

O2 Qualitative survey; interviews with headteachers (CZ)

1. School networking in the Czech Republic

Cooperation and networking as a strategy in education policy and indicator of school quality

The ability of schools to cooperate and create cooperating networks with other schools and external subjects is considered as one of the indicators of quality. In *Criteria for Evaluation of Conditions, Progress and Results of Education* (Czech School Inspectorate, 2017), which is a methodological manual for schools, the chapter *Schools cooperate with external partners* stipulates the requirement for cooperation with other schools as a criterion of quality assessment.

Schools cooperate actively with other schools and educational workplaces, establish possible partnerships with schools at home and abroad, participate in exchange programmes and common projects and make efficient use of the results of cooperation in favour of school improvement. Good partnership supports the fulfilment of the objectives of schools. Schools support students' and teachers' active involvement in national and international projects.

The Inspectorate's report for the school year 2016/2017 recommends to use the *local action plans* (see below) for school development, particularly for close, regular and permanent cooperation of schools and exchange of experience among school leaders and teachers.

What do people in schools opine about school cooperation?

No systematic research of school networking at the local level has been carried out so far in the Czech Republic, except for databases of financially supported European networking projects such as e-Twinning. As to inquiries into the experience gained from cooperation with external subjects, let us mention a rather subtle and specifically focused survey carried out by the portal School Education Gateway (<https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/cz/pub/index.htm>). Involving 356 respondents, this survey of school networking and partnership showed that most schools cooperated within eTwinning (54%). Forty per-cent cooperated with schools in their regions, 32% cooperated with foreign schools within EU projects and 13% did not cooperate with other schools at all. Cooperation with foreign schools was most appreciated; 79% respondents considered this type of cooperation important. Cooperation with cultural institutions was regarded important by 28% respondents and cooperation with other schools in the region was considered important by 48% respondents. As for the benefits of cooperation, the respondents mainly acknowledged its importance for teacher professional development, improvements in the learning process and the design of the strategic vision. They tended to opine that schools were motivated to cooperate and competition did not interfere with this motivation. Nevertheless, one of two respondents admitted that cooperation was time-demanding and difficult in terms of finding good partner schools.

Although these results indicate that schools have a positive attitude to networking and appreciate cooperation with other schools, the survey had some important limits: the sample was not representative (the way of questioning was not described) and comprised a lot of schools experienced in foreign cooperation (eTwinning). Also, the questions were aimed at the phenomenon of cooperation as such, but the existence of an enduring network of schools can be a

rather different matter. Cooperation, on the other hand, may be limited by the duration of particular projects.

Support for networking on various levels

Like in other European countries, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic pays attention to the support for European programmes aimed at **international cooperation of schools** such as Erasmus+, e-Twinning, European Schoolnet, Norway Grants and others. Every cooperation established under these programmes is evaluated annually. In recent years, the Ministry has published calls for allowances from European structural funds (operational programme Research, Development and Education) and projects based on the **Local Action Plans of Education Development**. A local action plan of education development is a document comprising an analytical part, a strategic framework and an action plan for the development of education in the vicinity of Municipalities with Extended Powers. The objective of these action plans is to set up priorities and propose steps that are necessary for the implementation of education policies based on local needs. Projects emerging from the analysis of needs should improve the quality of education in nursery schools and basic schools by means of support for cooperation among the establishing entities, schools and various stakeholders in education. To boost the local (but not only local) cooperation for improved quality and efficiency of pre-school and school education is one of the priorities of local action plans (<http://www.mapvzdelavani.cz/dobra-praxe/sitovani-/>.)

Besides the public sector, school cooperation is supported by a number of non-profit organizations, foundations and associations focusing on improvements in the quality of teaching. Let us mention the civic association AISIS, the SKAV [Permanent Conference of Associations in Education], the Open Society Fund and the Kellner Family Foundation who offer a variety of programmes that schools can enter if they are interested in partner cooperation in various areas of school operation (e.g. Success for each pupil, We help schools to succeed, Schools in motion, I'll make it, Circle of cooperating schools, and so on).

Also, networking and mutual support are ways in which Czech schools can react to the requirement for inclusive education. New legislation aiming at the support for inclusive education entered in force in 2016, therefore schools and people in schools are now learning to implement supportive measures for pupils in need. A variety of networks focused on the support of quality in inclusive education has originated in order for schools to cooperate (e.g. Fair school, Network of inclusive schools, and others).

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2. Methodology used by CZ partner

We have conducted individual interviews with headteachers of five basic schools of different size and location in the Czech Republic. The schools, i.e. their headteachers, were selected by a uniform methodology. A previously prepared semi-structure of the interview was used.

3. Participants

Schools selected:

Abbreviation of the name	size of the school	experience of the headteacher
School P (location populated over 1 million)	680 pupils	15 years
School B (location populated 400,000)	360 pupils	16 years
School H (location populated 11,000)	450 pupils	8 years
School T (location populated 36,000)	150 pupils	5 years
School L (location populated 2,000)	550 pupils	20 years

4. Results of the analysis

A number of categories was generated from analysis of the interviews describing the topics networks of teachers and schools focus on, their objectives, motivation of teachers to cooperation (or the way networks are created), the role of the headteacher, strategies of headteachers and challenges headteachers face when supporting networking.

5.1. Links between networking and teaching / learning

Networking in schools and school networking are closely related to education and teaching / learning in schools. The interviews resulted in the following categories, which illustrate how is networking linked to teaching / learning and education processes.

a) Networking aimed at developing specific competencies of pupils

The first category includes examples of teachers' cooperation aiming at enhancement of education, respectively development of specific competencies of pupils, usually beyond the usual curriculum. For example, a group of teachers from school T in cooperation with the Children and Youth House (Dům dětí a mládeže, DDM, is a non-profit education facility offering pastime activities for children), organizes the so-called **Week of Crafts**. A group of Teachers from school T designs and implements workshops for pupils and their parents (work with paper, textiles, wood, etc.) and they become leaders of these workshops. For one week, the doors of the school

open to the wider community (children and their parents). Pupils from school T and their parents, as well as pupils from other schools may try work with various materials, they learn about the basics of various crafts. The project connects not only the group of teachers from school T, but also teachers from the nearby schools.

The methodologists of prevention (note: this it is a compulsory function in Czech schools) of all the schools in the region regularly meet at trainings and they have agreed there that they could organize something like this because of the opinion that children do not have awareness of crafts. This is especially important for pupils with learning disabilities, who usually do not get to a secondary school and cannot decide what kind of apprenticeship they would like to choose. Craftsmen have a good position on the labor market. This is the main reason (the headteacher of school T).

About a third of teachers of school T, as well as several teachers from neighboring schools have been involved in the workshops as leaders. Surrounding schools propose other workshops contributing with material and human resources. The cooperating network of teachers has been gradually expanding to the surrounding schools mainly in connection with this project.

At school B, the project aimed at development of specific competencies of pupils is called **Eurocamp**. It is based on networking of schools in various countries. The topics of cooperation are pre-arranged so that all the pupils can get involved: gastronomy, culture - songs and dances, geography, history, etc. The pupils together with teachers create a program and expand their knowledge and skills in these areas.

Another project of school B, around which a network of teachers was created (first within the school, later with the participation of SK and A partners) is **Creative Writing**. The goal of cooperation of teachers is to support the creativity of pupils, respectively their ability to express ideas in written form. At first, a network of Czech teachers was established, later the cooperation was extended even outside the school.

Everything started thanks to a young colleague. He is a writer, quite a successful one, and he teaches the Czech language. Children became interested in his books and wanted to write something as well. He started working with them and began to inform the colleagues teaching Czech language as well (the headteacher of school B).

The group of teachers involved began to organize a competition in creative writing at the school and invited partner schools to cooperate.

b) Networking aimed at development of curriculum and methodology of work of teachers

Cooperation of teachers is aimed at development of a curriculum or methodology for work of teachers. Teachers learn new methods of working. One example of such cooperation is a stable, formally created and relatively closed internal network called the **Subject Committee**. Its aim is to continuously evaluate and modify the school curriculum in the given subject groups (e.g. science, languages, civics, etc.)

The Subject Committees for Mathematics, Czech and English work separately because these are the priority subjects. And then we have networks of teachers for science subjects and humanities. They make plans for the school year, meet once a month, prepare pupils for school Olympics and competitions, prepare project days for pupils (the headteacher of school L).

In this school network, teachers regularly exchange experience, share methodological material, create and share material for teaching pupils with special educational needs (SEN), consult the guidance and assessment of pupils with SEN, respectively implementation of support measures for these pupils.

T-discs supporting sharing of teachers across the school network are used for such purpose as well. At school P, they created an internal computer database, so-called T-disc, to which teachers upload methodological materials that become an inspiration for all the teachers at the school. This network is of great importance for enrichment of teaching and sharing support measures (special methodological tools) for pupils with SEN.

We encourage teachers to share their ideas, especially some special materials for pupils with SEN. They also share inspiration for creating Educational Support Plans for integrated pupils (note: Educational Support Plans are the first level of support for pupils with SEN in Czech schools) We keep on telling them: if you have something interesting, upload it there. (the headteacher of school P)

It is therefore a formal, easily sustainable network, which is accessible to all teachers of the school, but inaccessible to potential outside users.

At school P, **paired teaching** is also organized, within the framework of which some teachers organize teaching in pairs and with the support of the school leaders they organize **courses for smaller groups**. It is a network of teachers, usually teaching the same or similar subject, who are interested in teaching in pairs and **mentoring** and they develop peer-support in their own school. These are completely informal open groups, but they are transparent and supported by the school leaders. Teachers learn how to improve lessons together. Networks of teachers with similar goals may also have an overlap outside school. At school P, the so-called **field-of-study meetings are organized** inviting teachers from partner schools. About 5 to 6 times a year, teachers of school P meet and teachers from partner schools are invited to discuss, respectively share experience and materials on a topic specified in advance (e.g. teaching Czech language, essay exercises for pupils, assessment of pupils, special tools for pupils with learning disabilities, etc.). Meetings usually take place for two days and the topic follows from the needs of teachers.

Anybody can take part, but we sometimes have to make a selection because the interest is great. Teachers share experience, they attend lessons of other teachers to find out how to work with these materials (the headteacher of school P).

It is a semi-open network and a semi-formal network. The possibility to work in the network is usually given to all the teachers of the school and the partner schools who are informed of these regular events, the management creates space for these events, even though they leave the organization entirely on the teachers.

School H then got involved in a project educating science teachers in work with new measurement devices and building kits and the ways of performing interesting experiments. Thanks to the project, a **network of teachers of science subjects** from the participating schools was created, first they started to study together and exchange experience to be able to enrich their teaching with a wide range of experiments and measurements and to support the children's research skills.

In a similar way, we will go on inviting our colleagues, pupils, parents and other interested parties to our school for three years every month. We are going to prepare interesting programs for everybody that will support curiosity, interest in science subjects and interesting phenomena. We want the public to be involved in the project (the headteacher of school H).

It is a rather closed formal network the sustainability of which will depend on the willingness of teachers to develop partnerships with schools even after the end of the project. Teacher networks, the main purpose of which is exchange of experience and joint learning in order to develop the quality of teaching, are often formed around the topic of **inclusive education**. At school P, there is a network of teachers and school counselors who have developed innovative methodological sheets for teaching foreigners and pupils with learning disabilities and behavior disorders.

We have 35 foreign pupils at our school who need mainly language support. We have created a team in involving three students of education working in the role of assistants for foreign pupils, class teachers of foreign pupils, staff of the special school counseling department (school psychologist and school special educator) and the deputy headteacher. They meet regularly, work on methodological materials, which are then offered to all teachers and evaluate work with foreign pupils at school. (the headteacher of school P).

It is therefore a stable, semi-closed, formal network with relatively specifically defined objectives. Similarly, there exists a network of teachers called Kvido in this school offering inspiration to other teachers from school P and teachers from partner schools related to support of talented pupils.

c) Networking supporting learning culture of schools and work of school leaders

By this category, we mean networks of wider **school leaders**. This is usually a network originally created in connection with a (financially supported) project where headteachers of partner schools cooperate, share experience and provide consultations. They usually meet for this purpose. Obviously, these persistent, relatively stable networks rely on good personal relationships. The discussion topics are working with a team and building a learning culture in schools.

The impetus for meetings of teachers as well as school management or even school counseling teams was the project of one (unnamed) foundation. We were a pilot schools in the project. We worked together on topics of introducing paired teaching or developing reading literacy. When two schools do the same, it's not the same. But schools have similar problems so they provide mutual inspiration to each other. Building a learning community is not easy and different methods work for different people (the headteacher of school P).

School P has the most extensive experience with long-term stable networking of schools. It has been involved in a long-term project supported by one Czech foundation. Several schools have been involved in the project (five pilot schools in the first phase) and the main objective is to build a culture of "learning schools". A number of activities the foundation has been funding for the schools involved have served for this purpose as well. The conditions of funding, however, are maintaining a wider network of schools, permanent sharing of experience, materials,

exchange of teachers and so on. The main principle is meaningfulness, clear direction for achievement of the goals and ongoing evaluation.

Last but not least, joint learning leading to development of school management is equally important as well.

Well, we also provide some materials within the network of our partner schools for the purpose of copying them. When there is an order from the Ministry, e.g. some new forms to be filled in, it is often useful to provide a kind of template that saves time and we make sure we understand it well. (the headteacher of school B).

5.2. Topics for networking

There is a number of topics the projects bringing together schools and teachers focus on. They can be summarized into the following categories:

a) Multicultural topics (e.g. Eurocamp) are typical for international projects. School B has been in continuous cooperation, respectively it has created a network together with 10 foreign schools from 6 countries (UK, H, SI, ES, SK, A), with which it regularly cooperates in connection with many projects and during the meetings the pupils lead by teachers deal with a number of topics (culture, gastronomy, history and so on). Parents from different socio-economic levels meet, for example, in the project Week of Craft (School T) and the project really does include the multicultural and inclusive aspect.

b) Inclusive education. This is a category that has a lot to do with the previous one. It is a network of teachers and schools that cooperate on topics supporting teaching and involvement of pupils with SEN (Week of Crafts, Building a New House, methodological sheets for foreign pupils, etc.). At school P, the teachers associate themselves in connection with the project **Building a New House**, which aims at re-structuring the teaching of the first and sixth grades into teaching blocks canceling the formal breaks. The new organization of teaching should bring more rest to pupils in the first grades and allow even weaker pupils to keep the pace at the lesson (teaching flexibly organized according to pupils' needs, involving moments of relaxation, etc.).

In the first grades, they have block teaching with short lessons and relaxing moments, they have weekly plans. In the afternoon, teachers are together with governors from the school clubs, the breaks are canceled. The teachers must cooperate, otherwise it will not work. Children enjoy it, even the weaker ones can keep the pace, there is more time for them, but it is a lot of extra work for the teacher (the headteacher of school P).

c) Organization of teaching and inter-subject cooperation. At school P, teachers have created a network around the project called **Building a New House** (see above). It is a complete reconstruction of inadequately organized teaching. The newly designed block teaching for pupils in the sixth grade should eliminate waste of time, for example, when changing the professional classrooms, in the case of excursions and other events associated with teaching a subject and so on, block teaching will increase the efficiency of teaching (e.g. social sciences, science day, etc.).

In the same year, the same teachers teach the same subjects. That's just the basis of the timetable. The involved teachers of the sixth grade have formed a kind of network, and they have to discuss

setting up the block-based teaching, they organize three-week interdisciplinary projects. (the headteacher of school P).

It is a formal, relatively closed network of teachers, which is always set up at the beginning of the school year and ends with the end of the school year.

d) Subject matter. It is a group of teachers teaching similar subjects, for example, the above-mentioned Subject Committees share the materials they prepare on the T-disc, field-of-study meetings, paired teaching, etc.

e) Specific topics. Teachers also create networks around specific, narrow topics, such as professional orientation of pupils (Week of Crafts), development of specific skills and pupils' knowledge (creative writing, reading literacy, etc.).

f) Networking supporting the specific focus of the school. In our schools, we have also encountered relatively stable networks of teachers and schools naturally arising in connection with specific points of focus of the schools and development of specifics of these school. By this we mean, for example, **the Dalton School Network**, which includes school B, has been in long-term cooperation with the Dalton schools in the Czech Republic and abroad and the representatives meet regularly at conferences and practical seminars, where they share experience. Involvement in these networks and active participation in them also provide the school the right to have the name Dalton School and it also extends the opportunities for cooperation with partner schools even on other topics dealing with Dalton teaching only marginally or not at all. Similarly, School P works within a stable network of schools that have adopted the idea of **RWTC - Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking** developing teaching methods based on this idea together in a network of schools.

5.3. Teachers' motivation to networking

We have also been interested in the way networks are created and what makes teachers and schools start cooperating on certain topic. It is clear from the text above that many networks in schools and among schools are **created in connection with some project**, which is often financed from external resources (foundations, European funds, the Region, Ministry of Education, etc.). Some networks fall apart after the end of the project, others remain. What motivates teachers and schools to engage in these projects and networks? The following motivations followed from the interviews:

a) Political and development trends - development of the quality of teaching

Czech schools, in an attempt to adapt to the European trends of the last decades, have been exposed to a number of changes, which has been reflected in the relatively frequent changes in the school legislation. In recent years, Czech teachers have been particularly exposed to the requirement of inclusive education. Examples of some projects are listed above. Both headteachers and teachers jointly learn to implement the so-called support measures for pupils with SEN that have been anchored in legislation since 2017. This has resulted in creating an internal network of teachers and counselors in schools.

Teachers also have to master a variety of technologies and use modern teaching methods, adapt the curricula and so on. The motivation is therefore to increase the quality of teaching in

accordance with school-political requirements and to individualize it according to the needs of pupils.

Recently, teachers have to deal with a lot of tasks, they have to handle interactive whiteboards, everything is done electronically and in addition to this, the heterogeneity of pupils within a class has increased so they have to adapt to new ways of teaching, cooperate with assistants and so on. This is not easy and without the support of their colleagues they would not be able to manage this ... they need to exchange experience with each other when they want to master the technologies ... cooperation makes their work easier (the headteacher of school L).

Teachers had to create activities together so that the pupils with handicaps could succeed. The more talented pupils take part in competitions and school Olympics, we have plenty of opportunities for them. Inclusion has forced us to invent opportunities to success for these children as well (the headteacher of school T).

Teachers enter into cooperating networks not only to **improve and develop their own teaching** in line with current trends, but also to **make their work easier** (sharing materials, etc.).

a) Self-preservation tendencies

School T has faced a significant drop in the number of pupils in recent years and even dismissal of teachers. It was an impetus for the whole school to begin to work more on its image and to present itself outwardly with its good work.

There was a competition between local schools and our school needed to present itself with something. Teachers themselves understood that some steps have to be taken. The impulse was the threat to teachers, the school became a sinking boat and it had to get mobilized (the headteacher of school T).

Teachers began to invent projects that could be presented externally and open up the school to the local community. They wanted to allow parents to get to know the school "from the other side" and to entrust their children to it.

b) Financial motives

Networks of teachers and schools often arise around projects that are (at least initially) **subsidized from external resources**. This brings some extra financial resources to the school. However, even without external financial resources, headteachers of school seek to reward teachers for their cooperation if it has positive results. *Everyone working in a meaningful way receives a reward* (the headteacher of school B).

School P, on the other hand, has managed to **generate its own financial resources from networking**, from which the school and teachers benefit. Thanks to the projects and cooperation, the teachers have learned a whole range of new methodologies and have begun to offer "practical courses" (their own know-how) to partner schools. They have gradually applied for accreditation of these practical courses and a group of teachers from school P offers their know-how today regularly outside partner schools. *I would like the teachers to benefit from this when the others go to see them and they pass on their know how* (the headteacher of school P). For teachers and school P, this is another, often significant, source of income.

c) Self-realization and entertainment of teachers

The previous categories suggest that involvement of a teacher in any network, extends his / her teaching role beyond his / her class and enriches his / her work. The possibility of self-realization is therefore also a motivation for teachers. Thematic networks allow them to improve in the chosen area (career direction), to expand and show their skills, to engage outside their own class and school.

Sometimes, there is some initial personal interest or specific skill of the teacher that becomes an inspiration for other teachers. For example, the teacher-writer who wanted to use his skills and experience and offered support to his colleagues. This created a network supporting creative writing of pupils and the teacher could thus **apply his skill**. The headteacher of school B also said that the teachers like working on the projects and enjoy a lot of **fun** in the network of "people with the same way of thinking".

They have fun, especially the young ones. They go for trips with guitars, they even have their own band. They always look forward to each event and meeting. They are people with the same way of thinking and thanks to this they cooperate in a better way (the headteacher of school B).

In this context, the headteacher also commented on the teachers who have left for maternity leave. They try to keep in touch with the school and the network in which they used to cooperate to be able to get back because they had not only grown professionally in the team, but also enjoyed pleasant emotions and fun.

d) Social pressure

Sometimes, seeking self-improvement, self-realization or entertainment are the motivation, but some "social pressure" can be a motivation as well. In schools where networking and project work are a regular part of work of teachers and where active and cooperating teachers are publicly valued and rewarded, a strong culture of mutual cooperation and learning emerges.

At our school, everybody can be a leader, people just show their abilities, come up with something new and offer it to the others. A cooperating network is then created around these leaders. Everyone already knows who knows what, what can they learn from each other, it is transparent and open. The leaders are clearly identifiable (the headteacher of school P).

But a strong learning culture can also bring about certain **competition** and social pressure influencing all the teachers. Those who stay outside the cooperating network do not feel good. Their motivation to engage in a network may be to "be like the others" and not to stand aside, even though they might not like cooperation too much. They mostly want to stay in the team.

5.4. The role of school leaders in networking of teachers and schools

In teacher networking, school leaders play a more or less important and visible role. Sometimes they leave the activity entirely on the teacher, sometimes they are in control of the whole thing. Several forms of such roles have emerged from stories told by the headteachers.

a) Role of motivator

School headteacher T talked about craft workshops for the wider community, which she initially prepared together with a group of teachers. She felt that some teachers could be motivated by her own example. She became a leader of one of the workshops, on one meeting with the parents she "ran a café" making coffee and tea for the visitors. She considers the role of the headteacher a

motivational one, that is, he / she can get initially involved in all events and auxiliary works. It does not have to be just the "supervisory role".

b) Role of initiator

Although all headteachers emphasize mainly volunteering when it comes to cooperation in teacher networks, some still mention that creation of a stable network has sometimes been facilitated by the initial "command" that emerged from the school's current needs.

The headteacher of school L, always sets out tasks for individual networks - e.g. the Subject Committees based on the analysis of the previous school year (e.g. testing pupils' results) and on the basis of the expressed needs of the school policy and the current situation (what is being discussed). The needs and priorities of the school for the upcoming period are formulated in a report upon which the teams prepare their plans for the school year. The topics are therefore given by the school leaders.

Similarly, headteachers of other schools sometimes come up with proposals for cooperation but rather on a voluntary basis. They pass the idea to some teacher leaders who create a team around them. They come with the first impetus, they bring inspiration and suggestions for partnership.

At first, I prepared the whole thing, drafted some vision on paper, and then I handed it over to the teachers. I released the brake of the car and let it go down the slope, then it was driven by the teachers (the headteacher of school T).

I met a school headmaster from Bratislava at one event and invited her to our school. She liked the idea of creative writing, so she invited our teacher to Bratislava and he trained their teachers there creating a network of creative writing. Now we organize competitions ... and other projects together. We have already established connection with Vienna, our partner school from another network. (the headteacher of school B)

School headteachers act as initiators of the project even when looking for projects funded by foundations or other donors. They come with the idea of applying for a grant as the first ones.

c) Role of facilitator

School headteachers consider their role of a facilitator of networking the most important one. The facilitator creates the right conditions for cooperation - obtaining funds, managing substitute teachers, providing space and material. He / she provides teachers with study time off when they work on some time-consuming task. *I've been looking for project resources, trying to find money, when the teachers prepare something I make the resources synergic to support the continuity (the headteacher of school P).* The headteachers in the roles of "facilitators" often look for sponsors ensure reception of foreign visitors from partner schools in the town hall and so on.

In addition to this, the headteacher of school P sees his role of the facilitator even in strengthening the feeling of meaningfulness of the teachers. He also encourages the teachers to clearly formulate their goals and make their work meaningful, not to do it formally. Teachers write their personal development plans (PDP), which they discuss with the deputy headteachers looking for profits for teachers and pupils.

d) Role of supervisor

The headteachers play the role of supervisors (see also the strategy), but they admit that they need to have some insight into the way the teachers work together.

Cooperation is partly registered through the personal development plans (PDP). We also have school development plans (SDP) that are in line with the personal development plans of teachers. We started both of these plans within the framework of a project that has been supported by one foundation for a long time. We managed to keep the plans because it makes sense to us. Three times a year, a STDP report is written, in which individual teams have to contribute by reporting on the way of cooperation on the planned topic. All the cooperating teams, their work and their results are clearly identified within these reports (the headteacher of school P).

The headteacher of school L fulfills his supervisory role in a similar way, i.e. through regular reports.

In May, I want to see reports from the Subject Committees - goals, topics, way of cooperation, and the results of the mutual visits to the lessons. Everything is evaluated and measures are proposed ... I also require a report on the manner the Subject Committees deal with inclusive education and their proposals for the next year (the headteacher of school L).

In school B, the headteacher puts emphasis on public presentation of the school (marketing) as a way of supervision. He insists on publishing the results of the cooperation in the local bulletin so that the local community, parents and the establishing entity can learn about the work of the school.

Supervision is always difficult. I want the teachers to present the results of cooperation on the web and in local press or the school bulletin. Supervision is actually performed through marketing (the headteacher of school B).

It is also a common practice that teachers refer to the course and results of cooperation on a topic at meetings and educational councils. The results of cooperation are also reflected in terms of achievements of pupils in competitions, the interest of pupils and parents and their feedback, which is usually required by every school headteacher. It is obvious that the supervisory role is not pleasant for the headteachers so they look for ways to make it meaningful, informal and useful.

5.5. More profits from networking

Mainly pupils, but also teachers, parents, the whole school and the wider community profit from (not only) the above-mentioned examples of networking. The main profit is the development of learning and education, but there are a number of side-profits developing the processes that facilitate learning and teaching.

a) Benefits for pupils

Benefits for pupils are in the areas of:

- **knowledge** (on the example of the projects, headteachers demonstrate the impact on pupils' knowledge thanks to enrichment of teaching and methods - benefits in terms of language skills, geography, history, gastronomy, etc.)
- **skills** (in the above-mentioned projects involving cooperation of the teachers and pupils, pupils developed fine motor skills, worked with various materials, expanded

reading skills and habits. For example, the headteacher of school P was able to document the reading / reading literacy);

- **personal development** (teachers mentioned improvement of discipline in the case of some pupils thanks to cooperation, they improved their self-control, respect for differences, tolerance towards other cultures, they realized their priorities in professional orientation, developed their interests / dancing, singing, writing, reading ...) ... / creative writing, work with various materials ... / civics and national awareness ...),
- **relations** (teachers get to know their pupils from "another perspective", children help each other and get to know each other better, establish different relationships with teachers, etc.).

We have a boy here who is an autistic, he keeps on using rude language, but he wanted to go with us to the craft workshops. We did not want to take him with us, because he would put us into an embarrassing situation there. Then we gave him the condition that he should not speak in such a bad way and he really did not speak using rude expressions. We found out that it was possible to motivate him and for some time he really did not behave in the negative way. (the headteacher of school T).

It is also important to mention the impact **on learning and development in the case of pupils with SEN**, respectively, benefits related to inclusive education. Craft workshops at school T organized by a network of teachers and local schools, supported the relationship of pupils to some crafts and allowed them to clarify further direction of their studies. Pupils had the opportunity to get to know each other better and the others who usually "stand aside" made friends as well. In addition to this, parents of pupils from different cultural backgrounds had the opportunity to meet.

Children got to know each other better and the ones who did not use to even talk in the class began to talk to each other. In addition to this, parents had the opportunity to meet and "white" parents and Roma parents met and they all talked and worked together. Parents started talking together and the children then found their way to each other through their parents (the headteacher of school T).

b) Benefits for teachers

It might seem that teachers have the biggest profit from networking because they learn from their colleagues (not only) new methods of work - especially through paired teaching, visiting each other's lessons, mentoring, joint classes, interviews and other forms of sharing. Networking is always about mutual **inspiration and joint learning**.

Apart from the profits in the **methodology of work** (which undoubtedly always has an impact on pupils and their learning), the headteachers of schools also mention the profits for teachers who go beyond the framework of the school. Teachers learn how to pass on their knowledge and skills while passing on experience and sharing their knowledge in a network of colleagues, in other words, they learn mentor and lecturer "crafts".

The school has gradually accredited 9 courses offered jointly by teachers, in particular, courses dealing with exchange of experience and new methods of work. Teachers who get engaged in this can earn some extra money. At the same time, there is cooperation among schools. People

sometimes come to look at our teachers like in the ZOO, so they should pay for it (the headteacher of school P).

It is therefore clear that teachers have been expanding their role, **self-realization**, applying their skills both inside and outside school. Networking and cooperation also allow them to **earn some extra money** in their field.

It should also be borne in mind that thanks to the joint events prepared by various teacher networks, teachers have the opportunity to get to know their colleagues and pupils from another perspective and **therefore they change their views and attitudes** towards children, other people and their work.

c) Benefits for both school and management

In addition to the aforementioned benefits for pupils and teachers, some profits for schools as a whole can also be mentioned. Networking of teachers within schools has a strong impact on **school climate** (it strengthens relationships among the teachers, as well as relationships between the teachers and school leaders) and this **shapes the culture of a learning school**. The headteacher of the school said:

A busy child does is a good child. A busy teacher is a good teacher ... When the school leaders are satisfied, teachers are also satisfied. They know that when we are satisfied we do not bother them and they are happy as well. They do it for us (the headteacher of school T).

I've been enjoying the fact that the people trust us and they are not afraid to come and say that they do not know something and that something does not go right. Many mothers also like to come back from maternity and they keep in touch even during this. Relationships are also maintained outside the school, at celebrations, weddings ... (the headteacher of school B).

Similarly, the activities and outcomes of work of teacher networks **open up school to the public**, help school image and strengthen relationships with parents (see below).

School networks also serve to providing mutual **flexible help**. Headteachers of schools involved in networking often consult administrative and legal matters, they share materials and classrooms or gyms. Such "fast" cooperation can take many forms, as mentioned by the headteacher school B:

When you have a partner school, you know where to call when you have a problem. A colleague from school / XY / calls that he / she has a young teacher of art and wants to train her. He / she knows we have a good teacher of art, who knows the Dalton, so I can send him / her there as a mentor. She consults her, sends her the materials ... (the headteacher of school B).

The **financial benefits** for the school when networking is supported by projects are also worth mentioning.

d) Benefits for parents and community

If parents, the local community and the wider public have the opportunity to see teachers and schools cooperate on meaningful things that serve their children, then they have the opportunity to see the school from a different point of view and often change the stereotyped vision of the school and the work of a teacher.

Parents are not so shy, they cooperate with the school better and they communicate better in relation to issues related to children. They also accept inclusion better, Roma parents sit beside the "white" ones at an event and parents of children from different schools meet as well (the headteacher of school T).

5.6. School leadership strategy to support networking and their sustainability

Our headteachers choose different strategies to support networking and keep them alive. Some of the strategies could already be traced in the roles they attributed to themselves (see above). What are the main strategies at this point?

a) Small steps in partnership and in projects

The headteachers stated that teachers have to learn to cooperate withing networks slowly gaining confidence. Teachers usually feel overburdened with daily duties and they think work in a network related to some project or mutual learning activities are an extra work. School leaders therefore often agree on the fact that it pays off to start with small projects and to gradually develop cooperation. Schools, for example, first help each other by providing a gym, later they organize some activity together and if they enjoy such an experience, cooperation gradually evolves.

b) Looking for good partners

It is precisely the relationship with cooperating partners that is considered essential by headteachers. They therefore consider the search for such partners who get on well together and are reliable an important strategy. Such networks have good **sustainability**. Friendly people and friendly schools find topics for common activities in an easy and flexible way.

I do not make yearly plans because they change a lot, they are just a framework. In the course of a year something may come, friendly schools in our network may invite us for cooperation, so we either join them or not. We do not want to be bound with any plans. Opportunities come randomly (the headteacher of school B).

c) Building a team at school

The headteachers have repeatedly mentioned the importance of **the internal climate of school and school culture** for the success of networking. They emphasize deliberate and **thoughtful teamwork and good selection of new staff**. They are careful when replacing a leaving teacher so that the new one would fit into the team. If headteachers want teachers to do something beyond direct classroom work or they want to build a cooperating team, they must expect that some people may leave the school. It has taken years to establish stable teams at schools, because people usually stay only in a good team in which people learn and develop. It is important to know what members they really want to have in the team.

Everything starts with a good team. It is necessary to work on the composition of school staff. It's a team chemistry. When recruiting new people, I look at body language, the natural behavior of the person, we must like each other. That's more than just expertise. Someone came up to me and said he could talk to a teacher of Physics who was a bit strange, he was a loner, so I said I did not want him ... There are always more people involved in the recruitment, I do not choose them myself ... I also choose people who are able to communicate in English so that they can

communicate with partners outside the Czech Republic, that the communication does not depend on the language teachers only and to be able to communicate in relation to projects involving a foreign language (the headteacher of school B).

Networking often reveals the potential of a teacher, because he / she has more opportunities to develop and document it. However, projects and joint work, as well as the possibility to stand out must not lead to rivalry. The next strategy is therefore to give all teachers the same opportunities and to "**work with error**" well.

Teachers cannot compete with each other and they must not see each other as a threat by saying who is better. They must not be afraid to come up to a headteacher with an idea or problem. (the headteacher of school T).

At the same time, headteacher of school B emphasizes the effort to work with team **with regard to age** management and selects suitable projects for them (e.g. when teachers sleep in a partner school in a gym on the floor in sleeping bags, he answers the question of the interviewer: "*And what about older teachers? They have to take part as well?*" - "*I would not make them go there. They have different projects*"... etc.).

School headteachers of school P and B both emphasize not only the importance of selecting of new staff, but also the **positive influence of some** "leaders" in the team that need to be searched for and supported.

Cooperation works only when the school culture is set up well. The education consultant who helped to develop paired teaching and open classes has clearly influenced the development of cooperation. (the headteacher of school P).

The project is usually linked to some personal abilities - if you have extraordinary people in the team, they will make children and other colleagues interested... he / she must be a strong personality to attract other teachers and make them interested (the headteacher of school B).

Of course, good selection also involves the choice of school leaders (see also below). To support networking, the **potential of the non-teaching staff** (from the economist to the caretaker) needs to be used as well. They can facilitate the work of teachers involved in a project in a great extent.

d) Way of leading people

The most important strategy for developing and maintaining networking is to set up the way of leading people. The headteacher of school B talks about moving from "**school management to leading people**" and emphasizes **delegating** authority to others, promoting peer / peer-to-peer relationships at the school.

I have switched from management mode to leadership mode. The teacher - leader relationship will always remain asymmetric, no matter what leaders try to do against it. Leaders cannot attend teachers' lessons, therefore a pedagogical consultant, mentor, or another colleague-teacher takes over the role and becomes a confidant of the teachers. Teachers and pupils are more relaxed if the headteacher does not come to the classroom. Attending lessons must be safe. This is the only way they can learn from each other. I support mutual learning / teaching. I do not check on them (the headteacher of school P).

However, the headteachers often mention the need to **negotiate** with the teachers, not to make commands, but to compromise. They try to make offers and not to force teachers, to be **polite** to the teachers, to smile and express **respect** towards them and their work. They all say they do not emphasize their power and dominance. They try to behave as colleagues in the equal position but they demand respect.

I like the "old trick," the morning coffee is made in the meeting room, I usually cook it myself and everyone comes there. I myself buy good coffee and when someone goes for holiday, he / she brings good coffee or tea. Everyone does it. We come up with ideas talking over a cup of coffee The headteacher is a friend with respect, I do not deal with issue in a dominant way ... (the headteacher of school B).

It is also important to "not to overburden the teachers" and to **protect them** from unnecessary administration and other unimportant tasks giving them enough time and space to "work in peace" (for example, the headteacher of school B gives teachers days off and free time to study as much as possible).

I have selective attitude to superior authority requirements. If something makes no sense, I do not want it from the teachers, meaningful things are more important. I then communicated with the authorities saying that we are not going to do some of the activities as a school! I have been trying to avoid formalities at all levels. I want to see things meaningfully, in a normal way. (the headteacher of school B)

The headteachers try to provide teachers with **safety** so that they do not have to worry about being made redundant or afraid to come up to school leaders asking for help with any problem and trust them. The door of my office is always open for them.

I try to give them some kind of assurance, the teachers have experienced redundancy, they have fear ... When the teachers are criticized for something, they do not leave my office disappointed, even though this might be painful at first. There is one teacher many people complained about. She did not want to cooperate on anything, I told it to her strictly, she even said she cried ... but I also pointed to some positive aspects and supported her so she did not leave broken and she has really changed since then, she started to cooperate (the headteacher of school T) .

The headteachers believe that if they lead people in the above-mentioned way, people will be motivated to cooperate and to be satisfied. Then the leaders and pupils are also satisfied. If teachers feel comfortable and safe, they will change their attitudes towards children: *These are some details related to their approach to them - increasing the ethical behavior of teachers to children, the environment is pleasant for the children as well (the headteacher of school P).*

5.7. Limits, challenges and needs of headteachers

Although cooperation and networking are successful in the schools surveyed, the headteachers can identify some limiting factors and formulate the challenges they face from time to time.

a) Sustainability problem

It is well known that cooperation often starts and ends with some funded project. Although funding is important for the development of networking (see below), headteachers do not identify

it as the most significant sustainability limit. According to the headteachers, it is especially important to choose and supervise partners well - if they do not try to organize joint activities repeatedly, **the contact can be lost gradually**.

Headteacher of school P therefore promotes sustainability through school development plans (SDP) and ongoing reports on the course of cooperation.

b) Financial resources

Although financial resources are not crucial for cooperation according to the headteachers, they facilitate cooperation in many ways. **Funds** for materials are very important. Very often headteachers have to look for sponsors and it costs them a lot of time and energy. Sometimes, the Association of Parents and Friends of School has to contribute to funding cooperation with partner schools, partner schools and facilities help them as well. However, when there are no financial resources, everything is less comfortable for the teachers and school leaders.

We do not need money for every case of cooperation, even though it is nice to have it because money is usually the trigger starting cooperation ... The teachers are brave and they might go to another school with a sleeping bag and sleep in the gym ... we are able to cooperate outside the Czech Republic even without e-Twinning, even though we have already made use of it. We and our foreign partners trust each other, they collect money from the children for food and sometimes accommodation and they send them to us. They usually sleep in a host family or some kind of hostel, the parents pay for it.... I look for sponsors to fund other things as well. With respect to the years of my experience, I know where to ask for help. For example, a transport company sends me a cheap bus the company does not need at the moment (the headteacher of school B).

Sometimes, school headteachers would rather not even ask for networking support for European and other funds to avoid extensive administration.

c) When something goes wrong or someone fails

The headteachers consider the situation when there is bad mood in the team the greatest risk. This is either **caused by an individual or an unpleasant situation**. Even though headteachers try to select suitable teachers for their teams, each of them sometimes experiences periods when the relations are not ideal or periods in which he / she sympathizes more or less with someone in the team. It can also happen that a jointly planned course or event is not successful and teachers then moodily consider the whole event a waste of time and they lose confidence in other similar activities.

Our young teacher Z. is so intrusive. We had certain amount of money allocated for a project. And she came up to me with a calculator and complained to me that they did not get enough money claiming that if she divides the amount by the number of teachers who worked on the project, she can see it should be more I had to explain to her that I also had to pay the ones who administered the project, filled out all the papers, did the accounting ... Mainly language teachers experience different salaries, especially when running courses for companies, then they have the feeling that they could earn the same amount of money in schools and consider it a management problem (the headteacher of school B).

Teachers' motivation can also be undermined by an unsuccessful activity or tasks that make **no sense** to them :

The problem arose when somebody entered into cooperation in an inappropriate way, for example, when somebody recommended a lecturer for a school event and it did not work out well and the teachers were bored. Such cases turn against the leaders and they tell us: "Do not do this to us."... The problem is also when teachers do not want to do something but they have to do it even when it does not make any sense for them (the headteacher of school P).

Too many activities that are exhausting for the teachers and too big team might be a problem as well. Teachers then feel burnout, **overloaded** and they only know the teams (networks) that work together with them. The school as a whole (one team) does not work.

d) When good people leave

When **key teachers** or **headteachers** of affiliated schools leave, it might be a risk as well: *Only when the new headteacher came we started to work again slowly* (the headteacher of school T) ... *When one of the team drops off, I choose good substitute members* (the headteacher of school B). Teachers who professionally improve through cooperation and networking may expand their role and sometimes engage outside school as mentors and lecturers or leave to get a better job.

What a headteacher needs

A number of needs of headteachers of schools have already emerged from the previous categories.

Knowledge – the headteacher of school P emphasizes that headteachers mainly "*must comprehend the leaders and understand relationships at school*", they should know how to ensure safety of the teachers to develop a learning / teaching culture.

Orientation in project work - headteachers need to know where and when they can apply for grants.

Maintaining good relationships with external stakeholders (parents, establishing entities, partner schools).

Be brave! - Do not be afraid to take risks, take over financial risks, trust your partners.

Great team and wider leadership - All headteachers have repeatedly affirmed that they need to "lean on people" and especially on their colleagues in leadership, which should have a sufficient number of good leaders. A broad support team (representatives, project staff, assistants, educational consultants...) sets the hands of the headteacher free for creating and maintaining networks in relation to the projects / topics.

I fly above the ground, I deal mainly with development issues, I have ideas, they have to ground me a bit and manage the daily routine. I need people in the wider leadership who assume responsibility for administration - who document and manage projects, manages electronic administration of the pupils and I have an assistant as well (the headteacher of school P). *It is important to have good co-workers in leadership, the relationship with the deputy headteacher is like the second marriage* (the headteacher of school B).

Other needs to maintain and develop networking naturally include enough time and space for work, "good nerves", family support, **stable school policy**, more funds in education for teachers and materials, less burdens for teachers and so on.

5.8. Summary

We have shown examples of networks within schools and outside schools, examples of their goals and topics. We have also indicated concerns the headteachers may have in relation to networking, their doubts and needs. Across the topics, we can find examples of both formal and informal networks within schools and among schools, examples of networking with financial (project) support and without it, examples of closed, semi-open and fully open networks. We highlight and offer specific examples of profits from networking for all subjects and give specific examples of networks that are important for the development of inclusive education.