penal system and the programs for (ex-) offenders in each country, bringing ever broader elements into the discussion: penal systems are evolving differently and at different rates throughout partner countries and the wider European area.
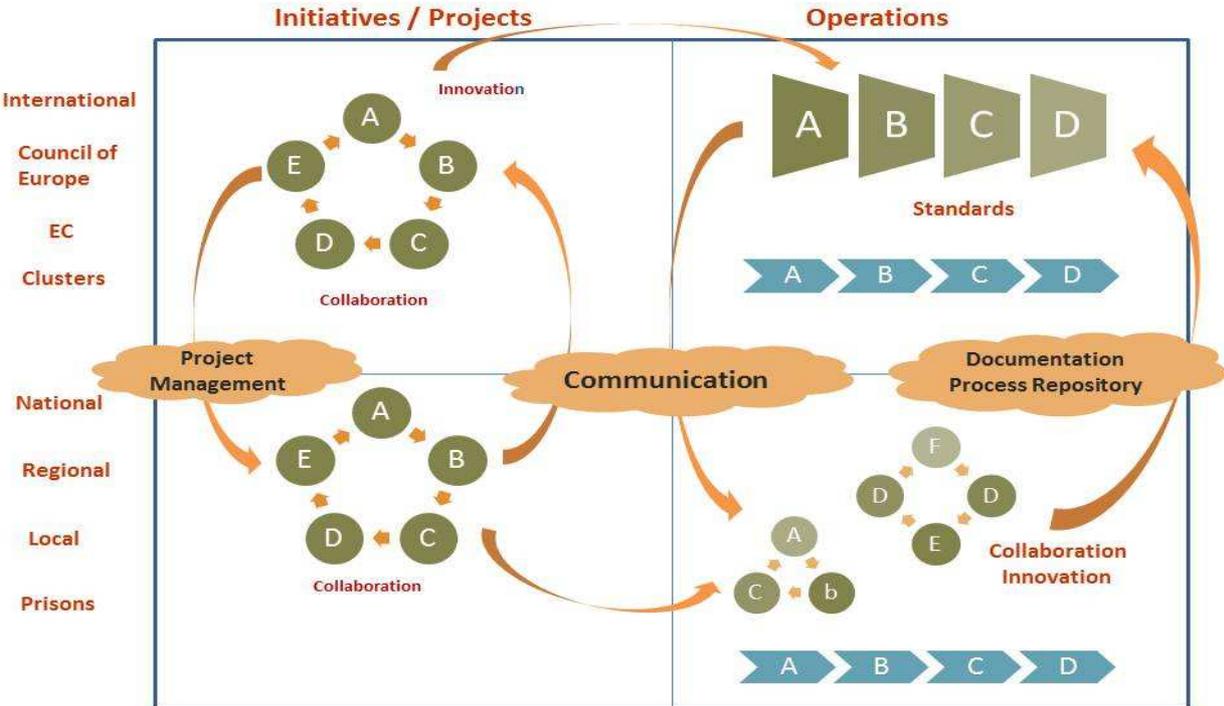
Take transition or case management: some partners have developed a national system covering the whole process from imprisonment to release and/ or moreover post-release. Other partners have no transition management at all. Learning from other countries' experiences provides vital foresight into potential problems (and their solutions); it can present strategic concepts for innovation and raise mutual understanding of different approaches within the EU. We still have much to learn.

ExOCoP's strength lies in linking together our diverse partners, whether funder, administration, local NGO or professional organisation. We have completed 20 Workshops and 5 Seminars with one goal in mind: to reduce re-offending by developing a clear Education, Training and Employment (ETE) path for prisoners and ex-offenders to access strategic resettlement facilities. Together we have successfully facilitated links between funders – particularly the ESF – with good practise and policy recommendations in education, training and employment on a national and European level.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT SUB PROJECT

Knowledge Management was the topic of an ExOCoP Conference in Ghent in 2010. Key outcomes of this conference are summarised in the diagram below. This illustrates the complexity of the interactions, and the different levels at which sharing information and experience could take place. At the other hand, it shows very clearly that no simple tool or IT system can effectively manage this diverse and growing knowledge-set. After all, we must also recognise the importance of governance: setting up IT systems is one thing but making them useful and successful is only possible if there is real engagement, an active participation and a clear governance structure.

The sharing of information starts within local prisons where prisoners themselves participate in several projects to help each other and share experiences. Some of that rather informal **knowledge sharing between inmates** is supported by organisational structures such as working with peers, coaching, setting up communities of practice or publish a local newspaper (many examples of good practice in this book have at least an element of each of these) and help inmates to learn from each others' experience. To support this kind of knowledge sharing, inmates should not only be given more access to knowledge sharing and learning systems, but also given the opportunity to participate and interact with those systems.

Local professionals often have a huge level of expertise and information. Where in smaller institutions the knowledge sharing often is organised on a more informal, less explicit way, the need for better structures and systems is higher in larger facilities. Finding methods and systems to facilitate the **management and sharing of knowledge within and between local prisons** is still challenging for a lot of countries. It is crucial we remain flexible to work on different tracks, use different systems such as a CMS, a wiki site, forums, blogs and embed these into the organisation by a good governance structure such as a working group or similar communities, rather than trying to find one single solution . Germany presents one example of a possible track.

THE GERMAN APPROACH

The knowledge management platform Prison Portal developed out of a nation-wide German project. User generated and edited content was the starting point – anybody who wanted to write something in the field of penalty, imprisonment, reintegration of (ex-) offenders and so on, was invited to participate. This approach meant targeting a large group of possible writers, including teachers, educators, staff from administrative, employment and training agencies and employees from the Ministries of Justice and Labour. From these content-givers came a wide range of different types of texts, standardised only by our format.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN A EUROPEAN CONTEXT: AIMS AND CHALLENGES

The management of knowledge on an international level is even a bigger challenge. During the Ghent conference the whole Network agreed that there is an urgent need for sharing all kinds of knowledge between different European Countries, and that ExOCoP should start up an initiative.

During the project phase, the German Prison Portal was presented to different European partners, who liked the platform and the idea. So when it came to the development of a European knowledge management tool, Germany's prior experience with this technology gave us a head start.

ExOCoP Steering Group members decided **one first step** to progress this collaborative facilitation would be to invest in a whole new, Europe-wide knowledge management system, basing on increasingly prevalent Wikimedia technology. This was established as a sub-project, feeding from the main work plan, alongside the Evaluation Sub-Project.

Share knowledge, facilitate communication, interface for collaboration: We began by transferring the content of Prison Portal to the new knowledge management system and let former contributors know about the new project, as the German system has not been edited for some years.

On the main page registered users can find out about the project, start their research or use a forum. With a big EU map, this is the perfect entry point for the system for European content in the English language. Platform gateways for four more co-existing systems – one for each participating country (Belgium, England, Germany, Romania, Spain) – are live and ready for users from these countries to input their own data, or to link to an existing national knowledge management system.

The new system has more data capacity and is based on the most up-to-date security standards, now commonly used in Europe. ExOCoP users benefit from some new features, added based on our experience with Prison Portal: the old wiki-editor was replaced by a new, more user-friendly interface, similar to conventional Microsoft Word (see Abb.2). Additionally, users can convert all pages of the Wiki to a PDF document and even combine several pages/ articles to print as a book.

Our aims regarding content were threefold: We want ExOCoP's wiki to act as a repository for the wealth of work which has already been undertaken around education, training and employment in Europe, to be a point of reference on national prison administrations and funding strategies, and – critically – to integrate itself into prison discussions successfully enough to become an active part of local, national and Europe-wide dissemination practice.

Motivational recruitment, marketing and dynamic content

Important next steps have been – and will continue to be – made to motivate people working in the field or currently running projects to share their knowledge.

Pro-active motivation of contributors has been a central challenge: with an 'empty' system and no prior experience, it's not easy for contributors to see the potential in this wiki. Better supporting infrastructure on a national level is being encouraged, specifically editors or people interested in taking care of and editing such a platform. They need to receive proper training, were necessary, and to make themselves available to the Managing Editor as a contact person on their national policy and resources.

Sensitivity of data was initially a concern for some partners, particularly those who are uncomfortable with the idea that the prisoners could enter the system. Partners disagreed

about what kind of content should be put on the platform(s) exactly. As a solution we started the EU platform as a visual model, using content already in the public domain. We translated EU relevant articles from the German platform for the EU platform, generated new content and tried to convince partners to put relevant content from their countries on the platform as well.

On-going digital marketing since the wiki was populated enough to make it interesting and useful to the target audience, we have been promoting it online. With one-click buttons, it's easy to share via social networking, to email or print or simply to bookmark pages of interest. We have also begun connecting with national and European figures using networking tools such as Twitter and LinkedIn. Ultimately, we would like to use these social media connections to identify trends in European prison thinking, and to find the right person to contribute. We have reciprocal links between projects of our partners, as well as many others, and want to connect with digital mail outs from other transnational networks, to encourage people to look at – or even contribute their own knowledge to – this growing, cross-disciplinary resource.

MOVING FORWARD: REACHING THE RIGHT PEOPLE & PROJECTS

Our eyes are wide open to the fact that these days everyone can just Google a juridical term and get thousands of explanations or even wider. Just go on Wikipedia and you will find more information that in the ExOCoP system as it currently exists. If we want it to be useful and successful, we need to make a difference.

Our aim is to research what information is useful to projects and among people working in this field, we give users a reason to visit and contribute. We intend to work in collaboration with people and organisations directly involved in on-going projects concerning education, training and employment of (ex-) offenders and ask them to participate and share their experiences. In this way we are not simply delivering information, but combining information with experience. People working in similar projects can read and learn from each other, maybe ask and discuss problems or news in the forum. This will improve their on-going projects and further projects as well.

FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

We believe that this kind of inter-agency communication can **support new structures**, networks, partnerships and projects within Europe, but it **has to be supported**, too. We need to set up a governance structure to embody the management of this Knowledge Management System and to guarantee it to be future-proof. As written above, this initiative is a part of a project, but a project has by definition a beginning and an end.

In the **Berlin Declaration on the Reintegration of Offenders and Ex-Offenders**, we therefore recommend that there is a focus on advancing improved exchange of knowledge and good practice. Discussions on successful approaches should be systematically integrated into the field of rehabilitation / reintegration at Member State level. In order to sustain this process, appropriate funding should be made available, in particular for the identification and dissemination of the successful approaches and for promoting exchange of knowledge and good practice.