NCP EXPERIENCE REPORT

Meet and Exchange Workshop:

NCP Systems – benchmarking on micro and macro level & gathering future needs

Background

The Meet and Exchange Workshop focused on the exchange of information and views on the various national NCP structures, including information on how the services are organised in different countries, what are the pros and cons of centralised and decentralised NCP systems and what tools NCPs use in their daily work. Key Performance Indicators and expectations towards outcome of the Horizon 2020 Interim Evaluation were also shared and discussed. In addition good practices on NCP working tools like CRM, strategic approaches to potential beneficiaries or novel training methods were deliberated.

The ambition of this Meet & Exchange was delivery of knowledge which could help in NCPs daily tasks such as registration and assessment of services provided, quality control, timing, foresight on potential beneficiaries, coordination of multiple NCPs with one theme and overall management of the NCP systems by national NCP Coordinators.

Event consisted in a half day meeting built with presentations, brainstorming sessions, working group and plenary discussions. The first day the session focused on the “macro level” and the second day session focused on the “micro level”.

Agenda

Day 1 Tuesday 30th May 2017

Part I: NCP Systems on Macro-level

Presentations

**KPIs – Can and should we benchmark NCP systems?**
*Sebastian Serwiak | Institute of Fundamental Technological Research PAS, Poland*

National Contact Points (NCPs) play a key role in Horizon 2020 as providers of information and assistance to potential applicants and project beneficiaries. They constitute the main interface to the European R&D community for Member States and Associated Countries and the European Commission. While their activities are underpinned by the European Commission’s “Guiding principles for setting up systems of national contact points”, NCPs are appointed and financed at the national level so that existing NCP systems show a wide variety of architectures and ways of working.

The Work Package 3 addressed quality standards and best practices. It included quantitative and qualitative assessment of NCP services in order to identify potential Key Performance Indicators. The presentation described part of the effort made under WP3 and its main conclusions. The WP3 analysis was performed in two stages and included the comparative evaluation of NCPs activities followed by corresponding member states FP7 participation analysis. For this purpose data were collected from the following participants: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Spain and Switzerland. Participation in the survey was voluntary.

The extensive survey and thorough statistical analysis of NCP systems, services, activities and indicators provided numerous data from different Member States, ranging from the number of proposals submitted/NCP to the types of services provided and the impact of using social media in NCP promotion activities. However, it could not demonstrate correlations or causality between NCP operations and national performance in FPs.

The conclusions of the exercise prove that no correlation could be found between how much effort NCPs put into their performance and the success of their country in the framework programme. Also, the different national NCPs system are hard to be compared as they differ substantially from country to country, which shows a high degree in heterogeneity (national structure, organization, coordination, resource etc.). Indicators only make sense if there is a goal to achieve, which can only be defined at national (or regional) level. Specific goals should be related to the actual potential and willingness of a country to improve its performance in a specific area.

The following issues were raised after the talk, during the discussion:

- Unfortunately the data of the exercise is not reliable
- There are countries missing that should do the effort to include their national data
- Not homogenous systems, therefore not comparable
- The NCP Academy project should watch out to whom these data is sent. Agree that the EC will not have these results
- Statistics are not the ground for KPIs and will never give a solid ground to assess how the NCP systems make an impact at national level
- It is important to know the objectives of each of the national NCP systems to assess how can we improve
- Organize a M&E on KPIs

The participants were asked to provide their ideas for future and new KPI:

![IDEAS FOR KPIs](image)

National differentiation and specific goals render any EU shared KPIs simply not feasible. As there are no common KPIs being used today or possible to introduce into H2020 NCP systems another approach was chosen. The National NCP Coordinators may use knowledge generated by the project and consider implementation of various indicators measuring progress towards goals from a **general list ‘a la carte’ of NCP indicators** identified within the NCP Academy project – Annex 1.
Presentations of different NCP´s systems
Observations of the most distinguishable features

Presentation of the French NCP network
Martine Roussel / MENESR, France

Today France ranks third among H2020 beneficiaries with 2,1 billion Euros contracted for the French community so far and the success rate of 14.5%.

France has a highly decentralised NCP system. The system works around three main documents:

- Minimum standards
- French specifications
- French convention (between Ministry/ host organisation and NCP)

The French NCP missions do not differ from the basic Commission minimum standards. They include:

- Informing and raising awareness
- Assist and advise their clients
- Signposting and cooperate with other network such as EEN whenever necessary

In practice an NCP for a H2020 theme means 1 thematic consortium. There is 22 thematic NCP coordinators and 138 individuals in total but it translates only into 34 FTE (full time equivalent) – more than 60 organisations are involved. The NCP system has cooperation bonds with regional and local actors.

The national authority for H2020 - MESRI (Ministry of Higher Education and Research) is involved in each thematic NCP (All French delegates to H2020 Programme Committees are NCPs).

There is a system of national incentives in place to support H2020 participation like: 30k € grants for the coordinator to prepare a consortium and a proposal, Trampoline ERC – financial grants for improvement of the application and keeping the applicant in the loop so she/he can reapply next year and national award: Stars of Europe.

Slovenian NCP´s systems
Darija Valančič | Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Slovenia

Slovenia has organised its NCP system into 30 thematic areas which are served by 21 individuals. Usually each theme is assigned to one NCP but there are some exceptions and some NCPs have several areas. Most of the NCPs are affiliated to one of the Ministries (MIZŠ) and 6 of them to other institutions. The NCP network meets 3 times per year.

A national workshop was organized to make an analysis of the Slovenian NCP system, in which issues such as the visibility of the NCP Network, the role of the NCP and of the associate NCPs were discussed. Among key challenges for the future Slovenia recognizes professionalization of the NCP network, building backup for NCP services - more than one NCP per theme, and better information flow among NCPs.
Presentation of the Czech NCP system  
Daniel Frank | Technology Centre ASCR, Czech Republic

Technology Centre of the CAS (Department National Information Centre for EU Research - NICER) supports the participation of the Czech Republic in the European Research Area, prepares analytical and conceptual studies for research and development, performs international technology transfers and supports the creation and development of innovation businesses.

TC CAS employs 27 persons including 17 NCPs - 14 FTE with long-standing experience from FP5. NCP activities are funded within the project CZERA2 (Czech Republic in ERA) by Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS) with annual budget of approx. 1.2 M €.

The Czech system is a centralised model with transparent and clear organizational structure for clients and state administration, where all relevant information are available in one place. TC CAS offers complete NCP services - financial consulting, legal service, proposals evaluation, monitoring, strategic studies, etc. Moreover TC CAS coordinates the European Enterprise Network (EEN) - convenient for clients - services and information are linked.

The Portuguese NCP System  
Ana Mafalda Dourado | FCT, Portugal

The Portuguese NCP system was created in 2007 with a two-fold objective:

1. To connect the portuguese research and industry stakeholders with the framework programme by the mutual coordination of the Delegates to Committees, the National NCP Network, and the representatives of the Technological Platforms and Joint Technology Initiatives.
2. To improve national performance in research and innovation whilst raising the portuguese financial return from the framework programmes.

Portugal has a centralised system where NCP responsibilities are assigned to Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT) - national funding agency that supports science, technology and innovation. Support for H2020 application and project execution is provided by 20 NCPs (20 FTE) coming from both academia and business. Apart from NCP activates FCT coordinates Portuguese Delegations in the Programme Committees, Technological Platforms and Joint Technological Initiatives and Portuguese NCPs are experts and delegates (more than 60%) to respective H2020 Programme Committees. The FCT runs its own database on national projects funded under FP6. Moreover NCPs are involved in FP related technical working groups providing up to date information and creating valid network opportunities.
Working groups - Reflection on key success and challenge factors of NCP systems

The 4 working groups went through a brainstorming session, followed by a SWOT analysis and plenary discussion on organisational models of NCP systems. The concept of centralised/de-centralised NCP services was discussed in depth.

The main strengths of the centralised system:

- Having individual NCPs under one roof enables responsive, high quality management system;
- Smooth internal communication and information channels (regular meetings, briefings);
- Relatively easy implementation of policies and strategies;

The main strengths of the de-centralised system:

- Spread structure brings NCPs closer to clients (especially in regions)
- Enables wider reach out
- Forces region to region overlaps in terms in knowledge (multiple NCP per theme) but creates natural backup structure
The main weaknesses of the centralised system:

- Limited reach out and knowledge of regional context and actors;
- Hampered visibility at regional level;
- Creation of closed club around centrally placed actors;
- Elevated costs of travelling and event organisation outside headquarter.

The main weaknesses of the de-centralised system:

- Considerable management efforts;
- Standardisation and quality of services are different from unit to unit (and so are customer service procedures);
- Challenging information flow between regions.
The main opportunities of the centralised system:

- Better possibilities for exchange of best practices, experiences and knowledge;
- Harmonised policies and procedures (incl. standards);
- Efficient coordination of NCPs.

The main opportunities of the de-centralised system:

- Balanced geographical NCP coverage of a territory;
- Equal access to information and services – fair dissemination conditions;
- Richness of the network (different actors, various NCP practices) – innovative approaches;
The main threats to centralised system:

- High susceptibility to stress and mismanagement;
- Responsivity of structure renders its instantly vulnerable to wrong decisions.

The main threats to de-centralised system:

- Communication
- Standardisation

Coordination

Outcomes of the task force "Impact of NCP projects"
Monique Bossi | APRE, Italy

NCP project coordinators established a Task Force (TF) to discuss, compare and improve the services they provide and the impact they generate. The TF interacts with other stakeholders including the EC Officers, National Coordinators and experts that have been – and possibly will be – involved in the development of the TF’s activities. The exercise targeted NCPs and R&I communities involving 17 NCP Network Projects, external experts, National NCP Coordinators and EC Officers. After several rounds of consultations, expert meetings, collection of data on individual and joint activities, the final report was prepared. The task force identified major, unique impacts of the NCP projects, that make the existence of individual network projects meaningful:

- Community: the networks represent a community for all NCPs irrespective of the geographical belonging or experience and ensure equal access to information, documents, expertise...
• **Benchmarking**: specific needs and competencies are usually assessed and taken into consideration in the implementation of the network workplan (e.g. trainings, welcome pack, mentoring, staff exchange);

• **Transnational cooperation**: ultimately it raises the general standard of support, ensuring that the EU framework programmes become known and accessible to all potential applicants.

These finding were followed by recommendations:

• **Bridging the Programmes**: NCP Network Projects should be up and running during the launch of FP9 to support NCPs and applicants;

• **Cooperation with the EC**: there should be a standard and shared approach for all DGs towards the networks and Agencies.

• **Services**: the NCP related topic description in the WP should be tailored as far as possible (going beyond one standard text for all) in order to reflect the relevant specificities and complementarities.

**Day 2: Wednesday 31st May 2017**

**Part II: NCP systems on Micro-level - NCP tools for daily work**

**NCPs to present "Hot issues in micro-management"**

*Consultations, registration/recording and follow-up*

*Tania Van Loon / IMPULSE.Brussels*

IMPULSE.Brussels is challenged by a number of issues concerning the customer relations and NCP work coordination, due to the organisation of their NCP system. There are 10 thematic NCPs nominated for 14 responsibilites who serve the same clients as the other 80 employees (part time NCPs). Sectorial approach generates a number of thematic overlaps in cross connected areas (e.g.: smart city, e-health). There is a considerable NCP team turnover with between 1 to 2 persons joining and leaving the system every year. In the whole organisation, the coordination of such a large team providing many services (with many sub-brands including the smart specialisation Clusters) to the same customer in a small region is very demanding.

In order to handle the challenge, IMPULSE.Brussels introduced an *Advanced Customer Relationship Management tool* allowing storing and managing of information. This tool includes the following features:

- all agenda items, workshops, (meaningful) e-mails, presentations, customer contacts, meeting reports, targeted sending of opportunities, etc.,
- structured access to all employees (except confidential items),
flexible but obligatory recording system for all 80 employees including the NCP team members

extensive use of agenda / flags for follow-up activities

systematic consultation when question comes in (clients services and consultations history)

The systems allows following the client needs and development while maintaining a clear, single main contact on behalf of the NCP. However when a comprehensive and complex approach is necessary, multiple experts knowledge may be called upon to support the customer. This is one of the strengths of the system, as illustrated with “pitching sessions” for the preparation of a SME instrument proposal submission, where the thematic NCP + sectorial experts + business experts + legal experts challenge together the applicant’s project before submission.

Organization at national level amongst multiple NCPs of the same theme
Ann van Hauwaert | Research Foundation Flanders, Belgium

The NCP system in Belgium with 5 NCP organisations reflects complexity of its administrational structure.

- NCP Flanders (Dutch):
  - VLAIO: Flemish Agency for entrepreneurship and innovation - 9 NCPs
  - FWO: Research Foundation Flanders - 3 NCPs
    - above mentioned organisations complement each other to provide NCP advise for all H2020 areas, while overall coordination lies upon FWO

- NCP FNRS (French)
  - FNRS: Fund for Scientific Research
    - (of Wallonia-Brussels Federation = French speaking community)

- NCP Wallonie (French)
  - UWE: Walloon Enterprise Agency

- NCP Brussels (bilingual)
  - Impulse Brussels: Brussels Enterprise Agency

- Eurofed (bilingual)
  - BELSPO: Belgian Science Policy

Despite this strict territorial division different NCPs act as cooperting partners honoring the principle of ‘No wrong-door’ and co-organising general information sessions (thus gathering critical mass sufficient to attract high level COM speakers). The NCPs follow joint Belgian vision formulated at strategic meetings on country level.

The NCP system from Flanders has advisors from 2 different Agencies:

- Research Foundation Flanders (independent) (FWO)
  - Funding for universities, research institutes:
    - Excellence
    - SC 6
    - Swafs
    - JRC
• Widening
• Security
• L&F – all (but SME’s)
• Coordination

• Flemish agency for entrepreneurship and innovation (Flemish government) (LAIO)
  Funding for enterprises, mainly SME:
  • NCP – enterprises and universities/research institutes:
  • All SC except SC6
  • LEIT
  • L&F – SME

However, all services provided by the two agencies share:
  - 1 website: ncpflanders.be,
  - 1 mail system on 2 different servers – xxx@ncpflanders.be
  - 1 SharePoint

**Novel training methods/work organization as NCP**

Morten Gylling-Jørgensen | DAFSE, Denmark

National H2020 NCP system in Denmark is provided by the executive agency of the Ministry of Research and Education - DAFSE.

The national support system for H2020 applicants is organised by the nominated NCPs and partner organisations. Partners create a firewall addressing the basic questions while NCPs can address exclusively on advanced questions and issues. DAFSE aims at reducing the number on clients and focusing its services and efforts on the most promising applicants.
There is a national program (incentives) for proposal preparation with grants of
10k € for project coordinators and 7k € for project partners. The budget of this action is
3M € per year with 3 cut-offs. The success rate of proposals supported with grants is 30% versus 15% of those without support.

**Website and Social Media for H2020 Promotion**

**Mustafa Buyukkara | TÜBITAK, Turkey**

H2020 NCP system in Turkey is centralised and affiliated to TÜBITAK where all individual NCPs are employed (23 FTE). It is a challenge to reach the population of 80 million citizens living on a widespread area and TÜBITAK decided to invest in modern, complex website which is comprehensive enough to meet clients’ needs.

The most important pillar of the website is dedicated to H2020 grants. In this part each thematic and horizontal area has its own page, which is practical application of the ‘one-stop shop’ concept. Moreover each page of a specific theme is updated with important related news, provides information on Turkish projects funded and additionally leads to subpages with topics, partner searches and call information.

Part of the portal is promoting European Technology Platforms as networking and cooperation opportunities for H2020 applicants. Further one can find actual releases of the eCorda database with top performers ranking in three categories – what according to Turkish experiences has a positive impact on national competitiveness. There is also a dedicated page with information on national support and award programs.

Effective advisory in a country of such a size, with centralised NCP System, would not be possible without information multipliers. There are more than 100 information multipliers all over Turkey, who mostly work at universities and technology transfer offices. 3 to 4 times per year they receive training on general issues of H2020.

**Working groups - Reflection on key success and challenge factors of NCP systems**

At the second round the 4 working groups went again through a brainstorming session, followed by presentations and plenary discussion, having focused this time on coordination of multiple NCPs (application of CRM systems) and novel training and communication strategies.
Organisation at national level among multiple NCPs from the same theme

The discussion let the workshop participant to a list of key factors to be minded and followed when national systems is challenged by managing multiple NCPs under the same FP theme. The finding were grouped separately as true for centralised and de-centralised systems, while some of them were marked ‘best practice’ regardless of the organisational structure.

At the centralised systems there are usually not many NCPs per one theme so managerial efforts are limited. Having them under one roof simplifies also the internal communication however there is a significant demand for cross-theme coordination. The usual challenge is creation of a backup system for theme oriented services and sharing communication (news) in case absences. On the other hand de-centralised systems require constant coordination but overlapping NCPs naturally guarantee a backup system so there is always an expert theme knowledge available for the customers. The internal communication and tasks follow-up takes regular (1-4 per year) national meetings and CRM systems are a great advantage here.

The separate discussion was dedicated to these CRM systems and, as agreed, they represent a significant added value to daily and even strategic management of national NCP systems however their introduction is always challenging. There is a considerable effort to change the daily routines of individual NCPs and when a CRM is operational, it has to be obligatory for all employees to regularly keep it up to date. The organisation considering CRM has to evaluate its implementation and daily effort against added value - necessity and reasons to register, scope of registration, usefulness, and possible follow up actions.

A part of the findings was valid for all systems, regardless of its structure:
Training new NCPs via mentoring schedules and sharing the best practices;
Every NCP should know basics about cross-cutting issues;
The organisation’s standards/procedures for customer services must guarantee only one consistent answer at all times:
  - internal share point,
  - theme coordinator,
  - signposting among NCPs,
  - all theme NCPs cc:

**Communication using new technologies**

The next issue discussed was novel communication strategies and the outcomes were as follows:

- the NCP portal should be an attractive and an interactive platform,
- the social media are an absolute minimum standard today,
- the use of newsletter is decreasing while there is growing demand for ‘google groups’ like solutions

The findings were backup by some observations and solutions. The novel communication model involves a lot resources and takes extra work or professional staff. It can be outsourced and/or supported by students (work practice). The institutional barriers and national legislation may negatively influence these efforts as key
management has to be convinced prior to change its views or habits and some actions may be not legally allowed due to e.g.: personal data protection provisions. The conclusion is that a major change in communication strategy may be a huge step forward however it takes extra consideration and a kind of feasibility study before implementation.

**Novel training methods/work organisation as NCP**

The final discussion was dedicated to improvement of NCPs work organisation and thus raise in their training efficiency. There were 2 key recommendations after this session.

The first says about building a ‘firewall system’ – a multilevel mechanism that filters questions and issues so the relatively simple ones are answered by the first line while up the ladder are transferred only the most sophisticated. Such a solution improves the effectiveness of the NCPs matching their current training level, experience and competences versus challenges.

The second recommendation concerns filtering system for customers attending the NCP events. The ambition is to ensure the right people attend the right training. Accomplishing of such a goal takes a good knowledge of the customer, the market expectations, the FP theme and individual NCP teaching skills. The efficient communication (e.g.: via website) and sing posting - clear massages to clients on the content are absolutely crucial for such tailored events. The second phase is an assertive selection of participants and then selection of attractive and effective training tools.
Annex 1 – List of KPIs

CATALOGUE ‘A LA CARTE’ OF NCP INDICATORS IDENTIFIED WITHIN THE NCP ACADEMY WP3 - (DRAFT)

FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE

- Number of project proposals sent nationally (partner / coordinator)
- Total amount of requested funding
- Number of proposals which obtained EU financing
- Total amount of EU funding received nationally
- Total job created/maintained through EU financing
- Number of national entities participating in FP
- National success rate(s) in Horizon 2020

NCP EFFORT AND PERFORMANCE

Advisory activities

- Number of personal consultations
- Number of e-mail consultations
- Number of telephone consultations
- Number of Trainings
- Number of Publications
- Number of proposals reviewed / checked

Data followed with details on organisation type (HES, REC, PRC, etc.), region, programme; duration, detailed/strategic consultancy)

Dissemination / Communication activities

- Number of visits to the website
- Number of Facebook followers
- Number of Twitter comments
- Number of newsletter subscribers
- Number of press releases
- Number of members of Linkedin group
- Number of active customers in database

Information activities

- Number of International conferences and seminars
- Number of presentations at international conferences
• Number of national conferences,
• Number of information days
• Number of seminars
• Number of workshops
• Number of Mentoring Services performed
• Number of WWW publications

Data followed with details on organisation type (HES, REC, PRC, etc.), region, number of participants - possible calculation of ratio participants per event / per event category.

• Number of Brokerage events co-organised
• Partner searches created (outward)
• Partner searches disseminated (inward)
• Number of EOI’s for outward Partner Searches
• Partner searches which concluded in submitted proposal
• Partner searches which concluded in funded proposal

**NCP EXPERT ACTIVITIES**

• Number of Working Groups on H2020 specific issues/topics
• Technical support to H2020 National Delegates to the FP Specific Programme Committees
• Cooperation with European institutions (European Commission, REA, EASME, etc.)
• Cooperation with national public administration
• Cooperation with the NCPs network
• Cooperation with national expert network(s)
  o Feedback on strategic consultancy by REC/HES/PRC/ SME/PUB/OTH
• Comparison of proposal success rates for customers supported by an NCP (proposal check) and those not in contact with the NCP

**OTHER**

• Event based / periodic Customer satisfaction survey
• Participation of NCP personnel to trainings
• Number of new companies prospected
# Annex 2 - List of Participants

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