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Evaluation of the Innovation Circle Project

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Notodden 11.09.07

Åse Streitlien

1. INTRODUCTION

In January 2006, Telemark Educational Research was invited by the management of the Innovation Circle to evaluate the Innovation Circle Project (IC), which runs from 1 February 2005 to 1 November 2007. The overall objective of the evaluation is to examine, understand and document the impact of the IC project. We were asked to assist in various ways, such as:

- Evaluation of the project according to the specifications of the task
- A ppt feedback presentation at the midterm conference in May 2006
- A ppt feedback presentation at the IC Expo conference in May 2007
- A final report.

The present final evaluation report describes the results of the evaluation as they were analysed and interpreted in August 2007 (which means that the IC project was not yet completed at the time of publication of this report).

We shall first give a short description of the project based on its presentation on the IC project website (<http://www.innovationcircle.net/index.php/pageid/252>).

1.1 Background

The Innovation Circle is a European Union funded project (Interreg III B project) which aims to stimulate innovations and long term development in rural districts and smaller and medium-sized towns in the Baltic Sea Region. The project budget is EUR 2 291 838.75.

As figure 1 illustrates, the project partners come from Estonia (Türi), Latvia (Cesis), Lithuania (Alytus, Druskininkai), Norway (Finnmark, Spydeberg, Ostfold, Notodden), Poland (Suwalki), Russia (Pskov, Murmansk) and

Sweden (Robertsfors, Tranemo).



Figure 1: Innovation Circle Project Partners

Some of the partners in the IC project participated in the PIPE project (Interreg Baltic Sea Region Project III) which ran from June 2002 until September 2004. Therefore, some of the partners had worked together before and some networks had already been established..

In the description of the project on the IC website we can read about the challenges rural districts in Europe are facing, e.g. in many European countries urban areas are magnets that attract people from villages, smaller towns and rural districts, because cities offer more hope for jobs, education, cultural and leisure

activities, health care and better living standards. At the same time rural areas and small towns located far from the large cities or other growth centres face:

- decreasing and ageing population;
- out-migration of young people;
- high unemployment because of loss of jobs in traditional sectors;
- lack of novel ideas for increasing new jobs, businesses and industries;
- limited access to education.

These places may be small industrial towns, service centres, agricultural or other primary production areas, like fishing, forestry or mining areas, or they may rely on tourism and their cultural heritage. In order to increase their competitiveness, local authorities must look for different ways to open their inhabitants to innovations – as entrepreneurs, as consumers, and as citizens.

One objective of the Innovation Circle project is to address this challenge by training people from different sectors within the district/region about how to work together to change their communities into attractive places for living, working and visiting. According to the project description of IC, *innovation* is understood as

Creating value out of new ideas, new products, new services or new ways of doing things. The innovation process involves interaction and collective learning as well as interplay between researchers and those with practical knowledge and experience”.
(<http://www.innovationcircle.net/index.php/pageid/254>)

1.2 Activities

The Innovation Circle project is organized into three work packages: A. Innovation Academy, B. Local Actions and C. Innovation Forum.

A. Innovation Academy is a problem-based training programme to improve partners' ability to work with innovations and stimulate entrepreneurship in their regions. The Innovation Academy consists of 5 theoretical packs and 5 practical workshops for adults and 2 summer camps for upper secondary school students.

The participants were trained in topics like:

- a. Territorial development strategies;
- b. Designing attractive towns and places;
- c. Changing culture of governance;
- d. Entrepreneurship and business development;
- e. Managing of innovative projects.

Each theoretical pack consists of a self-instruction section, questions and references to various sources of literature, examples of best practice and case studies. The practical workshops are arranged at various locations for 3-4 days and consist of some theoretical learning and field work, where the participants are given concrete tasks related to the host town and region. The participants are meant to work on these tasks in transnational teams and deliver a feedback report to the local council. Training material is collected and translated into the national languages of the partners according to local needs and made available in print and electronically.

Innovation summer camps for young people are conducted during the project period. The objective is that the participants should learn about how to work as entrepreneurs, creativity techniques, geography, culture and history. The participants are expected to present their local projects and exchange best practices. They also will experience practical work. These young people are also expected to become resource persons in the local actions.

B. Local Actions

The main idea of the local actions is to create significant innovations, related to various sectors (not only the private sector).

The partners are expected to implement at least three actions and as a minimum one should have significant transnational cooperation aspects. There is no maximum number of actions. All actions should be related to a local/regional

need or address a need in the international markets which could benefit the local community/region. As an organisational structure for local actions, each partner should establish a local “Community Generator”. The core group of these generators is the participants of the Innovation Academy, which includes both professionals and young people. The name “Community Generator” is just a label. Alternatively, it could be called “Community Incubator” or simply “Innovation Group”. But the word “Community Generator” expresses the need for generating new ideas and the need for dynamic changes. “Incubator” gives closer associations to pure business incubation and that is why a new word was found which also incorporates both business and community aspects. The local actions are conducted in four steps:

- SWOT analysis¹ with transnational participation;
- A future workshop with elaboration of the Future Charter (Innovation Charter). The Charter should include proposals to the local council; decisions of the council and an elaborated plan of actions based on the Charter;
- Implementation of local action plans (approximately 50 actions in total for all partners) in transnational cooperation;
- Presentation of projects through dissemination activities and participation at the Innovation Circle EXPO 2007

C. Innovation Forum consists of an exchange of experience among project partners through annual conferences and the circulation of information (newsletters, video materials, a website, brochures, and research reports). External experts are assisting the project partners.

EXPO 2007 is viewed as the climax of the Innovation Circle project and around 50 local/regional/transnational projects are expected to be presented by the IC

¹ **SWOT Analysis** is a strategic planning tool used to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats involved in a project or in a business venture. It involves specifying the objective of the business venture or project and identifying the internal and external factors that are favorable and unfavorable to achieving that objective. The technique is credited to Albert Humphrey, who led a research project at Stanford University in the 1960s and 1970s using data from the Fortune 500 companies.

participants. A jury will assess the various projects and present awards in different categories. All three work packages are considered important tools in achieving the overall goal of the IC.

The main conferences and EXPO 2007 are open to any other institutions or individuals outside the project who are interested in community innovation and the experience gained by the IC participants.

The following figure 2 illustrates the organisational model of the IC project:

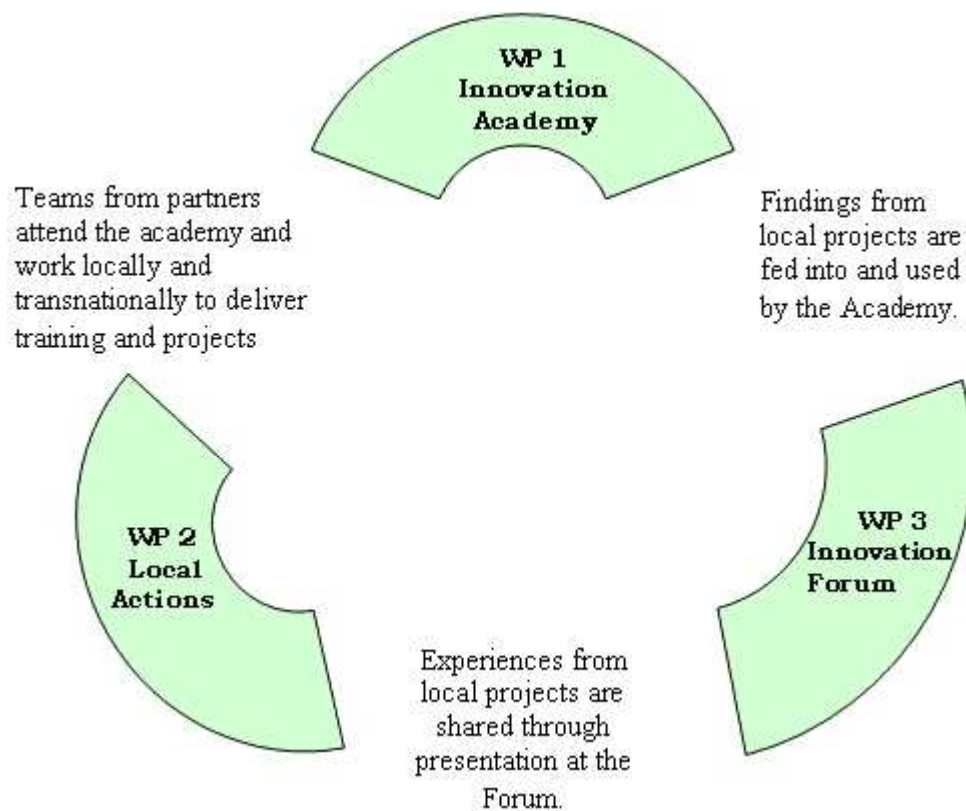


Figure 2: The Organisational Model of IC

Participants

IC activities and findings will be of interest to professionals, politicians and decision makers from regional and local administrations, representatives of schools, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and young people and other citizens and activists who are concerned with the quality of life in small towns and villages.

Expected Results:

- 100 adults and 100 students trained in the Innovation Academy who will continue to work as “agents of change” in their communities.
- A set of training materials developed by the Innovation Academy for further dissemination in partner countries.
- About 14 transnational experience exchange and learning workshops conducted.
- Increased ability of partner regions to further develop their communities and participate in international projects and cooperation networks.
- At least 50 innovative projects designed and introduced in partner regions
- A comparative study of innovation strategies.
- Innovation Forum established for future cooperation, knowledge and experience exchange and the development of an innovative environment in rural areas in the Baltic Sea Region.



2 EVALUATION DESIGN

2.1 Research Questions

The evaluation study was designed on the basis of the IC goals and structure. To be more precise, the specification from the IC management asked us to cover critical issues and questions, such as:

- How well is the IC project managed and organized?
 - Daily management/organizational model
 - Written documentation
 - Performance/quality routines and standards
 - Communication and community networking (activities, routines and skills)
- Innovation Academy; what is the impact/value of the training programme?
 - What is the key learning?
 - To what extent has the Academy been a valuable arena/tool for working with - local/regional innovations and entrepreneurship?
 - How useful have the workshops and summer camps been? What are the benefits?
- Innovation Forum; how do project partners perceive conferences and information sharing/materials?
 - The value/usefulness of the conferences
 - Attitudes and views regarding information material such as newsletters, videos, website, brochures and research reports
 - What are the benefits?
- Local Actions: how successful have the community groups been?
 - The organizational setup and the project implementation
 - Contribution from participants (motivation, participation, level etc.)
 - Key challenges and experiences from working groups. Barriers and benefits.

A central aspect in the evaluation is to study the links between the four dimensions outlined above in order to create a holistic picture of the quality of the project.

2.2 Methodological Approach

A common assumption is that evaluation is concerned with proving the success or failure of a programme. This myth assumes that success is implementing the perfect programme or project and never having to hear from management and participants again - the programmes or projects started will now run themselves perfectly. However, this does not happen in real life. Success means remaining open to continuing feedback and adjusting the projects accordingly. Evaluation is meant to give this continuing feedback.

Evaluating the Innovation Circle project is a challenging task. We are here concerned with a complex organisation, characterised by diverse activities and numerous participants, representing different countries, languages and cultures. We are considering human factors, not numbers and hard facts. How then can the results be measured? How should interventions be identified besides more “normal” development? What is due to the Innovation Circle, and what is due to other circumstances?

In the context of evaluation, different approaches can be chosen. As early as 1959, Kirkpatrick published his model of Evaluating Training Programmes. This was later revised in 1998. Kirkpatrick’s four level model is considered an industry standard by those involved in human relations and training.

The Innovation Circle includes more activities than merely a training programme; however, we found that the Kirkpatrick model could be adjusted for our use. With the four levels of his evaluation model as inspiration, we gathered data with the following issues in mind:

- Reactions of participants, coordinators, management – what they thought and felt about the organisational model, training and networking.
- Learning – the resulting increase in knowledge or capability.
- Changes in skills (applying learning to enhance behaviour).
- Effectiveness - improved performance because of enhanced behaviour.

We could also add results to this list, or the effects on business and environment resulting from the project. However, for us the key element will be the issue of *learning*; learning in transnational cooperation in a community of practice. The idea that learning involves a deepening process of participation in a community of practice has gained significant ground in recent years. *Communities of practice* (Wenger, 1998) have become an important focus within organizational development. The basic argument made by Wenger is that communities of practice are everywhere and that we are generally involved in a number of them - whether at work, school, home, or in our civic and leisure interests. In some groups we are core members, in others we are more marginal. The characteristics of such communities of practice vary; some have names, many do not. Some communities of practice are quite formal in organization, others are very fluid and informal. However, members are brought together by joining in common activities and by "what they have learned through their mutual engagement in these activities" (Wenger 1998). In this respect, a community of practice is different from a community of interest or a geographical community in that it involves a shared practice.

According to Wenger (1998), a community of practice defines itself along three dimensions:

- **What it is about** – its *joint enterprise* as understood and continually renegotiated by its members.
- **How it functions** - mutual engagement that binds members together into a social entity.
- **What capability it has produced** – the *shared repertoire* of communal resources (routines, sensibilities, artefacts, vocabulary, styles, etc.) that members have developed over time.

A community of practice involves much more than the technical knowledge or skill associated with undertaking some task. Members are involved in a set of relationships over time (Lave and Wenger 1991: 98) and communities develop around things that matter to people (Wenger 1998). The fact that they are organising around some particular area of knowledge and activity gives members a sense of joint enterprise and identity. For a community of practice to function it needs to generate and appropriate a shared repertoire of ideas, commitments and memories. It also needs to develop various resources such as tools, documents, routines, vocabulary and symbols that in some way carry the accumulated knowledge of the community. In other words, it involves practice: ways of doing and approaching things that are shared to some significant extent among members.

2.3 Evaluation Procedures

In the evaluation qualitative and quantitative elements are interlinked (Mertens 1998, Patton, 1987). Our cohort is the participants, the coordinators and members of the Steering Committee. What methods would give us answers to the research questions?

We considered it most appropriate to rely on the information supplied by those taking part in the project. This might be described as a phenomenological approach, the focus of phenomenology being on understanding a *concept* or *phenomenon*. The phenomenological approach is primarily an attempt to understand empirical matters, phenomena, from the perspective of those being studied (Schütz, 1962). Phenomenology serves as the rationale behind efforts to understand individuals by entering into their field of perception in order to see life as those individuals see it. In phenomenology, a non-dualistic ontology is emphasised in the sense that people's understanding is constituted in the relationship between the human being and the world. The aim is not to describe things "as they are", but to characterise how different phenomena appear to different people and which patterns we can identify in the results of our inquiry. Based on the assumptions that the most valuable information for us was what people participating in the IC project would tell us, the questionnaires

(Attachment I) and interview guides (Attachment II) were developed. The data were then collected by following methods:

- A questionnaire for coordinators
- A questionnaire for participants
- An in-depth interview for members of the Steering Committee, management and coordinators

In addition, we carried out some pilot studies in 2006. The method in use then was observations. The physical settings for these observations were workshops in Suwalki, Poland (Innovation Academy Pack 3). The observational protocol consisted of descriptive and reflective notes. Aspects we were focusing on were e.g. language use and communication within the groups, leadership of the groups, the content of activities, etc.

This pilot study gave us interesting information about the project, providing a general overview of the field which identified important areas worthy of further research. Articles and documents developed during the project period provided us with a basic background for the evaluation. We also found internal IC evaluation reports interesting, e.g. the evaluation of the Innovation Academy.

(<http://www.innovationcircle.net/index.php/pageid/252/articlepage/1/articleid/385>)

The mixed-methods design can be described in this way:

Methodology:	<i>Qualitative</i>	<i>Quantitative</i>	Qualitative
<i>Data Collection Approach:</i>	Exploratory observation Document studies	Survey	Personal Interview

Figure 3: Methodology

2.4 Rationale for Combining Methods

Surveys are a popular form of data collection when information needs to be gathered from large groups, where standardization is important. Surveys can be constructed in many ways, but the typical components are questions and responses. Responses may take the form of statements, rating on a scale (e.g. rate a given statement from “1” to “4” on a scale from “agree to “disagree”), they may be based on categories from which to choose, or may require estimates of numbers or percentages of time in which participants might engage in an activity.

A survey can be administered via computer-assisted calling, as e-mail attachments, and as web-based online data collection. We found a web-based survey attractive for a number of reasons. Firstly, because the data collected can be put directly into a database, thus the time and steps between data collection and analysis can then be shortened. Secondly, it is possible to build in checks that prevent out-of-range responses from being entered.

In our case, the questionnaires were presented by using the web-based programme QuestBack and designed with alternative possible answers combined with the possibility to add open comments. The alternatives for the respondents were on a scale with the following alternatives: “*I completely agree, I partly agree, I partly disagree and I entirely disagree*”. On some of the questions we added the category “*uncertain*”.

2.5 Data Analysis

In this section we describe the techniques used to analyse the data collected. We have analysed the respondents’ experiences and opinions regarding the IC project. Such information gives us an overall picture of tendencies. However, by using this technique we do not learn much about the respondents’ “view of a matter”. For us the open comments given by the respondents are just as valuable as frequency distribution. By giving the respondents the opportunity to give supplementary descriptions of crucial challenges in innovative work, we learn considerably more

about the quality of the processes in the project. The interviews also give more detailed insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the project.

In the analysis, the data were categorised according to three dimensions of agreement, representing what we call the level of consensus, i.e. consensus, less consensus, no consensus. Through that approach we have been able to identify issues where there seems to be a common view as well as issues where the respondents' opinions differ substantially.

Questionnaire data is presented as frequency distribution. The frequency distribution of the questionnaire is found in attachment 1 to this report.

3 FINDINGS

The presentation of the findings (interviews and surveys) is structured in accordance with the objectives of the evaluation. We focus mainly on the results from the survey, sometimes supplemented with the point of view of the interviewees. Finally, the findings will also be discussed against the background of Kirkpartick's evaluation model.

52 project participants and 14 coordinators responded to our questionnaire. This is a small sample size, but tables of frequencies give some insight into the experiences of the project participants and stakeholders. In this section we shall mainly use tables based on the participant questionnaire since there are only 13 coordinator respondents. Comments given are from both respondent groups. We interviewed four members of the steering committee of the IC project, the manager of the project and four coordinators. Our questions focused on a general view on the project (organisation, resources, objectives, transnational perspective, etc.), the process of activities and what was gained during the project period.

3.1 Project Organisation and Management

Our first questions were related to management of the project. (The organisational model of IC is described in section 2). We asked how well the IC project was managed and organised.

Table 1: The IC management is excellent (quest 2)

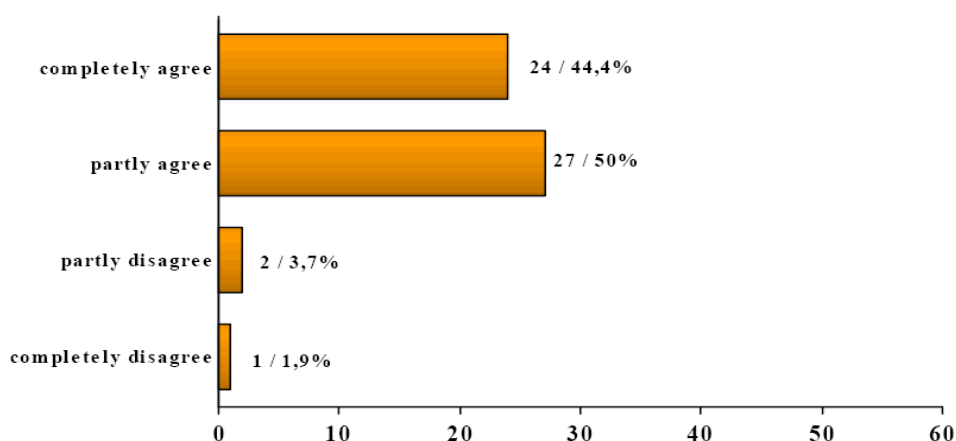


Table 1 shows us the results of the participant questionnaire. There was overall satisfaction with the management and the organisational model of IC. The majority of the respondents agreed, fully or partially, that the management of IC had been excellent. They also expressed their satisfaction with the organisational model. We find the same results when we look at the results of the coordinator questionnaire (attachment 1.2). The coordinators were even more positive than the participants in this matter. One explanation for this could be that the coordinators had more contact and communication with the management.

The respondents were asked about their view of freedom versus control in the project. The following quotations reflect their responses:

I think the project management has done a good work in balancing the demand for control in form of reports and "following" the project plan and on the other hand the local demand to form activities accordingly to the local situation.

However, the IC seems to have had a hesitant start. It is obvious that the IC project had some problems at the beginning of the project period. As stated in

interviews, it took some time before the partners fully understood what the IC project was about. The aims and objectives also seemed very ambitious. Some of the respondents missed more support from the management in the implementation of the project in the administrative districts. The activities and the progress of the project were difficult to understand in the beginning. As one respondent points out:

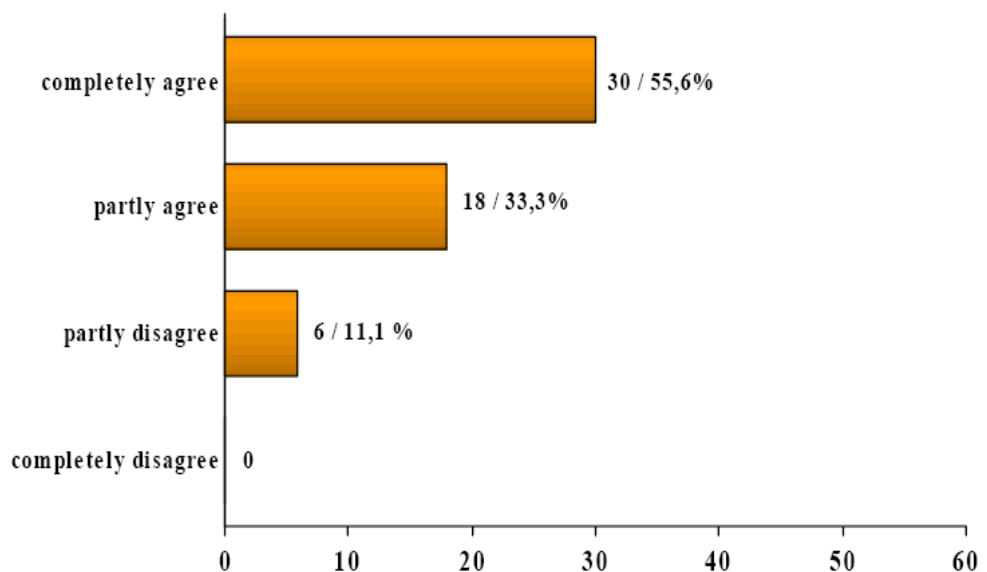
The control should have been carried out a little bit more focused from the beginning. What are our common goals, rules? How to manage international projects? I think we could have saved some time this way and perhaps have reached even better results.

Somewhat hard to adjust to different legislation in the Baltic Area and cultural differences a challenge that we have solved.

Management and organizational model functions very well, it allows to communicate and cooperate both with partners with the help of the management team and without it. This model gives an opportunity to work out the program of activities that suits our place best.

It is also interesting to note the overall satisfaction with the IC home page. All the coordinators completely or partly agree; indeed, nearly 90% of the participants have the same opinion.

Table 2: Written documents are available and easy to find on the website (question 4)



With regard to the communication process (question 6), the answers are not so unambiguous. In the question about communication, i.e. whether the communication process had been effective, 38.9% of the participants completely agree, 46.36% partly agree and 11.1% partly disagree.

One reason for this might be language problems. We observed in our 2006 pilot study quite considerable differences in the English language speaking skills of the participants. It is reasonable to assume that the language problem affects communication and transnational cooperation.

3.2 Innovation Academy

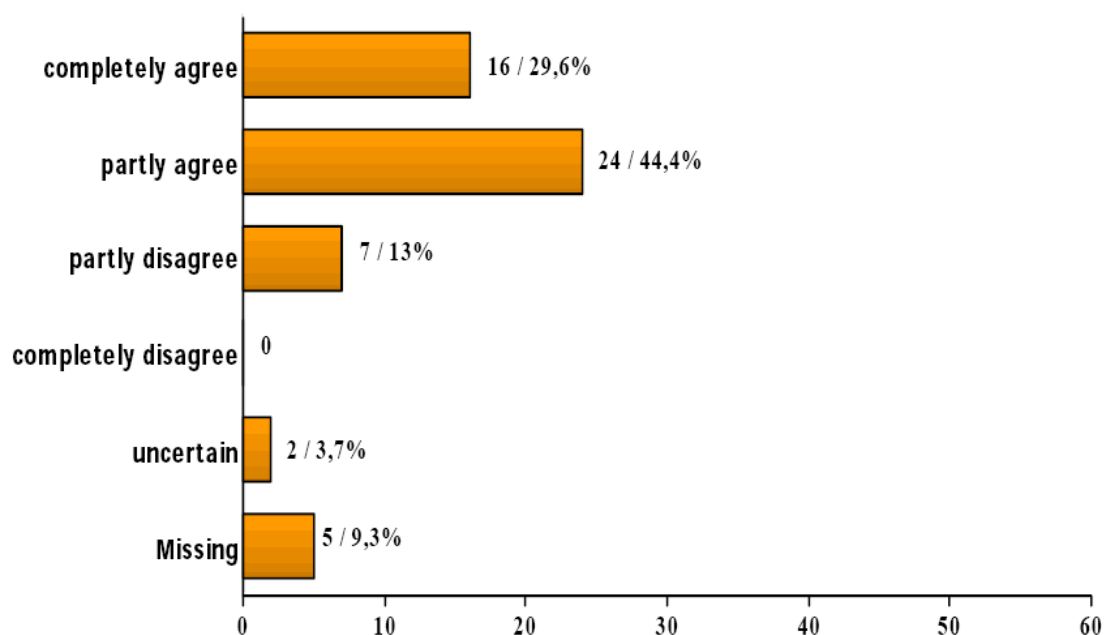


The Innovation Academy was evaluated in April 2007. This was an internal evaluation led by one of the experts, Christabel Myers, and will be commented in our discussion of the results. The results of our survey

indicate that the Innovation Academy as a whole has been of significant value for the participants. There are four questions concerned with opinions of the Innovation Academy (learning outcome, quality of lectures and literature, and practical use).

If we take a look at question 11 about the quality of the lectures, it shows the following distribution among the participants:

Table 3: The lectures have been very informative (quest 11)



Comments from the respondents tell us a little more:

The 4th and the 5th were most interesting. Great with a lot of Group Work and discussions during the last one. Perhaps it could have been more concentrated and on a higher level?

IA packs are really very useful for me. Yet it depended on how each partner used them.

IA packs were organized in such a way to combine both theory and practice. One of the ordinary, though very effective methods - to show examples, not just describe was used quite often.

It has been a BIG tool for me in my daily job

The main impression is that the participants give the Innovation Academy a positive assessment. The internal evaluation shows the same results. It is noteworthy that the Academy was considered to be improving from the very beginning to the very end. The participants were asked about their general impression at each event, regarding the quality and efficiency of the event. During the first three academies the majority described their general impression as “good”. However, the last academy was voted to be “excellent”.

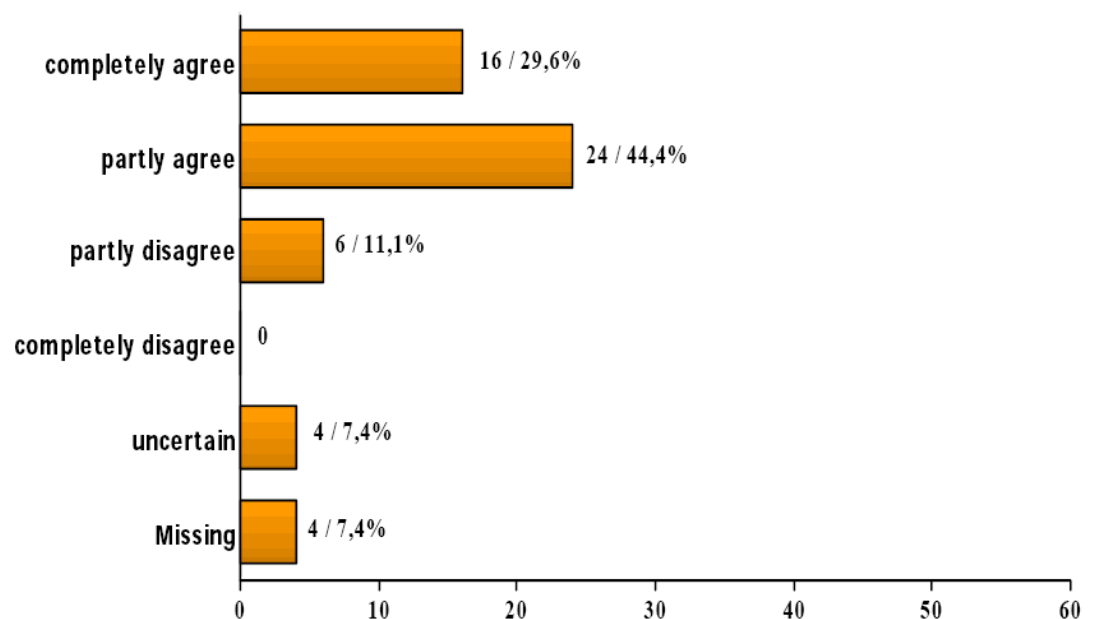
As the respondents see it, the strength of the project is the combination of theoretical knowledge presented in the Academy and discussions in the

workshops and local groups. The assessment of the packs gives similar results. Packs 4 and 5 are valued as the most successful ones. Some comments show us that reading and understanding the theories presented in the Academy has been hard work. Communication has not always gone smoothly. Not surprisingly, we find variation in English language skills that might have affected the learning process. The consequence for some participants is less benefit from presentations in English, a lower level of learning outcome and decreased participation in transnational discussion groups.

3.3 Innovation Forum

In general, the Innovation Forum was assessed as a positive element in the project. An important activity in Innovation Forum was the workshop. The exchange of ideas and experiences is highly valued by the partners. In the interviews this element was emphasised several times. We note that a successful workshop depends on communication skills and English speaking skills, and, as pointed out before, there are differences in how well the participants speak and understand English. This might be an explanation of the results on question 14 (participants).

Table 4: The benefits of the workshop activities have been significant (question 14)





We can take a look at some of the comments:

Many papers to read and learn from.

As one coordinator said in the interview, the IC project produced so many papers that it was difficult to keep control on all the documents. It was heavy work to read all the material; the content of papers was not always easy to understand due to theoretical perspectives on innovation that were new for him.

The comments on Innovation Forum are mainly positive.

Some of the Innovation Forums have been excellent.

It is an inspiration for new ideas and possibility for exchanging ideas.

Innovation Forum is quite useful for sharing experiences and ideas. Some successful experiences can be used by more than one partner.

It was interesting and very useful to understand the local projects, but the most important issue is to find cooperative partners.

As members of the Steering Committee pointed out, it will take time before new partners feel so comfortable that they can communicate freely, especially when they feel their English is poor. The partners who had participated in the PIPE-project earlier had therefore some advantage both in knowing each other and also in understanding the IC project. As one of the respondents say in his comment, international cooperating needs many steps before results are achieved.

3.4 Local Actions

Where we find less consensus is on questions about local actions. One of the questions here was how successful the community groups have been. These activities seem to raise significant challenges for both project participants and coordinators. The crucial element was how to implement new ideas in the local community. In their comments the respondents describe problems with involvement of politicians and other stakeholders in the local community, and lack of understanding for innovative work in their districts. This seems to be the weakest part of the project. We asked about the opinion of the community groups.

Table 5: The Community Groups are functional for the purpose (question 18)

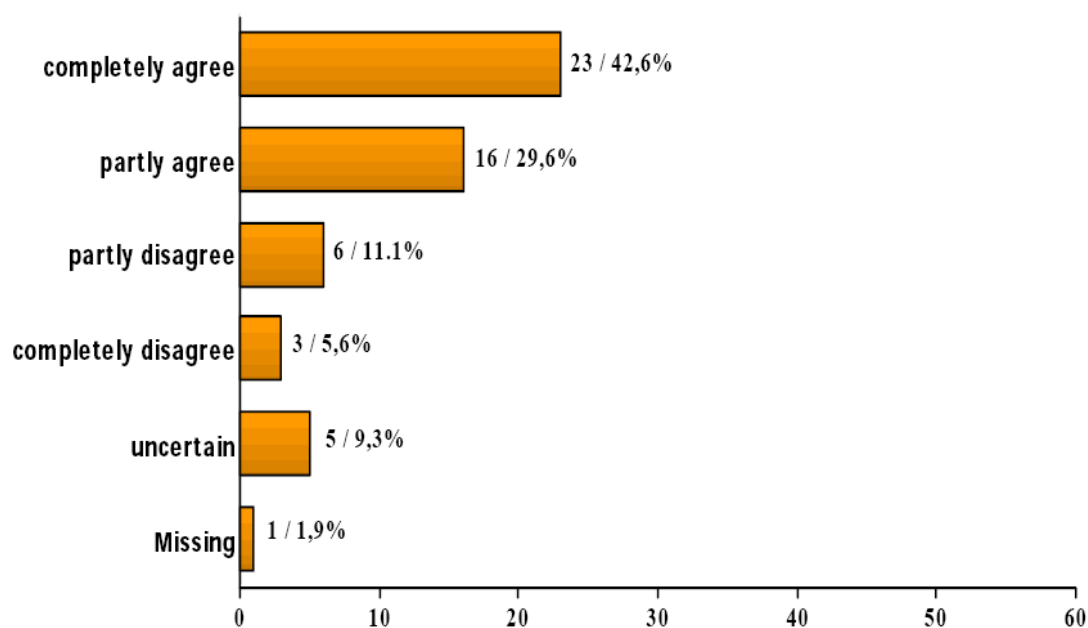


Table 5 shows that nearly 17% of the participants partly or completely disagree with the statement. Some of the respondents mention lack of people and resources as the main problem in the district. The community groups could have been more active.

We can see there have been some problems with extended involvement in the local communities. For example, lack of time seems to have been a recurring obstacle in local actions. In the interviews some coordinators pointed to the fact that they had to work with the Innovation Circle on top of their job. In addition to

the lack of time, another difficulty they met was a lack of interest among local stakeholders. Another difficulty was the turnover of people taking part in the local actions - people came and went. This created discontinuity in the local projects, and, as respondents expressed it, they often felt they had to start all over again. Some comments in the survey also indicate the same problems.

The actions have been carried out in my spare time and there have not been any additional resources to make it successful

We have had small personal resources for local activities.

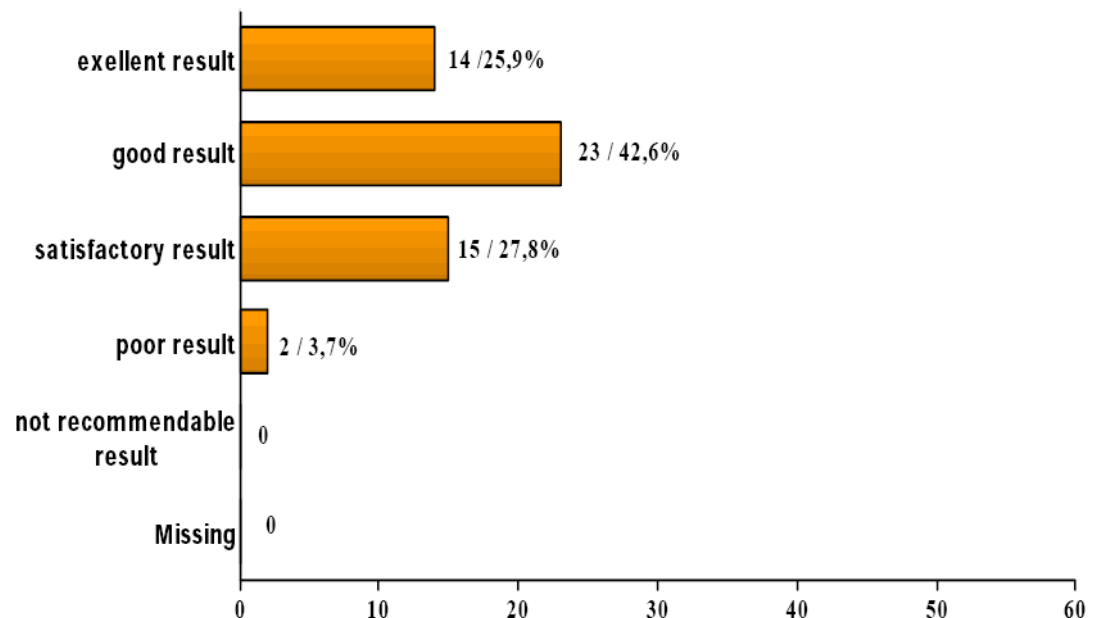
There is always too little manpower and too little money to be able to do all the things you want to do, but with better organisation of non-profit work we can reach very far.

Innovations and changes take time. There have to be resources in funding and human resources to support those changes.

The impact could have been better if the politicians were more involved.

We asked the respondents to give an assessment of the results of local projects.

Table 6: How will you characterize the results of local projects in your community? (Quest 33).



The comments show there are considerable differences in the partners' opinions. Some of the partners are very satisfied with their local projects and the progress.

Local projects are implemented well, despite of some difficulties in the beginning.

Local partners identify themselves with the activities and want to continue. The IC project model is really a good method. It gives multilevel engagement of local and international stakeholders.

Some projects were slower at the beginning, but later they were improved. We have learned a lot and now we can see what we should have done differently in the organisation of the local projects. And this is something that has an effect on how the "Local development forum" will organise its work in the future.

Others realise they still have a long way to go. The quality of local actions could have been better:

Not too good, there has been little understanding for the project

Some actions are too small, and for some I cannot see the result.

Some members of the Steering Committee described the IC project as a success; others admitted that they had not succeeded so well in their local projects.

According to the manager of the IC project, it has been a challenging task to develop quality in the local projects. Local actions involve people who do not know the Innovation Circle ideas and principles so well. In our view, the coordinators' contributions are one of the significant success factors.

Implementing new ideas takes time. We can imagine it has been hard work getting people involved, arguing with politicians and other stakeholders and keeping the spirit high in the local projects. The coordinators seem to have played a crucial role in the success of the project. One problem in some communities was that the coordinators changed during the project period. Obviously such changing of the people in charge at the local level affected the continuity of the work.

We may also assume that coordinators have different competences in innovative work. Such differences will affect the quality of the local activities.

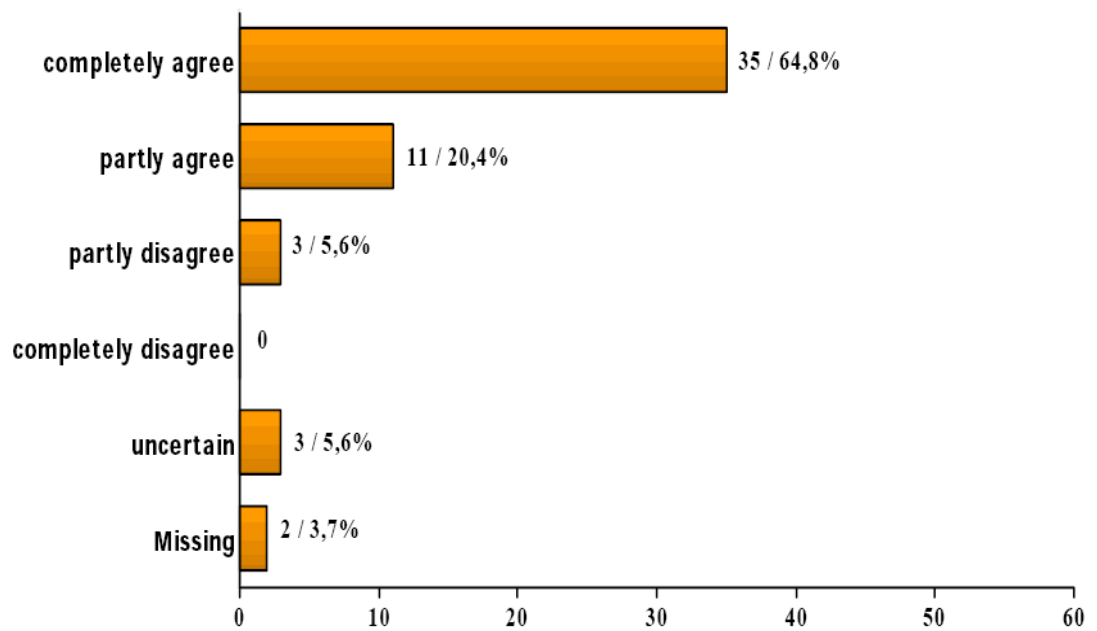
3.5 Changes in skills and competence?

A critical level of Kirkpartick's evaluation model is the third step – the level that measures the transfer that has occurred in the learner's behaviour due to the

training programme. It is pertinent to ask: Are there newly acquired skills, knowledge, or attitudes being applied in the everyday environment of the participant? It is said that this level represents the truest assessment of the effectiveness of a training programme. However, measuring at this level is difficult as it is often impossible to predict when the change of behaviour will occur. Thus, it requires decisions in terms of when to evaluate, how often and how to evaluate.

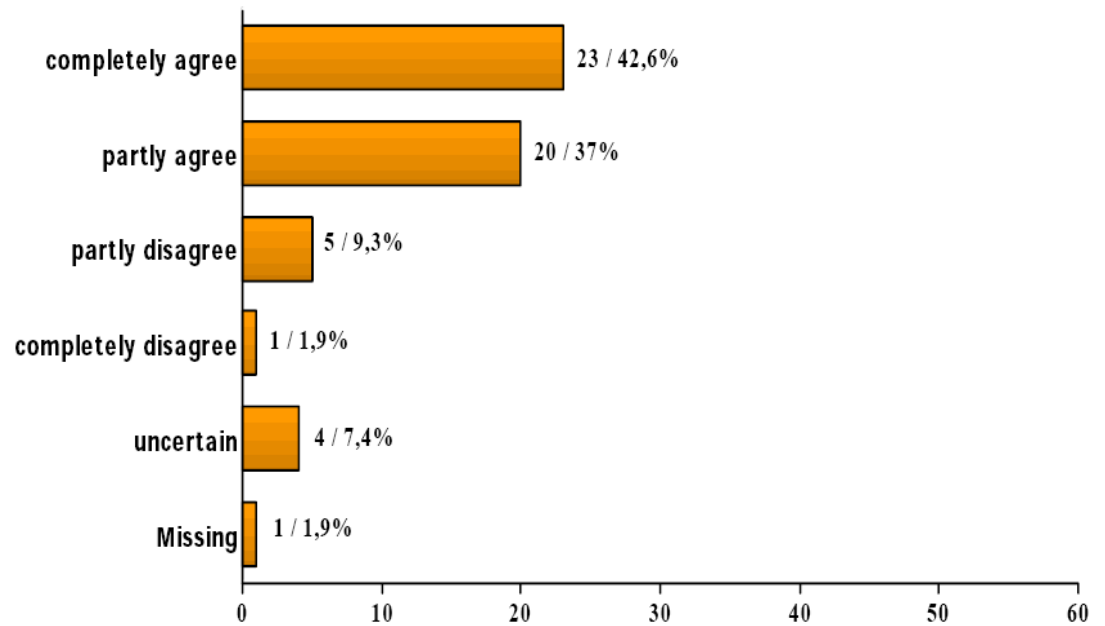
In a summative evaluation we will not have the opportunity to document the process of the project; neither follow “the change of behaviour”. Therefore, in our survey we asked the respondents to assess whether they had increased their knowledge and competence in international and innovative work:

Table 7: Participation in IC has given me increased competence in international cooperation (question 29)



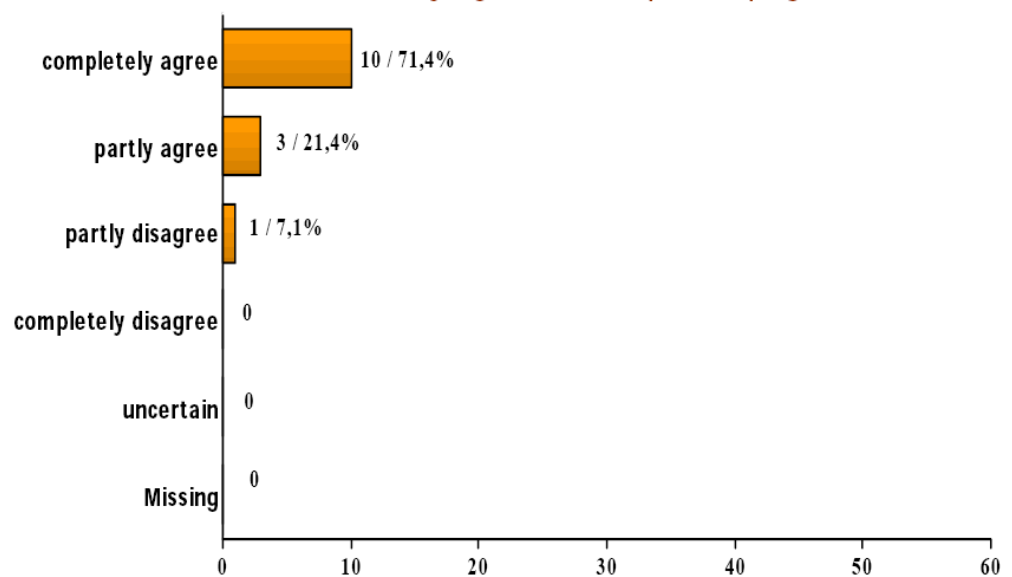
85% of the participants completely or partly agree that they have increased their competence in international cooperation. The benefits of taking part in the IC projects are obvious on this aspect.

Table 8: Participation in IC has given me more knowledge of what is needed for sustainable development (question 32)



The questions to the coordinators differ to some degree from the questions to the participants because of the coordinators' leading role in innovative work. For example, we asked the coordinators following question:

Table 9: Participation in IC has given me higher self- confidence in carrying out development projects (quest 33- coordinator).



As we can see, there is agreement that participation in the IC project has improved

the coordinators' self-confidence on this matter. High self-confidence and motivation for development work are needed if you want to become an agent of change and innovation.

A comment about the impact of IC on the local level supplements the impressions of changes in skills, not only in the case of the project participants, but also in the local communities.

A higher understanding among politicians and civil servants of the need to work transnational - to "lift our heads up" and see the world around us with all similarities and differences. I also think the IC has contributed to us becoming more open minded and allowing in discussions.

A great way of working with project implementation. I am a IC-fan absolutely. Knowledge and inspiration in international meetings and a lot of work at home!

As summary, there are positive statements about the IC project and the methods introduced for innovation and project implementation.

4 DISCUSSION



Figure 4: EXPO 2007 in Alytus

One of the expected results of the Innovation Circle project was to create at least 50 innovative projects, designed and introduced in partner regions. At the EXPO 2007, the manager of the Innovation Circle project, Alf Johansen, could refer to 53 local projects. Another expected result was 100 adults and 100 students trained in the Innovation Academy. About 150 adults and 200 youths, during two summer camps, have been trained in the project. These results are countable results that tell their story about the project.

What Telemark Research Institute was asked to do, was to evaluate the quality of Innovation Circle as a training program in innovative work. Did the IC project meet its goals and objectives on this background? We cannot give a clear yes or no to that question. We do not know the potential of the project, and we do not know exactly what is due to the project and what activities and results are due to other variables. The goals of the Innovation Circle project are ambitious and deal with essential aspects and critical questions for the local communities and their future. We cannot at this stage judge the long-term impact of the project.

4.1 Learning and Changes in Skills

Returning to Kirkpatrick's evaluation model, one of the criteria of success was learning – the resulting increase in knowledge or capability. The measurement of processes of learning and the evaluation of the outcomes of the developmental learning process pose major problems in research design. This is especially true where the desired outcomes are broadly defined as changes in interpersonal behaviour: a complex of knowledge, values, perceptions, and behavioural skills.

We observe thus a number of challenging and critical elements in the IC project. The following list indicates the most striking ones:

- Language problems
- Different cultures
- The understanding of innovation
- Problems with extended involvement in the local communities
- The balance between planning processes and implementation of the plans
- Innovative work takes time (also for people involved).

What is viewed as great progress in one area might be viewed as little progress in another. As mentioned in section 2, success is remaining open to continuing feedback and adjustment. Some of the comments point to a lack of continuity of the people involved, e.g. in some of the local communities the function of the coordinator changed several times. Young people participating in the project are moving to larger centres to acquire education and work skills. This affected the progress of local activities in some of the districts.

Nevertheless, the reactions of the participants are overwhelmingly positive. With regard to the learning which has taken place, the participants have increased their knowledge of innovation and entrepreneurship, and also increased their understanding of common challenges for European countries. In their own view they have developed their capability and skills in innovative work, international cooperation and how to establish partnerships and social networks.

Members have been involved in a set of relationships over time (Lave and Wenger 1991, Wenger, 98). According to Wenger, communities of practice develop around things that matter to people. Our findings indicate that the IC project has contributed to common knowledge and activity, giving the members a sense of joint enterprise and identity. As mentioned earlier, for a community of practice to function it needs to generate and appropriate a shared repertoire of ideas, commitments and memories.

The organisational model of IC (consisting of Innovation Academy, Innovation Forum and Local Actions) gave the participants rich learning opportunities. The Innovation Academy supported them with theories for innovative work, and the workshops gave them the opportunity to exchange ideas and discuss common challenges. However, the link between the theory presented at the academy and practical work in the local communities has not always been easy to grasp.

The partner countries involved in IC have different historical and political backgrounds. In spite of this, the transnational element in the project seemed to have been a significant motivating factor for success. This aspect is also strongly emphasised by members in the Steering Committee and the manager of the IC project. One of the key outcomes is that transnational networks between the partners appear to have been established. The years to come will show us the sustainability of the development work in the local communities. So far it can be stated that people participating in the IC project are highly motivated for developing their local communities. They were willing to learn and increase their expertise in cooperation with partners from other countries and districts. They were willing to work hard to achieve their goals and ambitions. The organisational model of the project seems to be functional for the purpose.

4.2 Final Comments

..to change their communities into attractive places for living, working and visiting.

The long term effect of the IC project will appear in the future. Some of the partners give optimistic statements about continuation: “They (the partners) are building *the New Europe* where Europeans are meeting challenges and solving problems by working cross border”.

Probably, innovative work will continue in some way or another in the participating municipalities. Transnational networks will most likely be established. Key persons in the municipalities are trained in innovative work and entrepreneurship. However, some success factors should be in place. We would like to call attention to

- The importance of governance and community building for an effective innovative culture.
- The importance of strategic thinking based on appropriate analysis (SWOT or similar analytical instruments).
- The integral causal link between local autonomy and the effective development of an innovative culture.
- The interlink between innovation and appropriate financial and human resources.

As a final conclusion, the strongest success factor is the human factor. The strength of the Innovation Circle project is the people involved. The willingness to participate and learn from partnership is a crucial indicator for success. The structure and the management of Innovation Circle stimulated cooperation between different generations, different sectors and areas of activities and different levels of authority. The involvement of youth gives promising perspectives.

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Figures:

Figure 1: Innovation Circle partners, p. 6:

Figure 2: the Organisational Model of IC, p. 10

Figure 3: Methodology, p. 16

Tables:

Table 1: The IC Management, p. 19

Table 2: Written documents, p. 20

Table 3: Lectures of Innovation Acedmy, p. 22

Table 4: The benefits of work shops, p.23

Table 5: The Community Groups, p. 25

Table 6: The results of local projects, p.26

Table 7: Increased competence, p. 28

Table 8: Knowledge, p. 29

Table 9: Self-confidence, p.30

6 Attachment

Attachment 1: Frequency tables participants

Attachment 2: Frequency table coordinators

Attachment 3: Interview Guide

Innovation Circle – participant – frequency tables

Q1 Gender

	Frequency	Percent
1 Female	29	53,7
2 Male	25	46,3
Total	54	100,0

Q2 The IC management is excellent

	Frequency	Percent
1 completely agree	24	44,4
2 partly agree	27	50,0
3 partly disagree	2	3,7
4 completely disagree	1	1,9
Total	54	100,0

Q3 The IC organizational model is excellent

	Frequency	Percent
1 completely agree	27	50,0
2 partly agree	25	46,3
3 partly disagree	2	3,7
Total	54	100,0

Q4 Written documents are available and easy to find on the website

	Frequency	Percent
1 completely agree	30	55,6
2 partly agree	18	33,3
3 partly disagree	6	11,1
Total	54	100,0

Q5 The IC project is characterized by high quality in activities and routines

	Frequency	Percent
1 completely agree	24	44,4
2 partly agree	25	46,3
3 partly disagree	5	9,3
Total	54	100,0

Q7 The communication process has been effective

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	21	38,9
	2 partly agree	25	46,3
	3 partly disagree	6	11,1
	Total	52	96,3
Missing	0	2	3,7
Total		54	100,0

Q8 The resources are used effectively

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	22	40,7
	2 partly agree	27	50,0
	3 partly disagree	3	5,6
	Total	52	96,3
Missing	0	2	3,7
Total		54	100,0

Q10 I have learned a lot by participating in the Innovation Academy

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	23	42,6
	2 partly agree	21	38,9
	3 partly disagree	2	3,7
	5 uncertain	3	5,6
	Total	49	90,7
Missing	0	5	9,3
Total		54	100,0

Q11 The lectures have been very informative

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	16	29,6
	2 partly agree	24	44,4
	3 partly disagree	7	13,0
	5 uncertain	2	3,7
	Total	49	90,7
Missing	0	5	9,3
Total		54	100,0

Q12 The literature provided has been interesting

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	16	29,6
	2 partly agree	26	48,1
	3 partly disagree	3	5,6
	4 completely disagree	1	1,9
	5 uncertain	4	7,4
	Total	50	92,6
Missing	0	4	7,4
Total		54	100,0

Q13 The IA has been a valuable tool for working with innovation and entrepreneurship

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	21	38,9
	2 partly agree	22	40,7
	3 partly disagree	5	9,3
	5 uncertain	2	3,7
	Total	50	92,6
Missing	0	4	7,4
Total		54	100,0

Q14 The benefits of the workshop activities have been significant

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	16	29,6
	2 partly agree	24	44,4
	3 partly disagree	6	11,1
	5 uncertain	4	7,4
	Total	50	92,6
Missing	0	4	7,4
Total		54	100,0

Q15 The objectives of the IA have been clearly defined

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	22	40,7
	2 partly agree	19	35,2
	3 partly disagree	5	9,3
	4 completely disagree	1	1,9
	5 uncertain	3	5,6
	Total	50	92,6
Missing	0	4	7,4
Total		54	100,0

Q16 There have been educational benefits for me in the IA

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	25	46,3
	2 partly agree	21	38,9
	3 partly disagree	1	1,9
	5 uncertain	3	5,6
	Total	50	92,6
Missing	0	4	7,4
Total		54	100,0

Q18 The Community Groups are functional for the purpose

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	23	42,6
	2 partly agree	16	29,6
	3 partly disagree	6	11,1
	4 completely disagree	3	5,6
	5 uncertain	5	9,3
	Total	53	98,1
Missing	0	1	1,9
Total		54	100,0

Q19 I have learned a lot about project implementation

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	22	40,7
	2 partly agree	21	38,9
	3 partly disagree	7	13,0
	5 uncertain	4	7,4
	Total	54	100,0

Q2 I have been highly motivated for local actions

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	26	48,1
	2 partly agree	20	37,0
	3 partly disagree	6	11,1
	Total	52	96,3
Missing	0	2	3,7
Total		54	100,0

Q22 The group work went smoothly

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	18	33,3
	2 partly agree	26	48,1
	3 partly disagree	7	13,0
	Total	51	94,4
Missing	0	3	5,6
Total		54	100,0

Q2 The time allocated for use in local projects are appropriate for the purpose

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	9	16,7
	2 partly agree	24	44,4
	3 partly disagree	7	13,0
	4 completely disagree	5	9,3
	5 uncertain	4	7,4
	Total	49	90,7
Missing	0	5	9,3
Total		54	100,0

**Q25 It has been useful sharing material
(newsletters, videos, brochures etc.)**

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	27	50,0
	2 partly agree	20	37,0
	3 partly disagree	3	5,6
	Total	50	92,6
Missing	0	4	7,4
Total		54	100,0

Q2 The summer camps have been successful

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	25	46,3
	2 partly agree	11	20,4
	3 partly disagree	1	1,9
	5 uncertain	13	24,1
	Total	50	92,6
Missing	0	4	7,4
Total		54	100,0

**Q28 Participation in IC has given me higher self-
confidence in carrying out development projects**

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	32	59,3
	2 partly agree	19	35,2
	5 uncertain	1	1,9
	Total	52	96,3
Missing	0	2	3,7
Total		54	100,0

**Q2 Participation in IC has given me increased
competence in international cooperation**

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	35	64,8
	2 partly agree	11	20,4
	3 partly disagree	3	5,6
	5 uncertain	3	5,6
	Total	52	96,3
Missing	0	2	3,7
Total		54	100,0

Q30 Participation in IC has given me engagement for innovation and development in local areas

	Frequency	Percent
1 completely agree	24	44,4
2 partly agree	27	50,0
3 partly disagree	3	5,6
Total	54	100,0

Q3 Participation in IC has given me increased understanding of international challenges in Europa

	Frequency	Percent
1 completely agree	37	68,5
2 partly agree	14	25,9
3 partly disagree	2	3,7
5 uncertain	1	1,9
Total	54	100,0

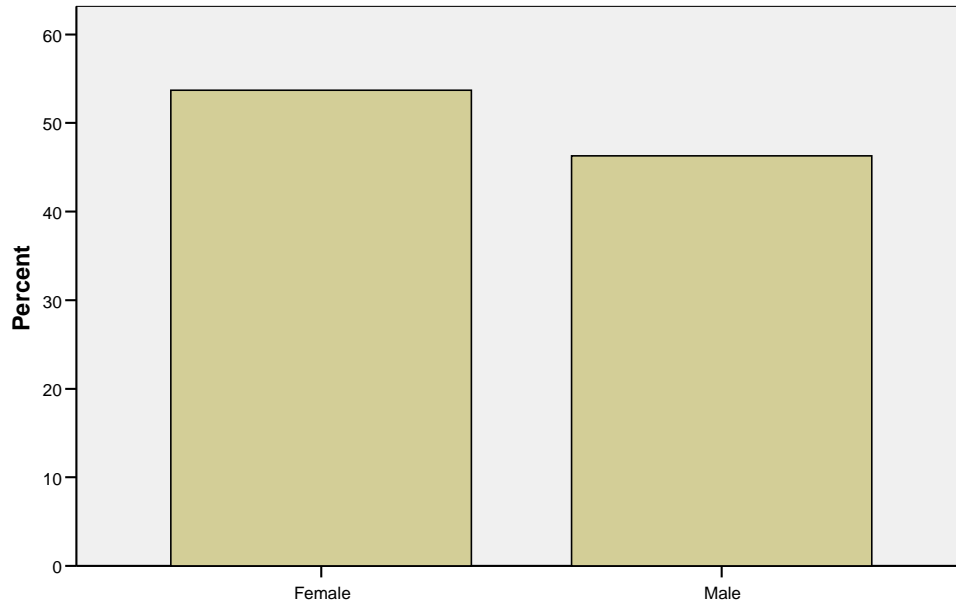
Q32 Participation in IC has given me more knowledge of what is needed for sustainable development

	Frequency	Percent
1 completely agree	23	42,6
2 partly agree	20	37,0
3 partly disagree	5	9,3
4 completely disagree	1	1,9
5 uncertain	4	7,4
Total	53	98,1
Missing 0	1	1,9
Total	54	100,0

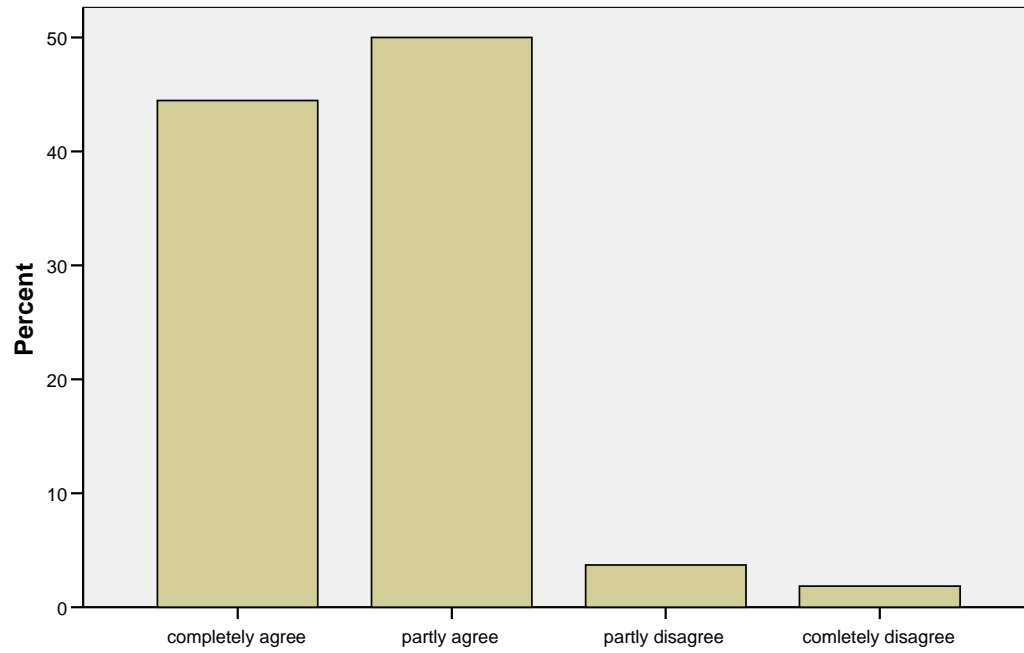
Q33 How will you characterize the results of local projects in your community?

	Frequency	Percent
1 excellent result	14	25,9
2 good result	23	42,6
3 satisfactory result	15	27,8
4 poor result	2	3,7
Total	54	100,0

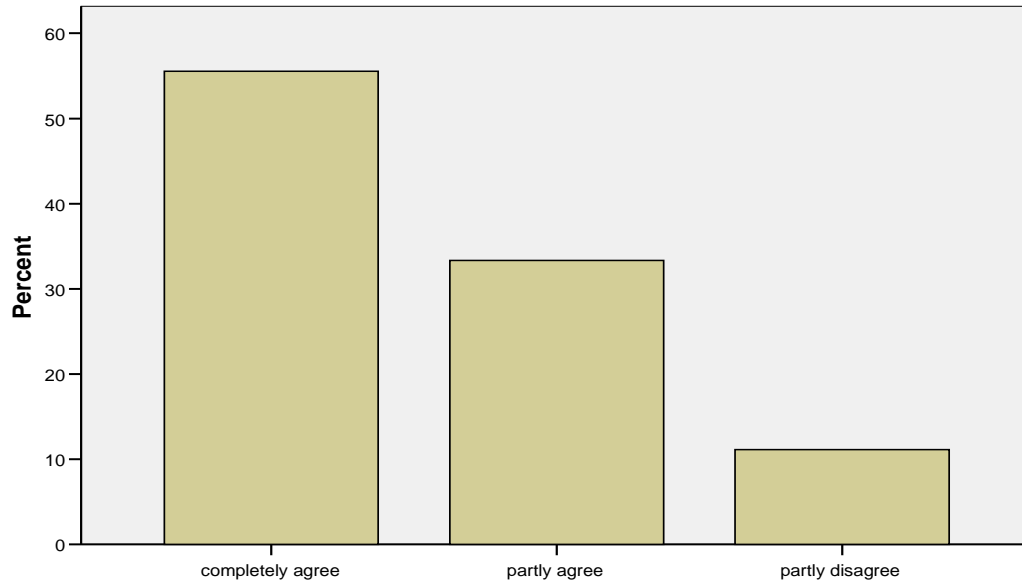
Gender



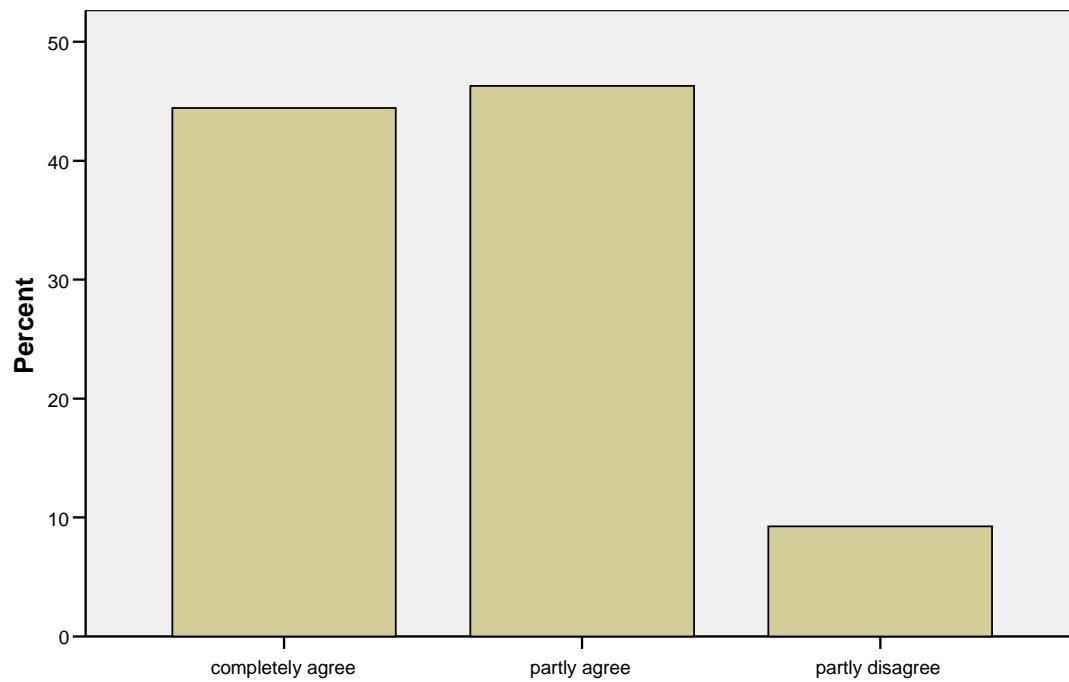
The IC management is excellent



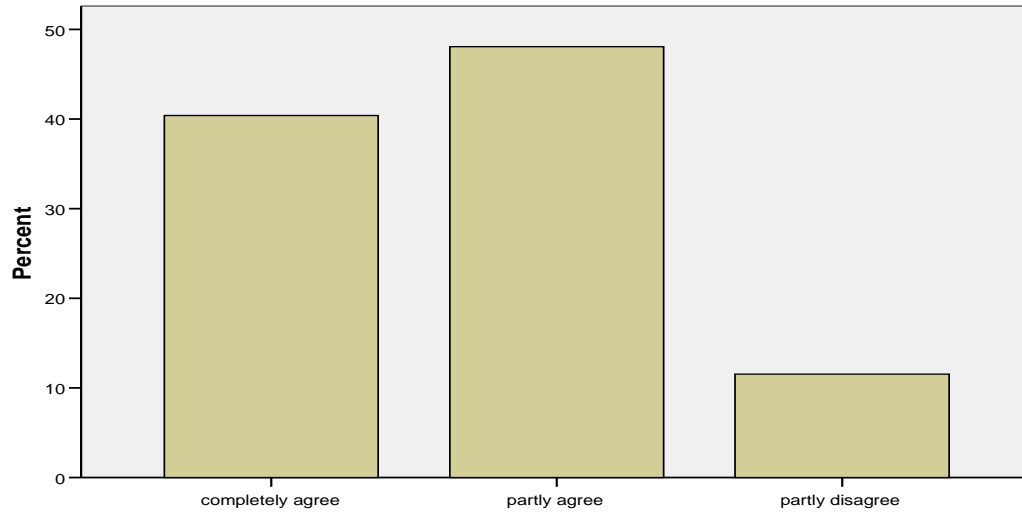
Written documents are available and easy to find on the website



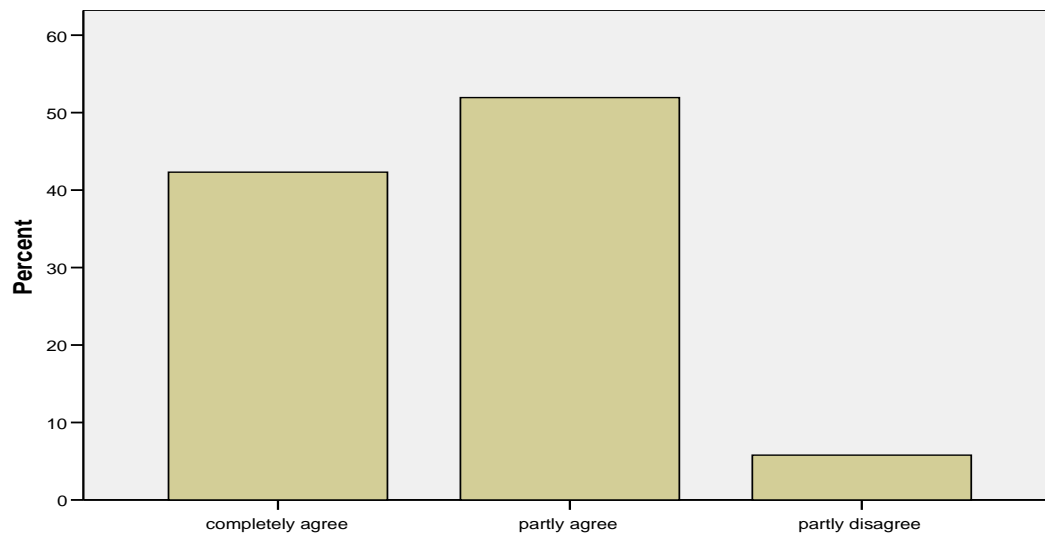
The IC project is characterized by high quality in activities and routines



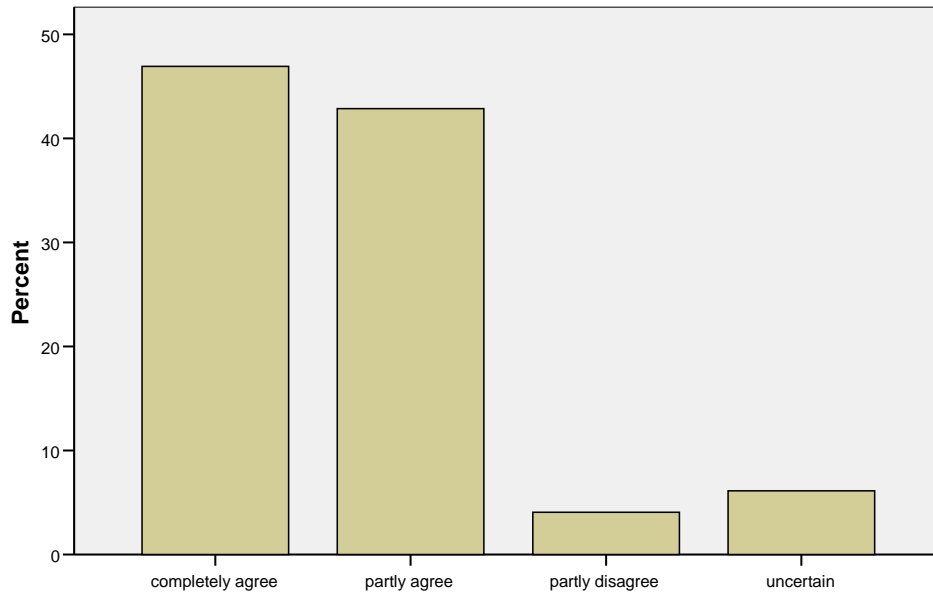
The communication process has been effective



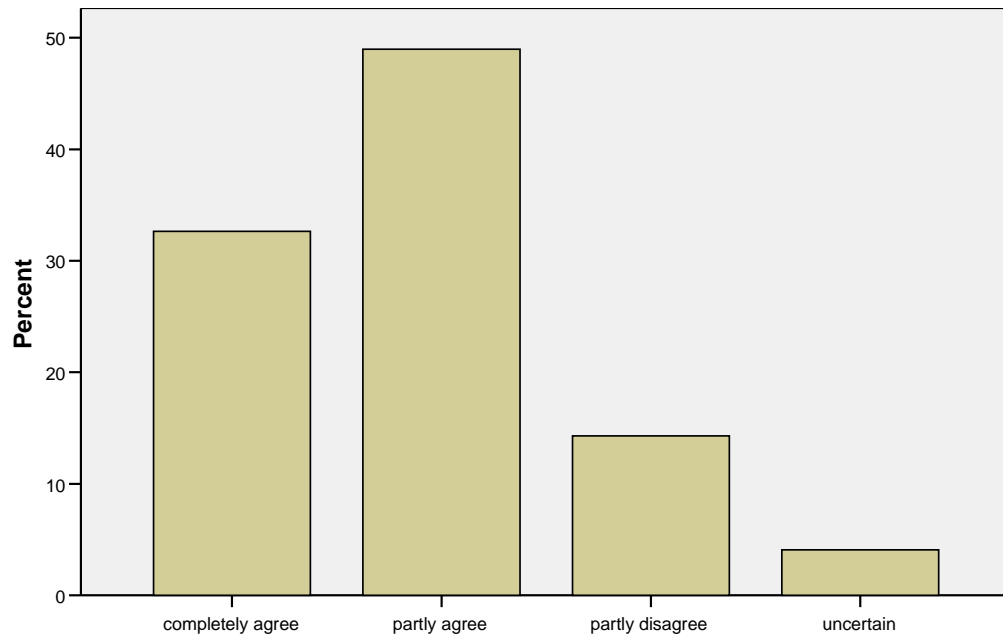
The resources are used effectively



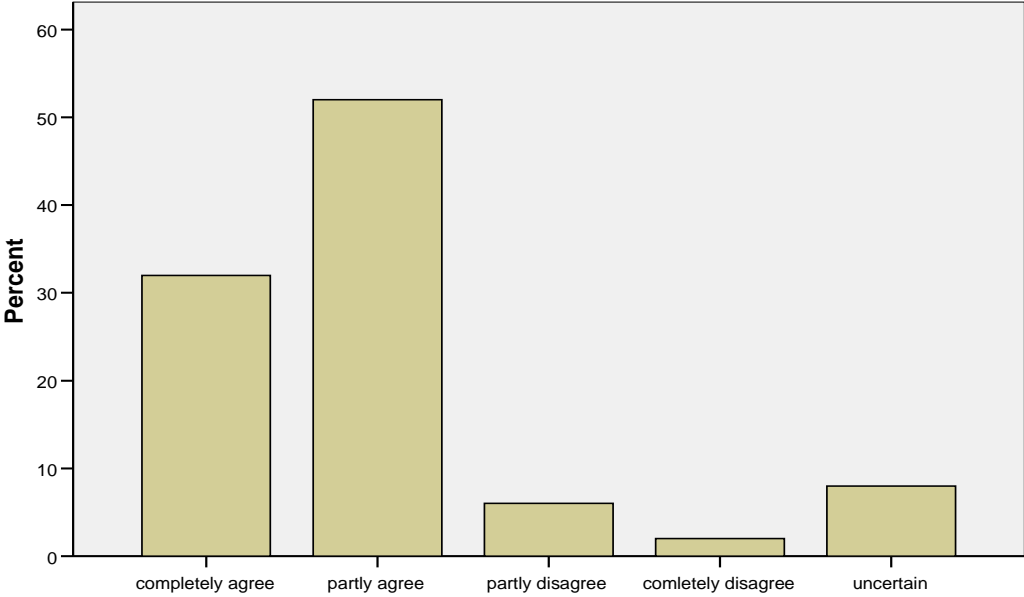
I have learned a lot by participating in the Innovation Academy



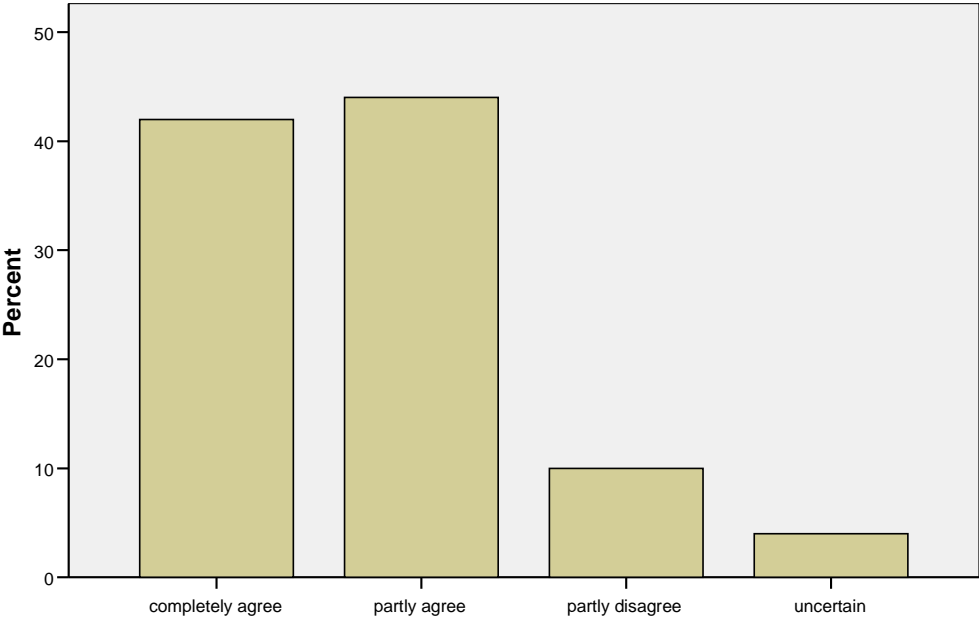
The lectures have been very informative



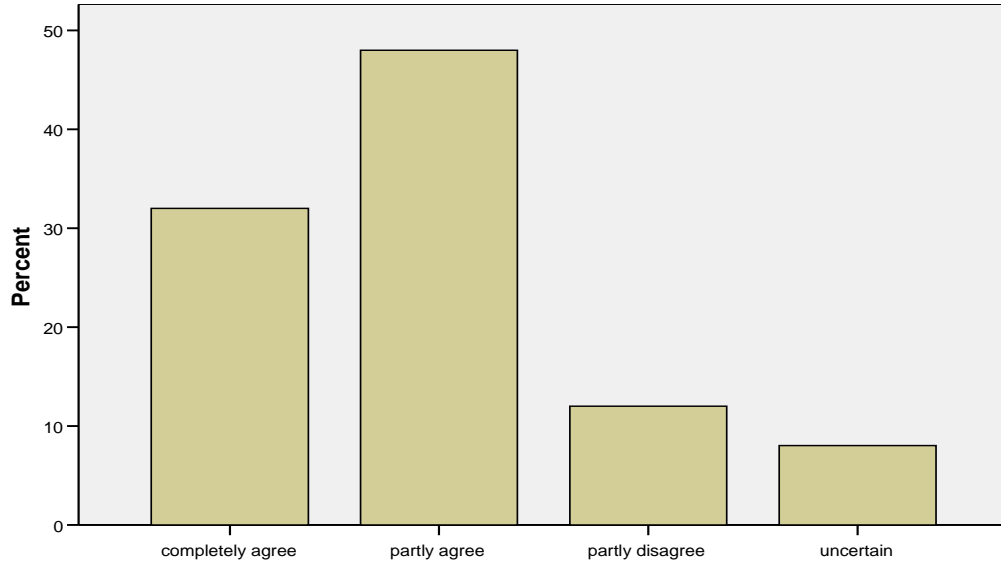
The literature provided has been interesting



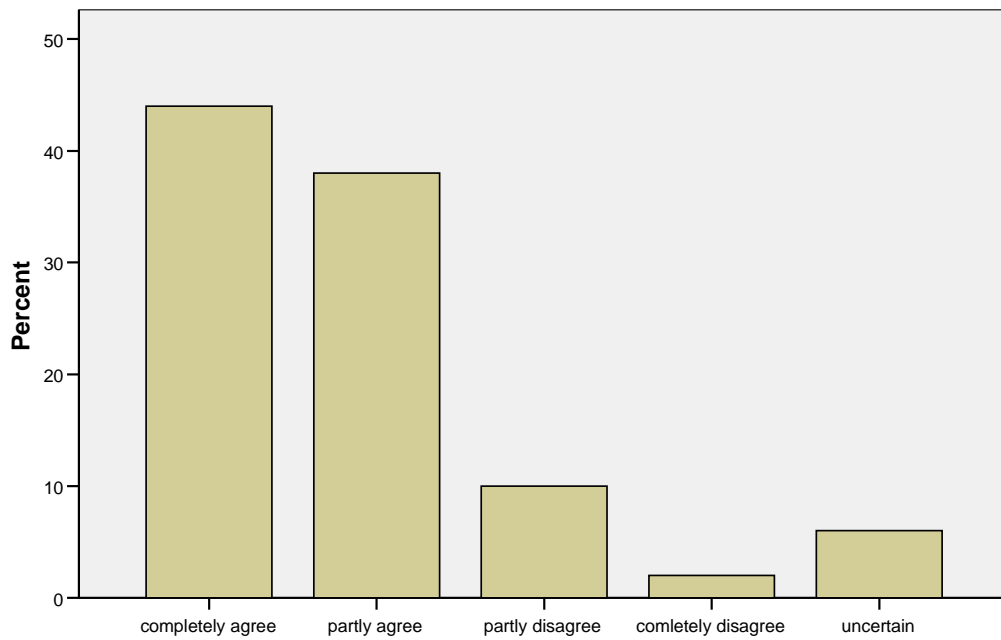
The IA has been a valuable tool for working with innovation and entrepreneurship



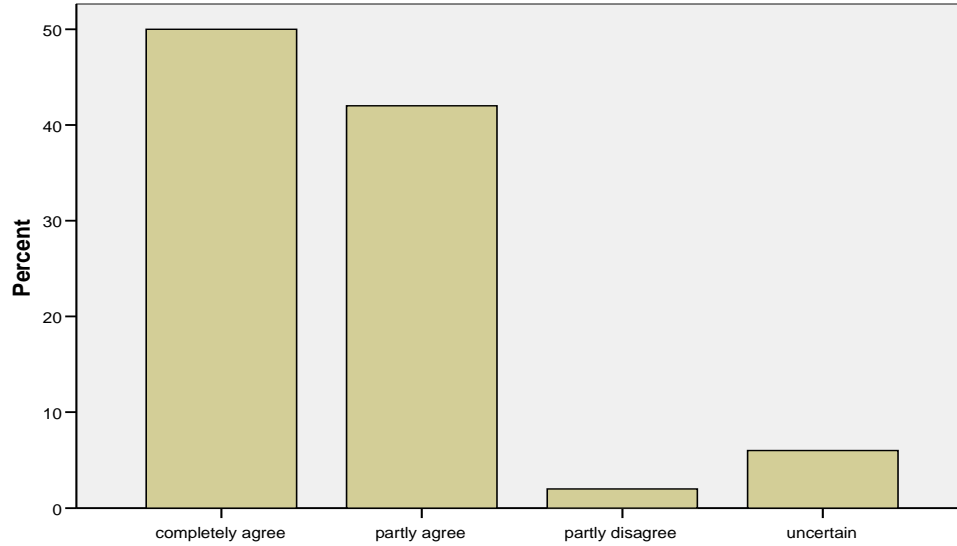
The benefits of the workshop activities have been significant



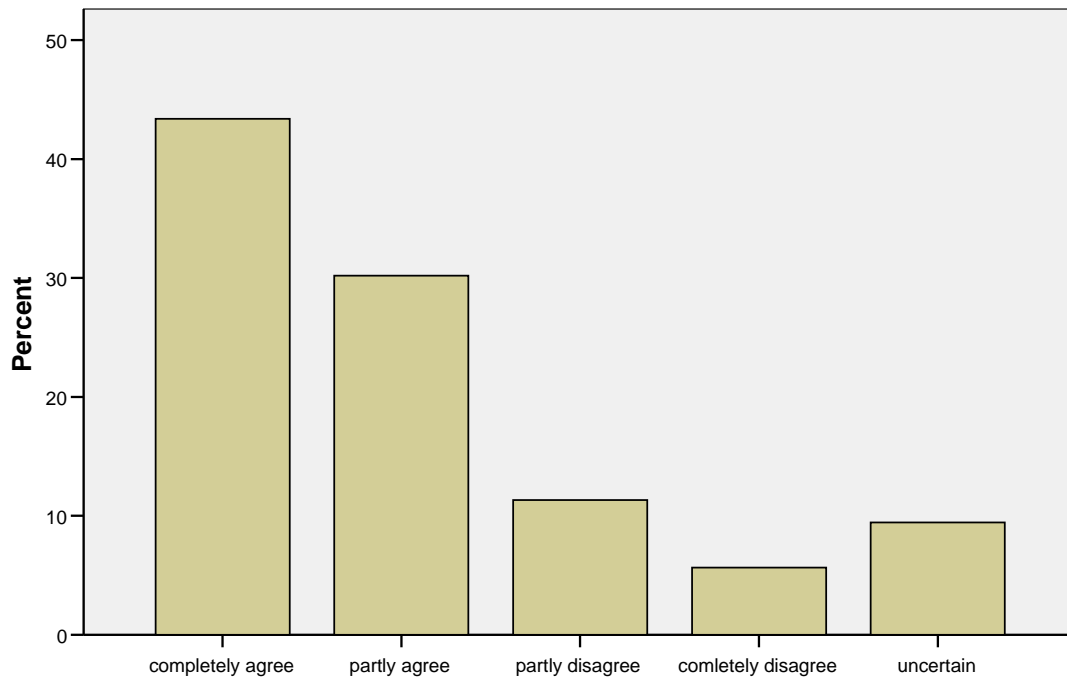
The objectives of the IA have been clearly defined



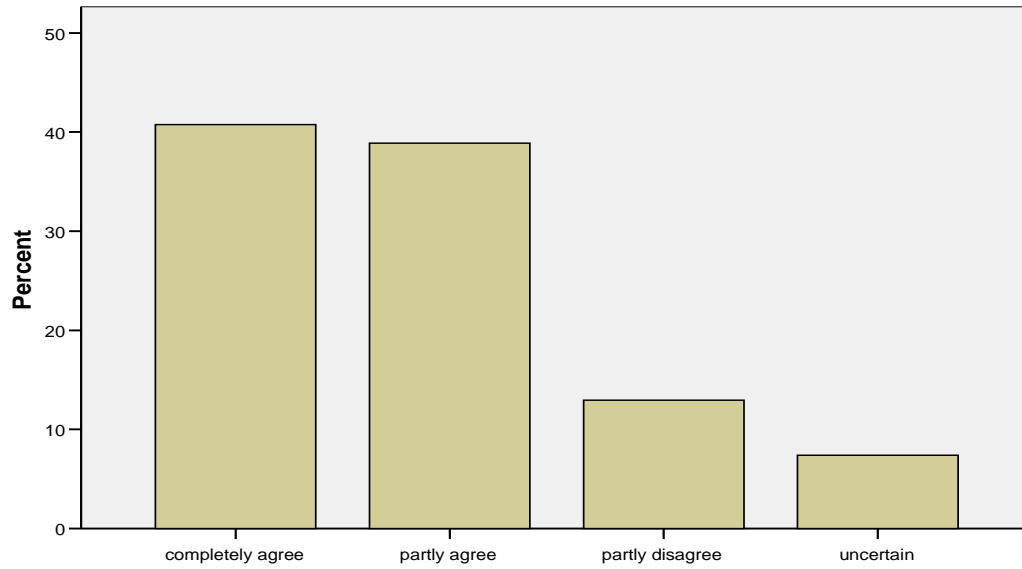
There have been educational benefits for me in the IA



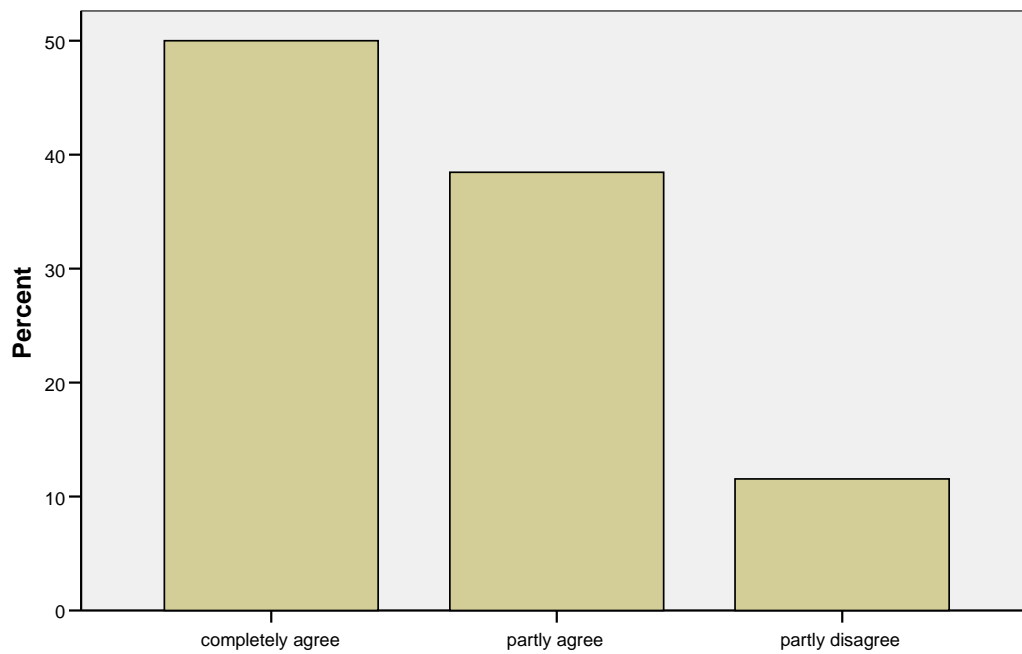
The Community Groups are functional for the purpose



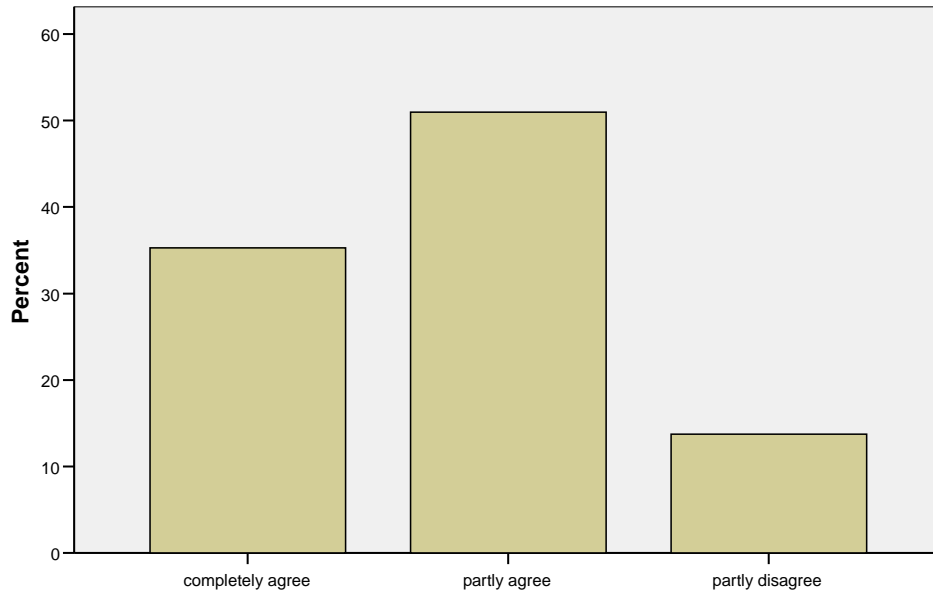
I have learned a lot about project implementation



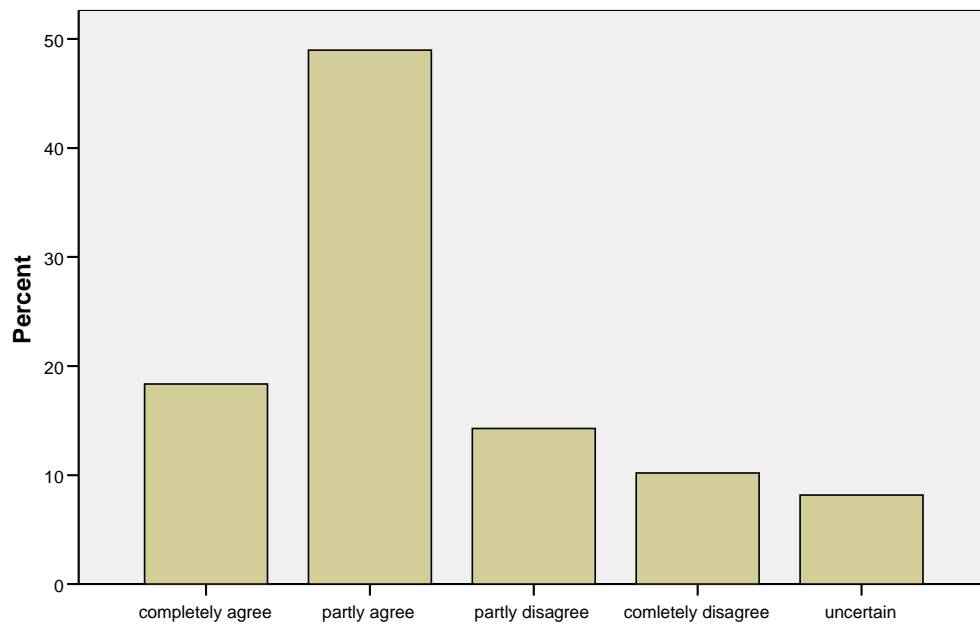
I have been highly motivated for local actions



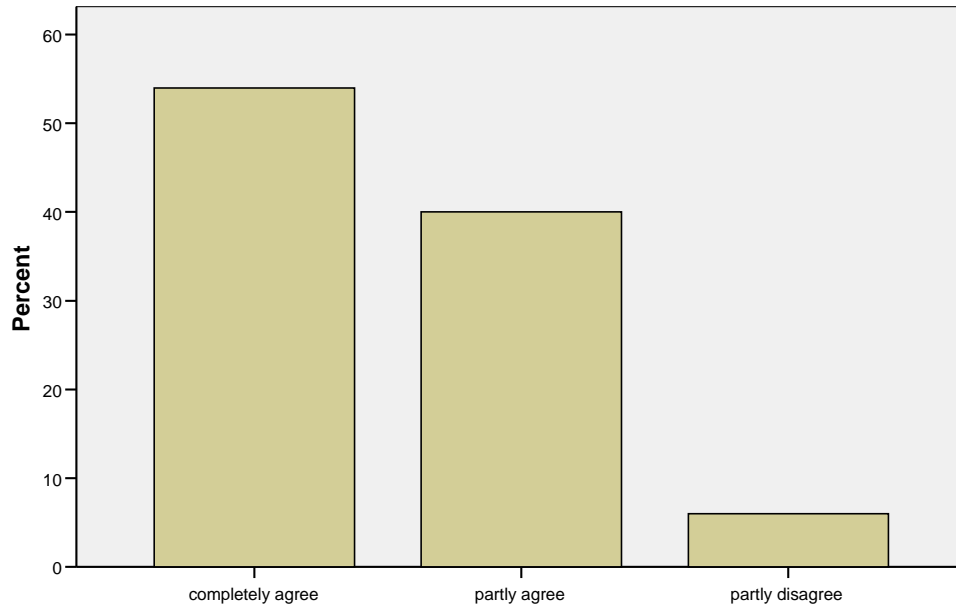
The group work went smoothly



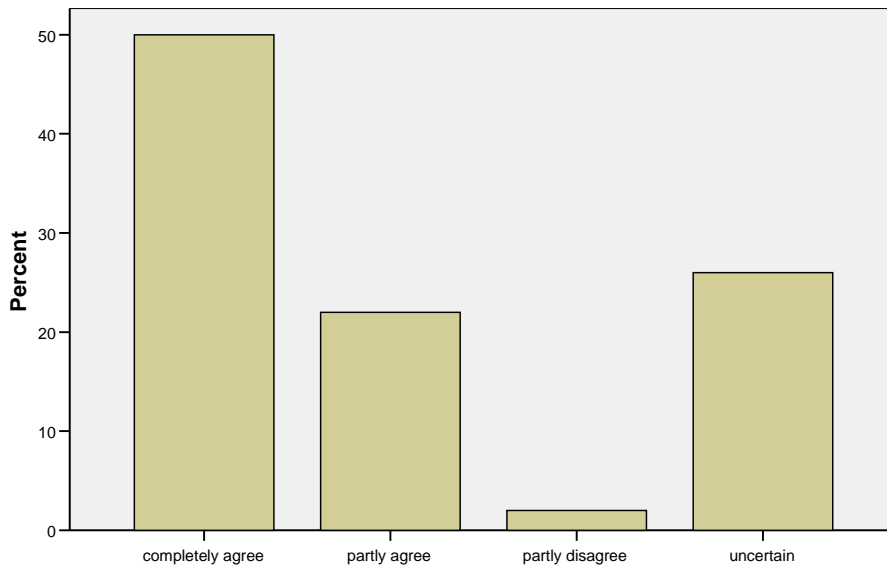
The time allocated for use in local projects are appropriate for the purpose



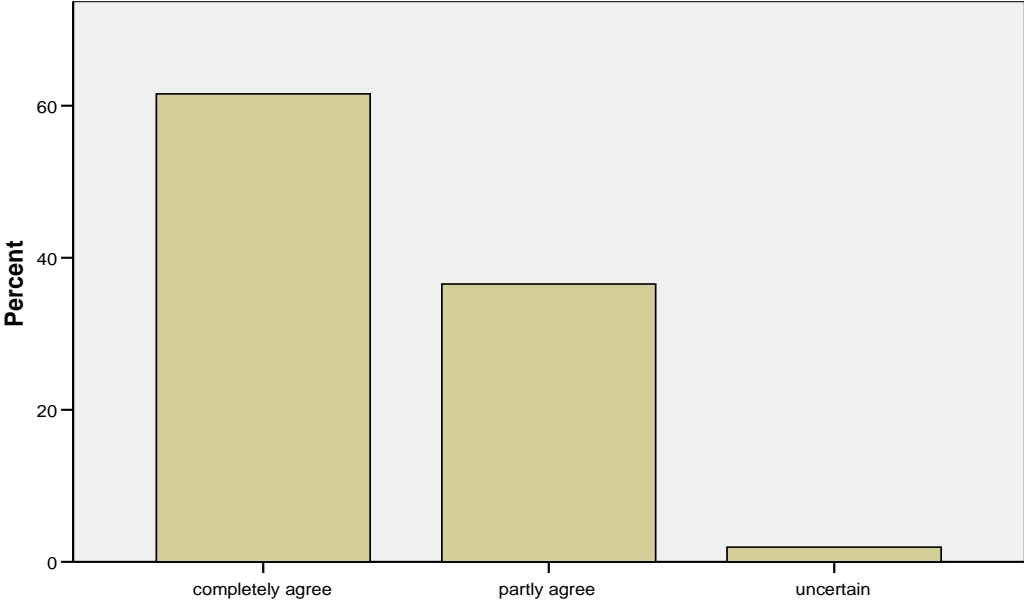
It has been useful sharing material (newsletters, videos, brochures etc.)



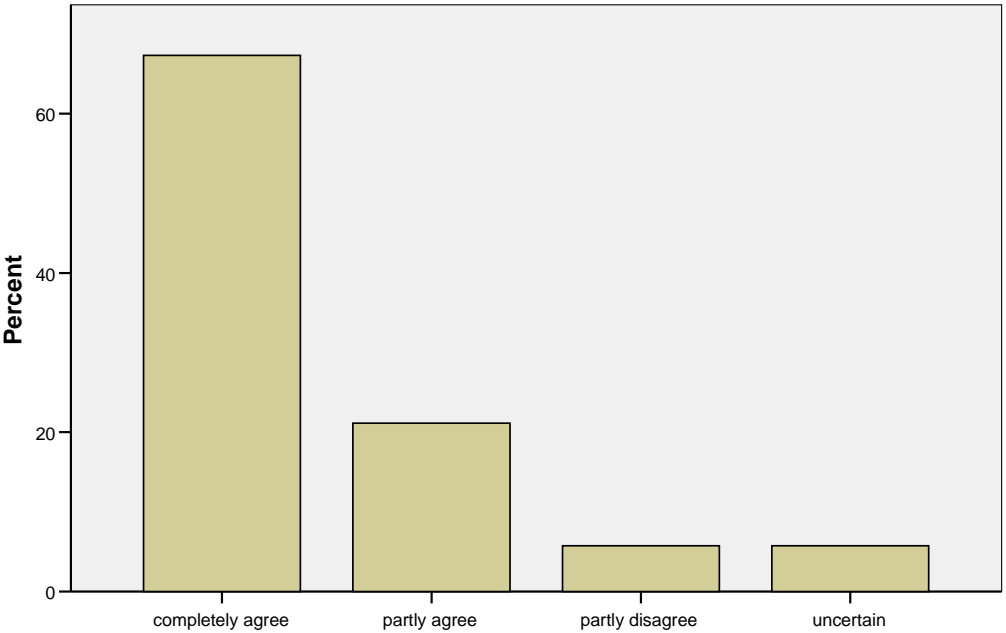
The summer camps have been successful



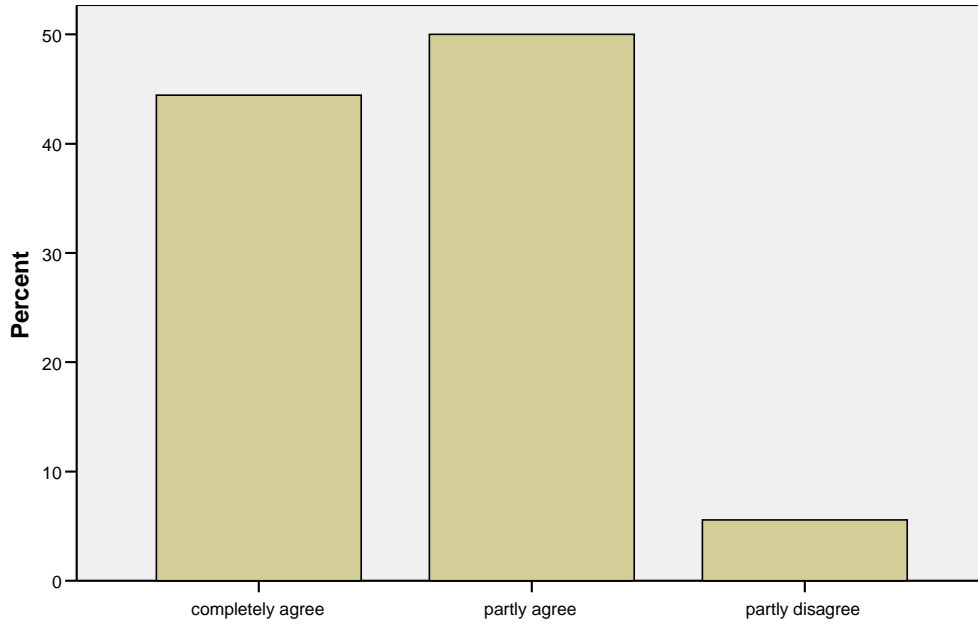
Participation in IC has given me higher self-confidence in carrying out development projects



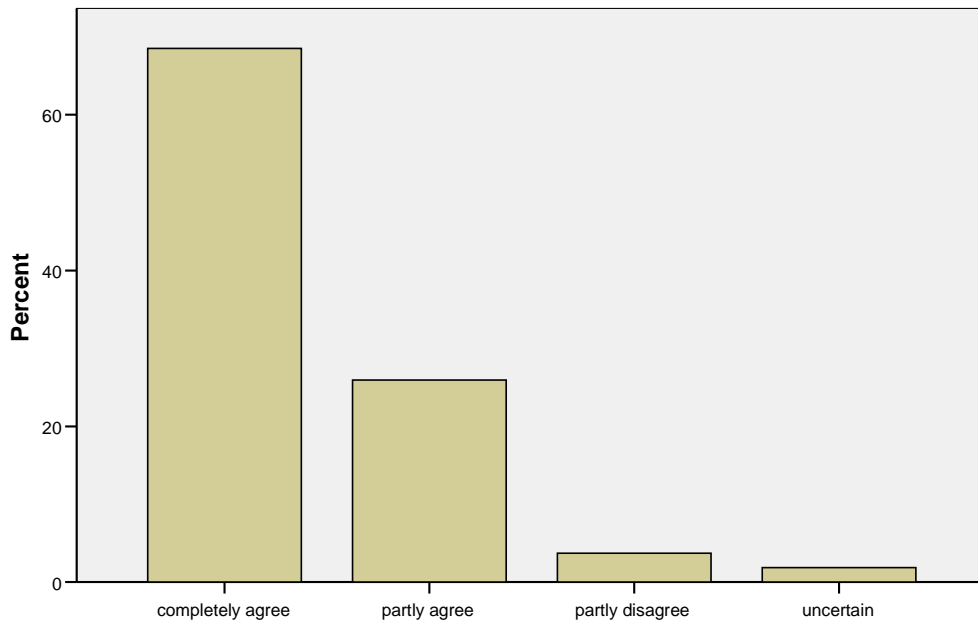
Participation in IC has given me increased competence in international cooperation



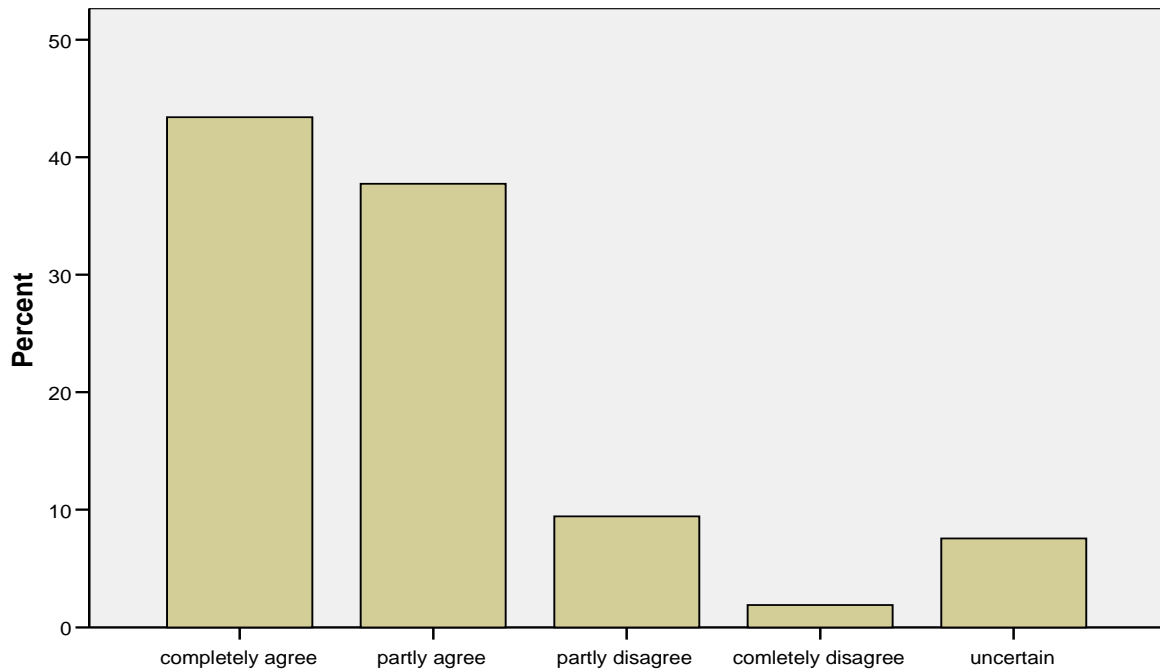
Participation in IC has given me engagement for innovation and development in local areas



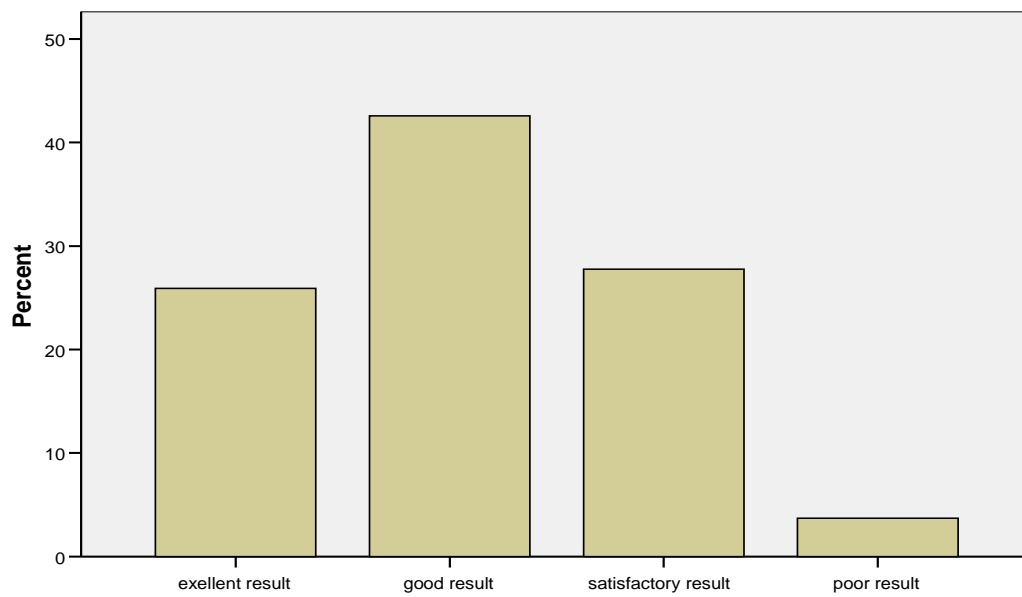
Participation in IC has given me increased understanding of international challenges in Europa



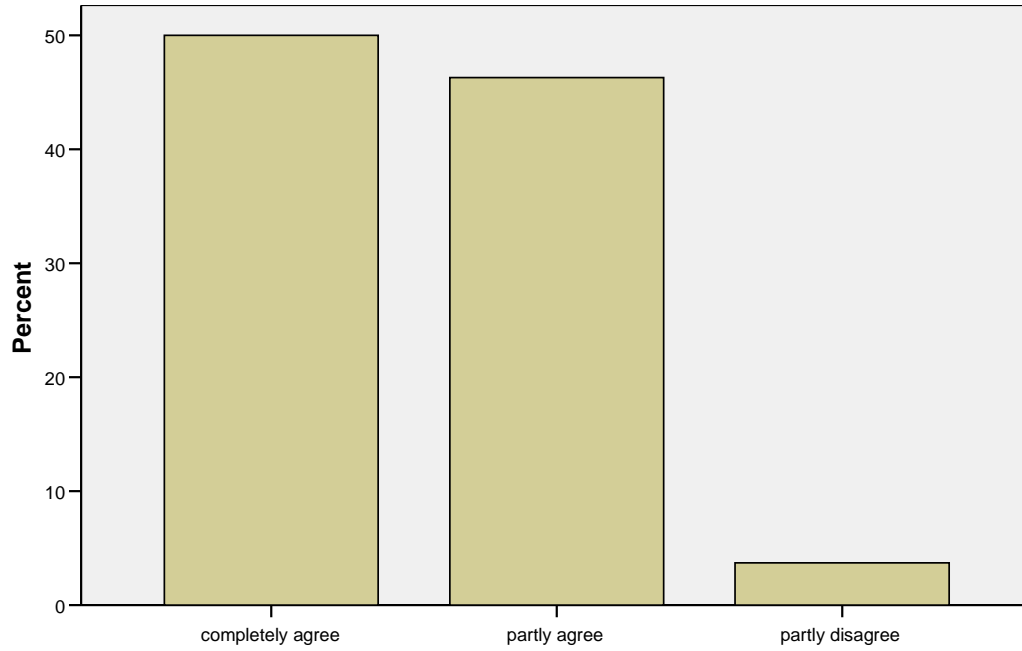
Participation in IC has given me more knowledge of what is needed for sustainable development



How will you characterize the results of local projects in your community?



The IC organizational model is excellent



Frequency Table Coordinatores

1 Gender

		Frequency	Percent
	1 female	7	50,0
	2 male	6	42,9
	Total	13	92,9
Missing	0 ikke besvart	1	7,1
Total		14	100,0

2 The IC management is excellent

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	8	57,1
	2 partly agree	6	42,9
	Total	14	100,0

3 The IC organizational model is excellent

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	9	64,3
	2 partly agree	5	35,7
	Total	14	100,0

4 Written documentations are available and easy to find on the website

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	8	57,1
	2 partly agree	5	35,7
	Total	13	92,9
Missing	0 ikke besvart	1	7,1
Total		14	100,0

5 The IC project is characterized by high quality in activities and routines

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	7	50,0
	2 partly agree	7	50,0
	Total	14	100,0

6 The communication process has been effective

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	6	42,9
	2 partly agree	6	42,9
	3 partly disagree	2	14,3
	Total	14	100,0

7 The resources are used effectively

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	6	42,9
	2 partly agree	7	50,0
	3 partly disagree	1	7,1
	Total	14	100,0

9 I have learned a lot by participating at the IA

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	6	42,9
	2 partly agree	3	21,4
	3 partly disagree	3	21,4
	Total	12	85,7
Missing	0 ikke besvart	2	14,3
Total		14	100,0

10 The lectures have been very informative

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	3	21,4
	2 partly agree	4	28,6
	3 partly disagree	4	28,6
	4 completely disagree	1	7,1
	Total	12	85,7
Missing	0 ikke besvart	2	14,3
Total		14	100,0

11 The literature provided has been interesting

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	5	35,7
	2 partly agree	5	35,7
	3 partly disagree	1	7,1
	Total	11	78,6
Missing	0 ikke besvart	3	21,4
Total		14	100,0

12 The IA has been a valuable tool for working with innovation and entrepreneurship

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	4	28,6
	2 partly agree	6	42,9
	3 partly disagree	2	14,3
	Total	12	85,7
Missing	0 ikke besvart	2	14,3
Total		14	100,0

13 The benefits of the workshop activities have been significant

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	5	35,7
	2 partly agree	4	28,6
	3 partly disagree	3	21,4
	Total	12	85,7
Missing	0 ikke besvart	2	14,3
Total		14	100,0

14 The objectives of the IA have been clearly defined

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	7	50,0
	2 partly agree	4	28,6
	3 partly disagree	1	7,1
	Total	12	85,7
Missing	0 ikke besvart	2	14,3
Total		14	100,0

15 There have been educational benefits for me in the IA

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	8	57,1
	2 partly agree	3	21,4
	3 partly disagree	1	7,1
	Total	12	85,7
Missing	0 ikke besvart	2	14,3
Total		14	100,0

17 The community Groups are functional for the purpose

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	7	50,0
	2 partly agree	6	42,9
	3 partly disagree	1	7,1
	Total	14	100,0

18 I have learned a lot about organizational setup

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	8	57,1
	2 partly agree	2	14,3
	3 partly disagree	1	7,1
	Total	11	78,6
Missing	0 ikke besvart	3	21,4
Total		14	100,0

19 I have learned a lot about project implementation

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	11	78,6
	2 partly agree	1	7,1
	3 partly disagree	1	7,1
	Total	13	92,9
Missing	0 ikke besvart	1	7,1
Total		14	100,0

20 The participants in the Community G. have been highly motivated for local actions

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	3	21,4
	2 partly agree	7	50,0
	3 partly disagree	3	21,4
	Total	13	92,9
Missing	0 ikke besvart	1	7,1
Total		14	100,0

21 The time allocated for use in local project are appropriate for the purpose

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	4	28,6
	2 partly agree	8	57,1
	3 partly disagree	2	14,3
	Total	14	100,0

22 There are external supports available helping the participants understand content area of innovation

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	5	35,7
	2 partly agree	7	50,0
	3 partly disagree	2	14,3
	Total	14	100,0

23 There are external supports available helping the participants develop a process of planning theory

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	7	50,0
	2 partly agree	5	35,7
	3 partly disagree	2	14,3
	Total	14	100,0

24 There are external supports available helping the participants implements their plans

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	4	28,6
	2 partly agree	8	57,1
	3 partly disagree	2	14,3
	Total	14	100,0

27 The conferences have been well prepared and accomplished

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	12	85,7
	2 partly agree	1	7,1
	5 uncertain	1	7,1
	Total	14	100,0

28 The information given has influenced local actions

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	7	50,0
	2 partly agree	6	42,9
	3 partly disagree	1	7,1
	Total	14	100,0

29 It has been easy to discuss ideas and experiences in English

	Frequency	Percent
1 completely agree	6	42,9
2 partly agree	6	42,9
3 partly disagree	2	14,3
Total	14	100,0

30 It has been useful sharing material (newsletters, videos, brochures etc.)

	Frequency	Percent
1 completely agree	5	35,7
2 partly agree	7	50,0
3 partly disagree	1	7,1
5 uncertain	1	7,1
Total	14	100,0

31 The summer camps have been successful

	Frequency	Percent
1 completely agree	10	71,4
2 partly agree	2	14,3
Total	12	85,7
Missing	0 ikke besvart	14,3
Total	14	100,0

33 Participation in IC has given me higher self-confidence in carrying out development projects

	Frequency	Percent
1 completely agree	10	71,4
2 partly agree	3	21,4
3 partly disagree	1	7,1
Total	14	100,0

34 Participation in IC has given me increased competence in international cooperation

	Frequency	Percent
1 completely agree	12	85,7
2 partly agree	2	14,3
Total	14	100,0

35 Participation in IC has given me engagement for innovation and development in local areas

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	11	78,6
	2 partly agree	1	7,1
	3 partly disagree	1	7,1
	Total	13	92,9
Missing	0 ikke besvart	1	7,1
Total		14	100,0

36 Participation in IC has given me increased understanding of international challenges in Europa

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	10	71,4
	2 partly agree	4	28,6
	Total	14	100,0

37 Participation in IC has given me more knowledge of what is needed for sustainable development

		Frequency	Percent
	1 completely agree	8	57,1
	2 partly agree	6	42,9
	Total	14	100,0



2 INTERVIEW GUIDE

About the project

1. Your view on the aims of the Innovation Circle Project (IC). What were your expectations when IC started?
2. Your view on the international aspect of IC.
3. Your view on the organisation model of IC (e.g. management, information, cooperation, available support, resources).

About the process

4. What is your impression of the developmental processes in IC?
5. How would you describe communication and cooperation among partners?
6. What is your opinion on decision-making processes in IC?
7. What have been major events in IC?

The results

8. What are the outcomes? (e.g. increased competence of region partners, establishment of innovative projects, intercultural understanding and cooperation, etc.)
9. What has been successful in the project? Less successful?

10. Which challenges would you consider to be the most important ones in the year to come? What will be main premises for continuation and long term development?

11. Other comments?