

## >> **ComNet: Competences for Networking in European Education**

Networking is a key competence of practitioners in education, and networks are considered to have high potential for solving structural problems.

**ComNet** is a project financed by the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme.

**ComNet** addresses professionals in education – teachers, trainers, programme developers, managers, researchers and evaluators – who are already involved in networks or may wish to be so in the future.

**ComNet** offers training opportunities for planning and implementing a particular type of network: European networks in the framework of the EU funding programmes for lifelong learning.

---

## >> **ComNet project launched**

**ComNet: Competences for Networking in European Education** is a transnational project funded by the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme. It builds on the results of the preceding project **Euoweaving** which developed the publication **The Art of Networking** and other useful resources for actors in European networks.

**ComNet** produces a Grundtvig course and training materials for actors and managers of European education networks.

**ComNet** started with a kick-off meeting in Vienna in November 2007 and will be terminated in October 2009.

Two blended learning training offers are foreseen in the lifetime of the project:

- > October 2008-January 2009 (pilot course)
- > September-December 2009 (Grundtvig course)

Information on these training offers will be distributed in due course through following project newsletters and on the project website which is now available at:

[www.networks-in-education.eu](http://www.networks-in-education.eu)

---

## >> **What is the mission of a European network in education?**

### **Networks in the Lifelong European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme**

In the main EU funding instrument for education, the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme, networks play a prominent role. Network actions are foreseen for all sectoral and also in the transversal sub-programmes:

One of the main reasons for this emphasis on networks is the fragmentation of European cooperation activities: European networks can be regarded as an attempt to overcome the prevalent thinking in terms of isolated projects. This lack of interaction between funded projects and the educational field in questions one of the greatest weaknesses detected in the EU education programmes. Many educational concepts and learning products of high quality and innovative potential have been developed by ambitious pilot projects, but are not sufficiently visible in the field. Generally speaking, the developed materials are neither sufficiently known and used by practitioners, nor does the

generated innovation perceptibly influence policy-making at national or European level.

Here networks are supposed to play an important strategic role. The EU funding programmes' expectations with regard to the integrating mission of networks is rather high. This becomes obvious in a term which recurs in many programme documents: A network is expected to become a key player in its respective educational field at European level. Becoming such a key player involves a long list of tasks that a network should fulfil:

- > Provide a common platform, forum, or reference point for discussion and reflection on key issues, policy and research in the field concerned (debate function).
- > Disseminate innovation and best practice generated by European projects and other initiatives (dissemination function).
- > Assist in the networking of projects which are thematically related and funded by the EU programme in question (support function).
- > Provide an overview of the thematic field through comparative analyses and contribute to the development of a shared terminology at a European level (research function).
- > Identify present, emergent and future needs of stakeholders and highlight potential areas for European cooperation (forecast function).
- > Promote the implementation of innovative results, insights and best practice in relevant fields (advocacy function).

In view of the rather fragile organisational basis of networks, and the limited financial and time resources the EU funding programmes grants to networks, it seems hardly possible that a network is able to fulfil all six potential network functions to the same extent. Of course the programme documents are to be taken seriously, as they are the basis for receiving funding, but they need to be interpreted in a realistic way. Less can be more: a network should focus on a few core functions instead of trying to accomplish literally every expectation that is expressed in the programme documents.

Our interpretation of the mission of European networks in education was influenced from three directions: the insights of social network analysis, the expectations of the EU funding programmes, and the experiences of network partners.

Taking also into account the structural limitations European that networks face due to the limitations of the funding mechanism and the fragile organisational base on which they operate, we recommend that networks in the EU funding programmes focus on three core functions:

### **Networks are about networking**

First and foremost, the objective of European networks should be to bring together practitioners, experts and policy-makers in a specific field and to create an organisational framework for intensive networking. This involves developing effective strategies as to how they can meet, share, and exchange their experiences and expertise for their mutual benefit. To plan, organise and implement provision for intensive and effective networking and keeping them alive is a challenging task in itself, which requires a considerable amount of the time and budget that a European network has available.

### **Networks are about learning**

It should be an obvious priority for a cooperative structure in an education context, but is not always sufficiently emphasised: a network should provide ample learning opportunities for all the actors involved. Of course learning activities within the thematic field concerned (best practice, research results, state of the art, different approaches and contexts in the European countries) should be a substantial part of a network's work programme. But learning is also crucial at another level. Networks are such complex structures that they need reflection and transformation as an indispensable basis for targeted action. We are convinced that networks are not able to succeed without

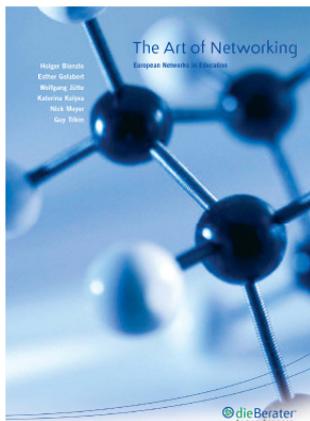
learning. Therefore personal and organisational learning should have a prominent role on the network agenda.

### **Networks are about shaping practices and policies**

Although the creation and maintenance of suitable provision for networking, sharing experiences and learning for actors inside and outside the network would already be a considerable achievement, networks should go one step further. A network should make some sort of measurable impact in the educational field concerned. But having said this, networks should also be realistic about what they can accomplish. This is why we combine the expectation of having an impact on the field with the warning not to be over-ambitious, but to 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.

Based on: **The Art of Networking. European Networks in Education**  
(ISBN 978-3-9502335-0-6)



### **The Art of Networking European Networks in Education** (ISBN 978-3-9502335-0-6)

Available as brochure (128 pages) or pdf.  
Downloads are also available in German and French:

**Die Kunst des Netzwerkers. Europäische Netzwerke im Bildungsbereich** (ISBN 978-3-9502335-1-3)

**L'Art du Networking. Réseaux européens pour l'éducation** (ISBN 978-3-9502335-2-0)

**Order paperback or download pdf now!**

---

---

## >>ComNet partners



die Berater  
Vienna, Austria  
[www.dieberater.com](http://www.dieberater.com)



Landkommanderij Alden Biesen  
Bilzen, Belgium  
[www.alden-biesen.be](http://www.alden-biesen.be)



European Cultural Interactions  
Athens, Greece  
[www.eurointeractions.com](http://www.eurointeractions.com)



NIACE  
Leicester, United Kingdom  
[www.niace.org](http://www.niace.org)



Belies Consulting  
Barcelona, Spain



BUPNET GmbH  
Göttingen, Germany  
[www.bupnet.net](http://www.bupnet.net)

**Academic advisor**

Wolfgang Jütte

---

## >>Contact



**Holger Bienzle**  
die Berater  
Wipplingerstrasse 32 / 24-26  
A-1010 Vienna  
Tel.: +43 1 743 73 45-0  
Fax: +43 1 743 73 45-1145  
E-Mail: [h.bienzle@dieberater.com](mailto:h.bienzle@dieberater.com)  
[www.dieberater.com](http://www.dieberater.com)



This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This newsletter reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.