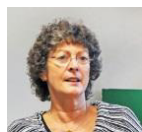


The Challenge of NICE 2



by Christiane Schiersmann

Behind us lie 3 years of fruitful collaboration, intensive discussions and processes and the publication of a quite valuable NICE (Tuning) Handbook. Now we have the chance to work together another 3 years as the Network for Innovation in Career Guidance and Counselling in Europe.

This chance poses a challenge and a question to us at the same time. The question is: What are our goals and tasks for this next period? With this article on the program of NICE 2 – which I also presented in Istanbul – I hope to give some answers to this question.

As I said, there is also a challenge. In my view, this challenge goes beyond the practical problems of working together. To a large extent it is in our hands to clarify the future role of academia in Career Guidance and Counselling in our modern world. No network or association is placed as well as we are to work out answers to this challenge.

When we think about our role as academics in today's world, we need to acknowledge that we – as representatives of universities and higher education institutions – are embedded in a multi-stakeholder world. We need to understand our identity, our mission and our role in society in a systemic way: Universities are embedded in society and influenced by many actors – at the same time we are also influencing the other parts of society. Our field of academia is not isolated from practise, politics or the citizens seeking career guidance and counselling.

Whatever we do – or don't do – will have consequences for the development of career guidance and counselling in Europe. This statement is all the more true when we act together, as a network of academics from all around Europe. Through our research efforts, through our decisions on what and how we teach our students, we shape the future of our field. Our responsibility is not small.

But what is our strength in this situation? Our strength can be – and the results from NICE 1 show this to some degree – that we have the means to understand and reflect the multi-dimensional world with our multi-perspective-approaches. As academics we are in the position to access and influence the theory, the practice-oriented research and the training of future practitioners and experts. All three of these approaches help us to inform other academics, policy, practitioners and clients to become more reflexive in their view on our field.

What is needed to meet this challenge?

In NICE 2 we face the very important challenge of connecting with the outer world. With our work and results we contribute to bridging the gaps between theory and practice, policy and research, services and citizens. Our results should and can be meaningful to all of these actors. The positive way in which our work from the last 3 years – published in 4 languages in the NICE Handbook – has been received by policy makers, practitioners and academics outside of our network, indicates that we are on the right track.

So with this start into the 2nd phase of the NICE network, we need to continue making use of the broad and deep knowledge that is embedded in the network: We should build on our previous experience of working together and our deep knowledge to draw a comprehensive picture about Career Guidance and Counselling in the 21st Century.

We need to feed this picture into the field – but we also need to be open for the perspectives of practitioners, policy-makers and end-users: We need to involve them in our discourse, and connect with them in a constructive way, if we want to bring real innovation in the field.

To do so, all partners, all our resources and strengths are needed and all our connections on international, national and local level will help us to be successful. Only together we



have the chance to pick up all the signals from inside and outside the academic world, to process these influences and to pass our reflexions back in form of meaningful results and powerful ideas.

Where do we want to go?

Our vision for the future of NICE is to become a sustainable network which

- Promotes professionalism and excellence in the practice of career guidance and counselling,
- Supports higher education institutions all around Europe who offer or want to offer degree programmes related to our field of excellence,
- Represents our academic discipline in politics at national and European levels as a consortium of experts,
- Articulates what developments are needed in our field and how they can be reached through innovation, research and education, and
- Provides an environment for science-based sharing and learning among academics (teachers and researchers) in our field.

What should we be doing now?

In order for us to realize this vision of NICE, we need to move our network away from only being a "project": NICE needs to become a sustainable organisation. In order

for NICE to become sustainable, our network needs to deliver an added value to all members and develop a regenerative and self-organizational capacity. Only through shared leadership will we be able to realize the vision of NICE.

For us to live up to this mission, we have developed a strategic program for NICE 2 which consists of a row of projects. Some of them focus more strongly on adding value for us and the wider field of career guidance and counselling, for example the "Memorandum Project" and the continuation of the "Tuning Project". Others focus more strongly on increasing how we grow together internally, for example the "Database Project" and the "Mobility Project". Since these projects will be presented shortly by their different coordinators in this newsletter, and you can find further information on our website soon, I won't go into more detail here, but leave this up to my friends and colleagues.

Instead, I want to discuss another part of our mission shortly: the need for building sustainable structures and continuous leadership capacity for our network. As a consequence of this need, we are currently reinventing the management structure of NICE.

A functioning and sustainable network is a community of people and organizations who collaborate on the basis of their free will, primarily for their own benefit, and with the option of leaving the community at just about any time. Therefore a network always remains a "fluid" organization with flexible

roles and responsibilities, a strong focus on projects and very low hierarchies.

In order to become sustainable, a network needs plenty of leaders that work together, share responsibility and support each other when necessary. At the same time a network needs a "culture of re-generation": new generations of leaders need to be raised all the time through mentoring and challenging projects. In short, networks need to be inclusive in their management structure. The leadership needs to be responsive to the needs and perspectives of the network members for this reason. It needs to involve them in the decision-making – at least in the most important decisions.

The new management structure which we have chosen for NICE 2 reflects these needs through a combination of 4 "institutions". They are a first try to establish structures of "shared responsibility" and a culture of "shared leadership".

One lesson that we have clearly learned from NICE-1 is that we need coordination. We are just too large, too many people, to be cooperative without a group of people who take over moderating and coordinative functions. Somebody needs to make sure that the different projects are aligned, that conferences are prepared on time etc. For NICE-2 we have offered to continue carrying this role as the "Heidelberg Team", including myself, Peter Weber, Johannes Katsarov, and Monika Kukyte.

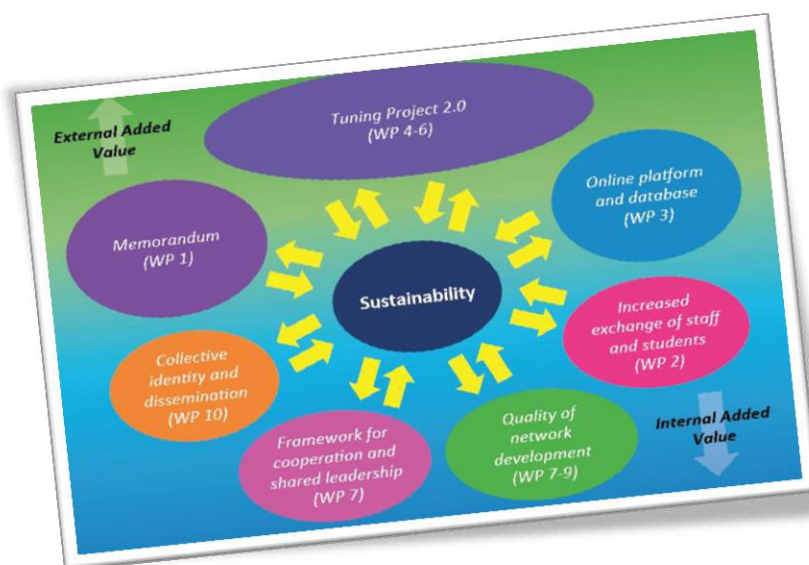
For strategically important decisions the "Network Coordination" needs guidance on

important decisions. We need a group of people who actively think ahead where our network is developing in the long term. To fulfill this purpose we have established a new "Steering Committee" which takes a visionary outside-view on the current projects. This way a strategic and controlling perspective on the activities is possible.

Very importantly, we want leadership and networking capacities to grow in NICE by having all project coordinated through "Self-Managed Teams". These teams manage their own work, autonomously organize workshops at the annual conferences and plan their activities in alignment with the Network Coordination. To support their development and overall coordination, each team has an official speaker, who keeps things going and represents the teams towards the rest of the network. Additionally, the teams are mentored by members of the steering committee, who give them feedback on their progress from a strategic perspective, and create connections with other network activities.

Finally, we've also established a "Quality Management Group": Its members work together closely with the different project teams of NICE to support them in managing the quality of their team work and producing high-quality results. Additionally, the quality management group will watch the work of the steering committee and the network coordination closely and provide regular feedback – also giving a united voice to the other members of the network.

We hope that through this setup of our network, we can ensure that cooperating in NICE is fun for everyone participating, that the outcomes of our work are really significant and innovative, and that we reach the goal of fostering shared leadership and setting up a network that will be more than "just a project".



INTERESTING INFO

- ✓ Check out our website:
www.nice-network.eu
- ✓ Download the NICE Handbook for free!
- ✓ The NICE Handbook is a practical manual for the academic training of career guidance and counselling professionals. It is already available in English, French, German and Spanish!