Chapter 5 (draft in progress)
Organisation of Communities of Practice in TOL

Content

Organising a Community of Practice in TOL

The objective of preparing school lunches fresh and delicious with local ingredients, can only be achieved if many players working together to investigate the issue and find solutions. The problems in the school meals are different in all countries and regions. Accordingly different are the actors, interests, problem formulations and approaches about healthy school lunches. A regional network of main players and stakeholders can be an important the motor for development and change in the quality of school lunches and in the further involvement of regional products in its production.

Collaborations constant exchange of experience and knowledge transfer of players and stakeholders are an important condition for quality development and change processes in this field.

Example: On the initiative of "Agrarmarketing Mecklenburg-Vorpommern eV" (AMV), a network of 100 partners from the agro-food sector in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern industry found itself caterers, producers, state administration, a health insurance company, logistics companies and service and consulting company for the food industry, advice and information for schools about school meals together to do more for integrating regional products in school meals in the country in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

The initiative "vital menu" was created. With participation of children of different ages, a project team developed and tested a variety of healthy school menus. Knowledge, information and practical experiences of producers, entrepreneurs, scientists, school food providers and also the children were incorporated into the process of making the menus. An important result was a recipe manual for cooks, caterers and school kitchens. There were also formulated five criteria for a successful action to increased use of regional products in the school food making. These can use as an orientation for school food providers, but also as a model for the more using of regional products in school meals. More caterer and school kitchens focus on using more regional products for the school meals of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, they get valuable advice and support. The recipe collection of the »VitalMenü in the school lunch« can be requested by all caterers of the country. Tasting actions, workshops, student competitions are instruments to continue the initiative. The players who have got together represent different interests and expertise. In a multi-year process they developed a common action strategy and concerted action alike benefit from the use of regional products, strengthen the food economy and promoting health in children and adolescents.

The success was achieved by the following factors:

- cooperation in a working group, which were determined by the interests of those involved

- the elaboration of a common task understanding,

- the exchange of expertise and experience as well

- the development of a common practice, as reflected in the concept and the measures of healthy meals called VitalMenü.

The initiative "Vital menu" is a good example of the effectiveness and the benefits of a CoP. The essence of this practical experience in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern can be described very well with the concept of communities of Practice (abbreviated: COP) that goes back to Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger. The term CoP designates a theoretical model, in order to highlight learning processes and change processes in the context of social cooperation. Crucial impetus for the passed way in MV resulting from the work out and identify a common knowledge and experience holdings, which

culminated in a common idea and action. The idea of CoP is closely linked to organizational development in the era of modern knowledge and communication society.

The project partners of the project TOL have the construct CoP identified as an important tool to convey the ideas of the healthy food in school.

In this chapter we want to give suggestions for the use of the CoP approach for promoting change in regionality and quality of school lunches from a mix of theoretical considerations and practical experience about CoP in the partner countries. This much the experience of two-year project TOL used. In 6 countries CoP have formed, which are presented here.

The **structural characteristics of a community of practice**

CoP is in the context of the strategic network TOL understood as a community of people from different social spheres of action preferably linked informally and beyond institutionally bound working groups and networks in order to promote the development of services for healthy school lunches.

Knowledge in society or in an organization appears in many different forms and is not limited to the "heads of the experts". New organizational structures and cooperation networks as well as bringing to the same extent and speed produce new knowledge.

The concept of community of practice is well applicable for the acquisition of knowledge, the provision of knowledge and its use for changes in healthy, high-quality school lunches is particularly suitable. Here the aim is to use not only structures and theoretical expertise, especially potentials of social cooperation, in order to construct new practical knowledge.

To deal with this diversity, an environment must be created so that knowledge and information are managed useful. It is important to make tasks and troubleshooting efficiently. It is an important experience, which is a big barrier for missing changes to promote a better quality of school food in the absence of networking and collaboration of stakeholders.

A new trend is certainly the Community of Practice (CoP) as a special form of expert network / the Knowledge Community. A CoP is not a network per se, no Association, no project group. The name stands for an informal group that organizes itself, fulfilled self-chosen purposes and determine their leadership itself. Informally here means beyond structural and institutional contexts. The CoP are distinguished primarily by the "common interest in a topic" of individuals or groups that meet both virtually and physically. There is a lively exchange between participants, employees or stakeholders. The aim is that employees not only focus on knowledge from databases and experts but to develop their resources, skills and creativity and thus takes place a more comprehensive knowledge transfer, which promotes new practices.

CoPs are temporary; they "live" as long as the interest and the need for exchanges and the environment (in this case, the interest, the interaction of the members) will be maintained. It can go to diverse topics: structuring or preparation of background information, questions / answers or experience or developing new knowledge, new practices.

There is a good definition of term CoP by Wenger:

TOL: Taste of Life, regional, healthy food in schools
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"Every group that shares interest on a website is called a community today, but communities of practice are a specific kind of community. They are focused on a domain of knowledge and over time accumulate expertise in this domain. They develop their shared practice by interacting around problems, solutions, and insights, and building a common store of knowledge."

Etienne Wenger: "Cultivating communities of practice – a guide to manage knowledge"

A "CoP" opens a way to generate organizational development and problem-solving skills on a specific topic under the conditions of complex systems through informal processes of exchanging knowledge and resources.

Relative to TOL, a CoP means that people, actors are coming together, because they have their own interests in solutions for healthy school lunches in their region. They operate largely self-organized with each other, exchange ideas and support each other. What it is important is the absence of introductory preambles of external orders, institutional bindings.

To launch a CoP, it is important to know the three structural features or dimensions of a CoP:
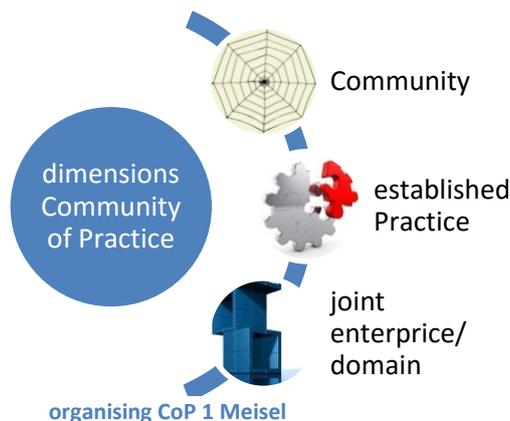
"Domain or joint enterprise"

This is the content dimension. These include the common theme, projects (joint enterprise), as understood by the members and constantly renegotiated in the cooperation process.

„Common, interrelated actions – Community

Community means the relations of mutual commitment, which involve the members in a social entity of joint acting.

„Ongoing Practice"

The shared repertoire of resources (eg, routines, vocabulary, etc.), which produce the members over time is counted for the dimension of established practice.

organising CoP 1 Meisel

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CoP's show in different ways and with different scope effect. Based on Wenger's concept of value assessment you can find arguments for the effects of the activities of a CoP.
In this chapter also the experience of 6 COPs should be included. It can methodically identify five with each intertwined effect cycles of action:

Cycle 1. Effect immediately:
The activities and interactions between members in a CoP have a value in and of itself and is immediately effective. Have to give an example of TOL

Cycle 2 Potential:
The activities and interactions of cycle 1 cannot be implemented immediately, but exist as a resource, tool or knowledge capital whose value is stored in it. Its potential can be realized only later. Have to give an example of TOL

Cycle 3: appliableness: The resources created in the common practice require applying and adapting to a specific situation. It's principally available. Have to give an example of TOL

Cycle 4. Realized value:
Even applied new practices or tools are not enough. A change in practice does not necessarily lead to improved performance, so it is important to find out what effects the application of knowledge capital is having on the achievement of what matters to stakeholders. Have to give an example of TOL
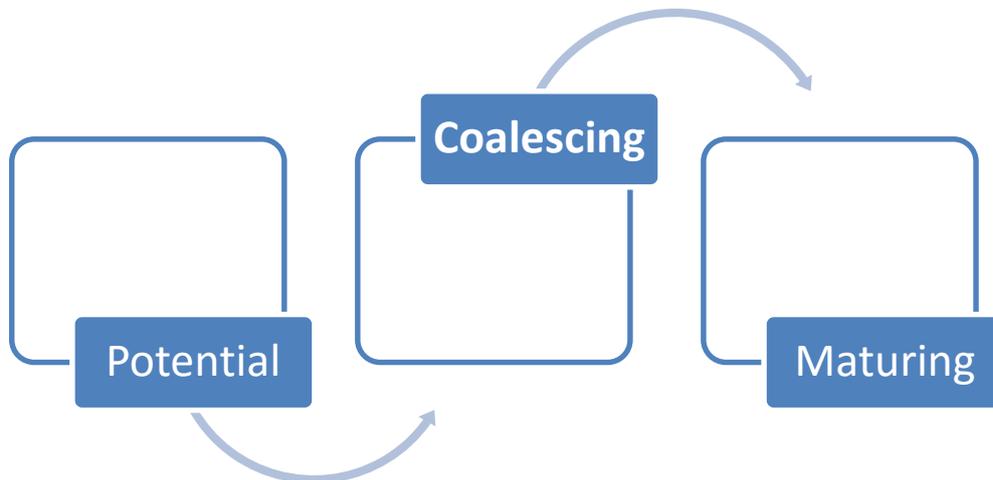
Ebene 5. Reframing:
This occurs when the common practice causes a re-examination of how success is defined. It includes the reformulation of strategies, goals and values. Have to give an example of TOL
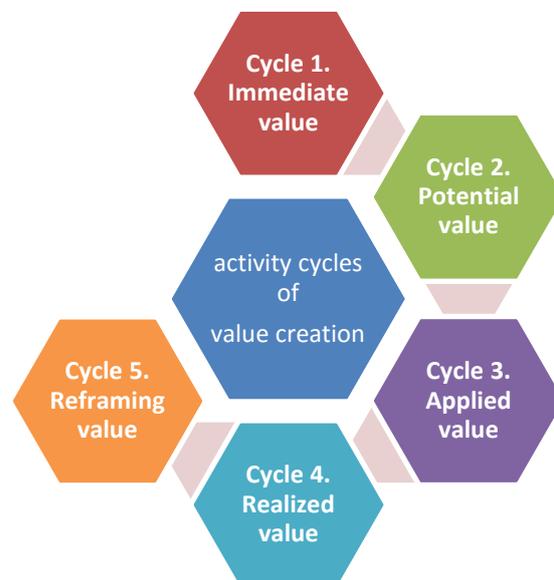
Launching a CoP for TOL

Ideally, can be 3 essential tasks in the active development of a community of practice show. These are the 3 steps launch a CoP.

The description of the three steps to establish or launch a CoP.

POTENTIAL

The first step – see the POTENTIAL - is characterized by one or more actors, stakeholders, which assume a certain subject and recognize the needs of change and action. To establish a community you may clear the three structural dimensions: domain, community and practice in the following sense:

1. When the community begins, the key **domain** issue, the joint enterprise is necessary to define in a way that follows the real interests and passion of members. Important task: focus on dimensions of the domain that particularly important for the daily business of the members. Focus on aspects of the domain members have a passion to work on it. Define the scope wide enough to bring a plurality and divert of people together, to have a good ground for new discussion, creativity and new visions. Built a case of action to describe the potential value of the community to start and get a rational for supporting it.

2. It is to find people who already network on the topic. It is the key issue to help the members to find an image how networking and working together on a **community** topic could be valuable for them. Important steps are: Identify potential coordinators and thought leaders as a key to community success. Interview potential members.

3. At the beginning you have to identify the common knowledge and resources the members for promote TOL need or to start changes in TOL. Important task: Create a preliminary design for the community. It should include a clear description of its scopes, the identified gaps, the hot topics, the background and role of members, an image of the experience sharing process and so on.

COALESCING

The second step (Coalescing /structure formation) is characterized by the formation of a basic structure, are outlined in the objectives, tasks and communication channels.

MATURING

In the third step (Maturing / aging) the actual work of the community begins: knowledge building and sharing. With increasing activity usually increases the number of members. Ongoing objectives, tasks and channels of communication will be evaluated and adapted to the needs of the members by the members themselves.

Seven keys how do you could cultivate a succesfull CoP in TOL?

In the development of COPs, there are many challenges. To be successful, have experience from organizational theory of E. Wenger and our practice of TOL, which will be presented here.

1. **Design a CoP for evolution**

Basic principles of the existence of CoP are constant changes. Adaptation to evolving members, the introduction of new members, alteration of resource documents, alteration of discourse traditions, changes in problems, changes in the structure of the COP. Experience in TOL-project:

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2. **Open a dialogue between inside and outside perspectives**

To look outside of the CoP is beneficial to develop their knowledge resources and to understand the different possibilities for achieving their development goals. An active communication of the values of the CoP domain outside is a main motivation, why people become active in a COP.

Experience in TOL-project:

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3. **Invite different levels of participation**

By some of core activists alone no COP is supported. For example, the young must be established for employees within the COP. It is important to open up different approaches for the involvement of all members in the COP. This also contributes to the plurality of angles of views in the specific problem to be treated.

Ideally, can be observed 3 groups:

- The core group which is actively leading the discussions and concrete projects and actions. It guides the organization of the group.

- A group of members who appear regularly and punctually, they bring something to the CoP, but do not play a major role.

- And a peripheral group that participates passively is testing the scope of their active participation.

    Experience in TOL-project:

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4. Develop both public and private community spaces

Even if the COP often is itself a non-institutional organization, so there should be here as well areas where meet subgroups, where issues are discussed independently of the current agenda, in which also individual problems and differences can be addressed without ago the 'plenum 'the COP to contact.

Tensions could arise when such problems can not be discussed away from the 'official stage'. Often form such sideshows also the birthplace for subsequent themes of COP, which then maintains this, albeit in perhaps changed constellation.

Experience in TOL-project:

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5. Focus on value

CoPs should review their value and focus on activities that promote it. Ensuring quality is also important for each COP. This concerns both the maintenance of the COP on a meta-level and the strengthening of the process of 'Situated Negotiation of Meaning'.

Experience in TOL-project:

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6. Combine familiarity and excitement

Also COPs live equally from their supporting structures and practices as well as from well-rehearsed fresh wind. CoPs should consciously organize the expected starting points for change as part of their structure and the opportunities for its membership. This is achieved most likely by an atmosphere of brainstorming and of balanced communication of conventional and radically new knowledge. The members of the CoP deal in that way with their issues together and better.

Experience in TOL-project:

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7. Create a rhythm for the community

Also the pulse of activities (a regular rhythm) contributes to the continued existence and a good 'working environment' within the COP. CoPs should organize a vital cycle of activities and events for its members. This allows members to meet regularly to reflect on and develop. CoPs should organize a vital cycle of activities and events for its members. This allows members to meet regularly to reflect on their issues and develop. A necessary level of commitment must be maintained. The rhythm or tempo determines how alive the activity of the community is. It comes down to cooperate not so fast, but not too unwieldy and overwhelming to in its intensity.

Experience in TOL-project:

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Check list/questionaire

In this section, a checklist will be presented as a list of questions. This may help the reader or those interested in TOL to organize a CoP into a region to promote regional, healthy school lunches.

(I will use the structure of 3 essential task/4 phases described by Wenger as an orientation for check points and questions) and following strategic aspects for implementation of CoP

Potential

Coalescing

Maturing

- Welche Ziele sollen mit einer CoP erreicht werden? (bspw. Fachaustausch, Problemlösung,)

- Welchen Nutzen bietet die CoP für die gemeinsame Unternehmung TOL? (bspw. Neue Lösungsansätze, Einbezug von neuen Akteuren durch Bündnis für TOL , …., Weiterbildung der Akteure)

- Was sind die Kriterien für den Erfolg oder Misserfolg? (bspw. Anzahl Beiträge)

- Wie wird die CoP vermarktet bzw. wie und welche Mitglieder will man gewinnen?

- Wie wird die CoP im Gemeinwesen organisatorisch verankert? (Zugang zu Ressourcen z.B. zeitlich, finanziell, etc.)

- Wie hoch ist der Formalisierungsgrad?

- Wie kann die CoP in die Organisationskultur integriert werden?

- Wie sieht die Legitimierung bzw. dem Zugang zu Ressourcen aus? (z.B. zeitlich, finanziell, Rechtfertigungszwang und Ergebnisdruck)

Description of the 6 CoP's

Here is the place for a short introduction about context and history and where the data about the CoP's come.

Nickname of the CoP

1.   Key domain issue according the identified gap or problem of TOL in COP or its core pur-pose

2.   Short description of the design of the regional CoP

3.   Practice, Effects

CoP Friesland NL

CoP Bihor RO

CoP Mecklenburg DE "Schulverpflegung – frisch, regional und schmackhaft mit Zutaten aus der regionalen Produktion in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern"

1. **Key domain issue according the identified gap or problem of TOL in COP or its core purpose**

   The main objective of the CoP is the development and implementation of age-appropriate, health-promoting, tasty and affordable school lunches using food products from domestic production.

   It should be attached to the quality standards of the DGE for school meals as a minimum standard. Participation opportunities for children and youth will be opened in the recipe of the menus.

   The activity of cooperation is linked to the country's action plan for health promotion and prevention in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

2. **Short description of the design of the regional CoP**

   At the initiative of the Association Agrarmarketing Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (AMV) network "Vital menu" was founded.

   Members of the CoP represent the following stakeholders from Mecklenburg-Vorpommern: Carrier of public health insurance (AOK Nordost Die Gesundheitskasse), Retail companies (Globus Handelshof St. Wendel & Co. KG, Betriebsstätte Roggentin/Rostock), logistics industry (Kraftverkehr Nagel GmbH & Co. KG), Wissenschaft (Zentrum für Lebensmitteltechnologie Mecklenburg-Vorpommern), state politics (Landesmarketing Mecklenburg-Vorpommern), Caterer (uwm Kulinaria GmbH & Co. KG), Supplier for kitchens and catering equipment (rogatec GmbH), the framework of the National Action Plan "IN FORM – German national initiative to promote healthy diets and physical activity" (Network units for school meals in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern)

   The CoP has restructured in 2015 in order to more co-operation with schools to set-in order to achieve concrete actions and measures the participation of pupils.

   At the initiative of the Association Agrarmarketing Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (MV) network "Vital menu" was founded.

3. **Practice, Effects**

   Collection of recipes with regionalism

   Caterers that provide lunch meals in schools in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, get valuable support. The recipe collection for the "Vital menus in school catering" can be requested by all caterers of the land. Originally, the recipes were conceived for use in larger canteen kitchens. Meanwhile, the approaches will be transferred to other solutions for school catering at the schools of the land.
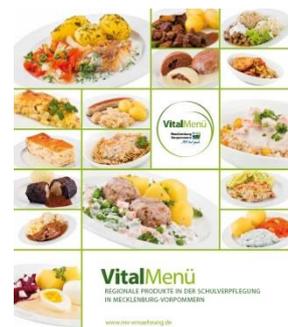
Overview of producers, processing companies, markets, distributors and traders

This overview give schools, caterer, cooks and parents an overview, who is who in the game of offering regional products for school meals in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

Actions and measuring with schools

Workshops, action days for informing and advising, competition for classes

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CoP NR Westphalen DE

CoP Bohemia CZ

CoP Ostrobothnia FI

A short Bibliography

r.meisel@sbwev.de