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## **How to develop a trans-cultural approach for studying the *professional development of trainers* in a European context?**

**– Working paper on the methodological foundations of the research approach of the European cooperation project TTplus**

### **1. Introduction**

This working paper is a contribution to the ongoing methodological discussion that has been started within the European cooperation project TTplus. The project has been launched as a ‘reference material’ project within the programme Leonardo da Vinci to

- a) analyse the current professional situation of trainers in the participating countries and to
  - b) develop a common framework for promoting the professional development of trainers.
- As such, these tasks are seemingly simple and they could be easily operationalised in terms of traditional questionnaires (that provide data on the working condition of trainers) *and* pre-comparative country studies (that bring forward examples of ‘good practice’).

The questionnaires would provide the basic data for relating the examples to country-specific backgrounds. The examples could serve as basic material for constructing ‘the European framework’ for promoting ‘training of trainers’ in Europe. The framework could be composed as a set of cornerstones and related recommendations that emerge as conclusions from the empirical analyses.

However, for the TTplus project such an approach is not optimal for several reasons:

- **Firstly**, the project is working parallel to another European cooperation project (“Eurotrainer”) that has the task to produce a Europe-wide basic material on the professional situation of and training for trainers. Therefore, it is not appropriate to duplicate the work but instead there is a case to develop synergy between the projects.
- **Secondly**, the TTplus project can draw upon the experience of several predecessor projects in which the professional situation of trainers or the preconditions for training practice have been highlighted (as a part of a more comprehensive agenda). Therefore, there is a need to consider, how adequately these projects have analysed the working contexts of trainers and to what extent this interpretation needs to be revised or specified.
- **Thirdly**, the TTplus project can draw upon the experience of several recent projects that have been working with innovation concepts that are related to workplace learning and uses of ICT as support for work-related learning. Therefore, there is a need to consider, how adequately the particular impulses and related working concepts have addressed regarding the involvement of trainers as key actors for putting the ideas into practice.

- **Fourthly**, the TTplus project has committed itself to a work programme that includes basic analyses, field studies, scenario-setting, construction of context-specific use cases and analyses on models for promoting professional development of trainers. In this respect the project has committed itself to a complex, relatively selective and action-oriented research programme that draws upon the empirical findings.

In the light of the above this working paper tries to outline a common strategic framework for context-specific studies on the boundary conditions for ‘training’ in different societies and on the prospects for ‘training of trainers’. In particular the framework tries to take into account dynamic changes and ‘moving frontiers’ between different policies, actor positions and related interests. Regarding the special needs of a trans-cultural research strategy, the framework seeks to develop instruments and strategic steps that maintain a picture of ‘coherent diversity’. Thus, the framework has to give all ‘training cultures’ a possibility to find themselves in a European group picture and to address their starting positions, strategic priorities and change agendas in their own terms. At the same time the framework has to provide basic tools and mediating instruments that make it possible for different training cultures to understand each other and to learn from each other.

In this respect the framework consists of the following main components that are outlined in the following sections:

- 1) **The section on basic analyses** explores the role of ‘training activities’ and ‘trainers’ in the context of different societies with the help of related mapping instruments.
- 2) **The section on prospective analyses** presents similar mapping instruments for analysing the prospects for curricular changes regarding in different training cultures and for drawing conclusions for the development of ‘training of trainers’.
- 3) **The section on scenario methodologies** presents the instruments for addressing major changes at macro- and meso-systemic levels (*‘scenarios of practice’*) and at micro level (*‘use cases’*).
- 4) **The section on research strategy** discusses the role of common *research questions*, *hypotheses*, *guiding principles for knowledge processing* and the *strategy for the inquiry*.
- 5) **The concluding section** summarises briefly the points of the previous sections.

## **1. The basic analyses: How to locate the role ‘training activities’ and ‘trainers’ in different systemic and organisational contexts?**

The first section presents the starting point for *background analyses* and presents the related mapping instruments. **The first mapping instrument** presents a *‘global’ overview* on the distribution of ‘training’ activities between different social systems and policy fields. The instrument also highlights the role of institutions and market processes in the shaping of the characteristic ‘training’ activities in different societies. **The second mapping instrument** analyses in what way *‘training functions’* linked to *cooperation strategies* and are *distributed in the respective organisational contexts*. The complementary relations between the two instruments are discussed in the reflective commentary.

### **1.1. The role of ‘training’ vis-à-vis different systemic, institutional and policy contexts**

The basic problem for the European studies that focus on trainers is the fact that the subject matter ‘trainers’ has often been taken up as corollary issue, an annex to a main theme that is perceived as a broader framework. In this respect educational studies that raise the issue ‘training of trainers’ tend to focus primarily on (vocational) teacher education and consider

the diverse groups of trainers as sub-sets of a broader spectrum of ‘teachers and trainers’. In a similar way organisational studies that raise the issue ‘training in industry’ tend to focus primarily on managerial strategies (HRD) and consider ‘training’ as a particular activity that contributes to the implementation of such strategies.

Therefore, attempts to create European overviews on ‘training’ or ‘training the trainers’ tend to remain fragmented. Consequently, it is difficult to get a general picture on the role of training activities in different societies and on the changes that are taking place in different training cultures. Below, Figure 1 presents a mapping instrument that helps to analyse how ‘training’ activities are allocated to different societal systems and policy fields.

<b>Systems/ Institutions</b>	<b>Public education/ training system:</b>	<b>Private training markets/ Training in the industries</b>
<b>Policies/ Instruments</b>	<i>VET colleges/ Public training centres</i>	<i>Private training providers/ Training within enterprises</i>
<b>Education/ Training/ HRD:</b> <i>Macro-systemic frameworks</i>	<b>Workplace training based on formal VET or CVT curricula and qualifications</b>	<b>Workplace training based on company-specific HRD strategies</b>
<b>Employment/ Education/ Social policy:</b> <i>Meso-systemic schemes or measures</i>	<i>Workplace training within employment promotion schemes</i>	<i>Workplace learning as arena for targeted training initiatives</i>

**Figure 1: Allocation of ‘training’ activities to policy fields and to arenas of activity**

The mapping instrument has been presented as an *open space* that makes it possible to locate that starting points and main activities in different training cultures. In this respect the instrument itself doesn’t postulate the primacy of public education/training systems or private training markets. In a similar way the instrument is open for interpreting the role of different policies and measures. Thus, the instrument doesn’t postulate the existence or lack of connections between *systemic macro-frameworks* and *targeted schemes or measures*.

However, given the relative openness, the instrument makes it possible to locate the country-specific key institutions/organisations, key activities and their dependency on general policies. In particular the instrument makes it possible to make transparent the role of training activities that are located to systemic or institutional interfaces areas or which are characterised by overlapping policies and policy-related interests regarding the role of training activities.

Thus, the first mapping instrument makes it possible to presents the **national training landscape** as a *macro- and meso-systemic constellation of training activities* vis-à-vis

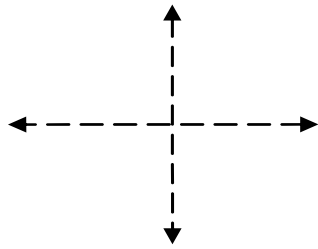
systemic, institutional and policy-related background factors. In this respect the instrument makes it possible to illustrate possible clustering of training activities on the basis of leading ideas, institutions or organisational infrastructures. On the other hand it is possible to draw attention to policy-based, cultural and/or institutional differences in the given national context.

In addition to this it is worthwhile to note that the instrument relates to each other macro-systemic background factors and meso-systemic factors (measures and schemes) that may refer to the impact of different policy fields upon training activities. Thus, the national training landscapes may bring into picture different patterns of influencing training activities.

## 1.2. The allocation and distribution of ‘training functions’ in organisational contexts

In this context it is essential to note that the allocation, combination and distribution of training functions is not pre-defined by the systemic, institutional or policy-related settings. Instead, it is essential to note that the training providers (as organisations) and the user-organisations (as partners in training arrangements) may follow different patterns. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse the organisational strategies for developing and organising training activities on for making use of training functions. Below Figure 2 presents a mapping instrument for analysing the organisational strategies, patterns of cooperation and the related tendencies to combine or distribute training functions.

<b>Arrangements/ Strategies</b> <b>Functions/ Distribution</b>	<b>Public VET curricula:</b> <i>Cooperation between the learning venues</i>	<b>Training in the industries:</b> <i>Combination of internal and external arrangements</i>
<p><b>Centralised training functions:</b> Curriculum management/ Content management</p> <p><b>Decentralised training functions:</b> <i>Pedagogic support and supervision</i></p>	<p><b>Curriculum management in cooperation with VET or CVT providers</b></p> <p><i>Implementation/ supervision of training schemes for diverse target groups</i></p>	<p><b>Curricular cooperation based on company-specific training policies/partnerships</b></p> <p><i>Facilitation/ supervision of decentralised learning within training initiatives</i></p>



**Figure 2: Organisational strategies related to ‘training’ activities**

As was the case earlier (see Figure 1), the instrument presents an open space that makes it possible to identify how different organisations position themselves on the training landscape regarding curriculum management vs. curricular cooperation and regarding the centralisation of training functions (use of full-time trainers) and decentralisation of training functions (use of part-time trainers). In this respect the instrument is open for identifying different kinds of strategies, possible cooperation arrangements and combinations of training functions.

Thus, the second instrument complements the overview on the national training landscape by presenting *meso-and micro-systemic constellations* on the *organisational positioning vis-à-vis training activities and training-related expertise*. In this respect the instrument can bring forward more specific tendencies regarding the management of training, partnership-based cooperation and networking as well as mobilisation of internal resources.

### 1.3. Reflective commentary

In this context it is worthwhile to note that the above presented mapping activities have the status of preparatory measures. Regarding the aim to analyse *training activities* and to the *position of trainers in different training cultures* the instrument makes it possible to identify basic models according to the following points:

- 1) The instruments draw attention to the *centres of activity* regarding training functions and make it possible to identify different training cultures according to the allocation of central roles and responsibilities.
- 2) The instruments draw attention to the *central vs. peripheral role of cooperation arrangements* in organising training provisions.
- 3) The instruments draw attention to different *combinations of central responsibilities and distributed training functions*.
- 4) The instruments draw attention the possible role that *new learning needs* and *alternative modes of providing pedagogic support* may play in the training culture.

## 2. The prospective analyses: How to relate *training practice* and ‘*training of trainers*’ to changing views on *curricula*?

### 2.1. Starting points

The second section shifts the emphasis from starting positions and background factors to boundary conditions for curriculum development and to prospects for curricular change. In this context it worthwhile to note that the concept ‘curriculum’ is used as a trans-cultural concept that refers to different country-specific terminologies. Therefore, in this framework the expression ‘curriculum’ or ‘curricular’ is not only limited to formal education/training systems or regulated curricular frameworks or to written curriculum documents. The concept ‘curriculum’ is used as an overarching concept for all (conceptual and action-oriented) frameworks that give training processes a pedagogic meaning-structure. The pedagogic meaning-structure presents the learning goals, appropriate means to achieve the goals and indications on the competences that have been acquired on the basis of successful learning.

Without going into detailed analyses on different conceptually and culturally specific views on ‘curriculum’ or ‘curriculum processes’ (which vary considerably in different formal education/training cultures) it is possible to indicate *two genres of curricula* and *curriculum development* in the context of training activities:

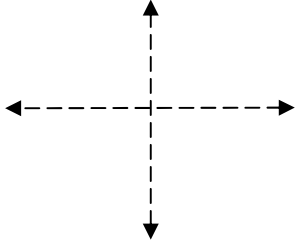
- a) **vocational particularism** (which is characterised by *atomistic view on skilling* and by piecemeal engineering regarding curriculum development),
- b) **vocational professionalism** (which is characterised by *holistic view on promoting competences* and by context-embedded curriculum development).

It is worthwhile to note that these genres are not stable background factors. Instead they need to be taken into account as basic orientations that have a co-shaping impact on the future curriculum concepts and on the processes of renewing curricula and learning concepts. However, in order to analyse the changing views on curricula it is essential trace the factors that are crucial making different learning arrangements manageable, usable and effective in the country-specific training contexts. In a similar way it is essential to analyse, what kind of curricular frameworks for ‘training of trainers’ are feasible, attractive and adequately adjusted to the related training culture.

## 2.1. The role of ‘curricula’ as support frameworks for training activities

In this context the first mapping instrument (see Figure 3 below) explores the role of ‘curricula’ as conceptual frameworks and pedagogic guidelines for training activities. On the one hand this refers to the institutional status that is given to curricula as the underlying framework. On the other hand this refers to the possible roles of trainers as ‘curricular actors’ and to their room for manoeuvre.

The institutional status of curricula Role of training staff as curricular actors	Curricula as regulative frameworks for public education/training	‘Curricula’ as management and marketing concepts in the training markets
Training staff as ‘curriculum managers’	Curriculum implementation based on given guidelines and training competences	Training management based on company-specific strategies and current market situation
Training staff as ‘curricular networkers’	<i>‘Curricula’ as tailored training arrangements for special client groups</i>	<i>‘Curricula’ as support for targeted training and learning based on personal development plans</i>



**Figure 3: Specifying the role of curricula as support frameworks for training**

Here, the mapping instrument presents some starting positions and outlines an open space for shaping new curricular approaches. In particular the instrument makes it possible to analyse shifts of emphasis and boundary-crossing movements. However, regarding the future role of curricular frameworks and the positioning of trainers (as curricular actors) there is a need to differentiate between

- a) the individual preferences of trainers (based on their own professional and pedagogic experience) and
- b) their views on the critical expectations to which the training activities have to respond (based on their interpretation on the current training culture).

## 2.2. 'Training of trainers' as support for curriculum- and training-related competences

The above outlined options for curricular change are closely related to the question, what kind of role 'training of trainers' can have in supporting the curriculum- and training-related expertise of trainers. The respective mapping instrument (see Figure 4) explores the potential role that 'training of trainers' can have in the light of different training contexts and different views on the trainers' pedagogic roles.

Firstly it is essential to note the different starting positions for 'training the trainers' in the context of *public training provisions* and in the context of *private training organisations*. On the one hand these for management and promotion of learning processes in organisational contexts. Obviously, these training contexts provide somewhat different expectations on the related knowledge on curriculum management and on curriculum development. On the other hand there is a broad demand to support the trainers' pedagogic competences in supporting the learning of diverse target groups and diverse individualised learning arrangements.

<b>Support for curriculum-related competences</b>  <b>Support for <i>centralised/ de-centralised</i> training functions</b>	<b>Curriculum management/ <i>Curriculum development</i> in public training provisions</b>	<b>Curriculum management/ <i>Curriculum development</i> in private organisations</b>
<b>Support for system-based or organisation-specific 'curriculum management'</b>	<b>Support for the management of training cooperation between learning venues</b>	<b>Training management related to externalised services or to work-related learning</b>
<i>Support for context-specific and target group -oriented pedagogic competences</i>	<i>Pedagogic support for work with tailored arrangements with special client groups</i>	<i>Pedagogic support for work with personal development plans and with related learning initiatives</i>

**Figure 3: Specifying the role of 'training of trainers' as support for training activities**

Once again, the mapping instrument outlines some starting positions an open space for identifying intermediate positions and boundary-crossing movements. Also, in accordance to the above presented instrument there is a need to differentiate between

- c) the trainers' personal preferences regarding 'training of trainers' (with reference to their individual interests and needs for pedagogic support) and
- d) the trainers' views on what the context-related stakeholders consider as policy priorities for 'training of trainers'.

### 2.3. Reflective commentary

The second set of mapping instruments has shifted the emphasis from the country-specific training landscapes to the educational characteristics of training culture and to the respective patterns of curriculum development.

Firstly, this discussion has brought into picture different educational genres and related approaches to the scope of training activities and to the formats of delivery (modules, schemes, wider training arrangements). Secondly, this discussion has brought into picture the role of guiding frameworks and role models. In this respect the instruments draw attention to the following *frontiers of curricular change* and *patterns of renewal* in the training cultures:

- 1) *Redesigning the curricular framework* of training activities *and/or* adopting *new leading ideas* regarding the contents and delivery;
- 2) *Redefining* the curricular or cross-curricular *cooperation patterns* according to *new partnership concepts* or new kinds of *client relations*;
- 3) *Rearranging the trainer/learner -relations* according to *new pedagogic service concepts* and related learning targets;
- 4) Reorientation vis-à-vis the *promotion of trainers' competences* in terms of *upgrading* (and introducing professional development measures) *or* in terms of *outsourcing* (and relying on external training experts).

### 3. The scenario methodologies: What kind of *scenarios of practice* and *use cases* can be constructed with a view on *trainers' professional development*?

#### 3.1. Starting points

As has been indicated, the tools for basic analyses and for prospective analyses provide a general picture of training landscapes and of some frontiers and patterns of curricular change. As such, these analyses provide necessary but not sufficient conditions for addressing the issue of trainers' professional development. For this purpose, there is a need for more context-specific information. Furthermore, there is a need to agree on a strategy for processing such information for developmental purposes.

Therefore, the TTplus project needs to use scenario methodologies to bridge the gap between empirical research information and developmental reasoning. Below I will present a proposal how to use scenario methodologies in studies that

- a) help to bring the country-specific data on 'training' and 'professional development of trainers' to a common European discussion and
- b) help to specify particular educational action contexts for the professional development of trainers and for related European cooperation.

In my view the use of scenario methodologies in the TTplus project has to be based on two levels of scenarios:

- 1) *the general level of 'scenarios of practice'* makes transparent key developments in the current training culture and relate the to the country-specific training landscape;
- 2) *the context-specific level of 'use cases'* makes transparent exemplary developments that illustrate how conceptual support for 'professional development of trainers' can contribute to the development of European training cultures.

### 3.2. What kind of *scenarios for practice* can be constructed at the *macro and meso levels*?

According to my interpretation the '*scenarios of practice*' are to be developed as more overarching narratives that characterise the key developments in the national training culture and in the related training landscape. The '*scenarios of practice*' should serve as the pillars for an overarching interpretation of the information that arises from all case studies that have been undertaken in one particular country.

The '*scenarios*' should make use of the mapping instruments that have been outlined for basic analyses (to capture the national training landscape) and for prospective analyses (to capture the frontiers and patterns for curricular change). Yet, the scenarios should not be a priori constructs to which the empirical analyses insert context-specific data. Thus, the scenarios should arise from the empirical material and reflect the action contexts, situation assessments and strategic orientations of the respondents:

- a) Firstly, the scenarios should serve as *integrative tools* inasmuch as the respondents' views can be linked to a common orientation. However, if the material is characterised by contradictory views, conflicting priorities and different strategic accents, this should be reflected via different scenarios of practice.
- b) Secondly, the scenarios should serve as *illustrative tools* inasmuch as the respondents' views can be related to specific sectoral or regional developments, related cooperation arrangements and change agendas regarding the training practice.

The scenarios should give a picture of **key developments** in the *training culture* and in the *training landscape* (either on the maintenance of status quo and of factors contributing to this or on major changes and of the drivers of change). In particular the scenarios should bring into picture such developments that are related to curriculum development or curricular reorientation regarding the following issues:

- Uses of public frameworks *or* private provisions and related frameworks for certification,
- Uses of public-private partnerships *or* training-related interest group, training networks and developmental communities,
- Linking of training activities to other policy fields *and/or* addressing of new target groups with new service concepts,
- Introduction of personalised learning environments, development of new web-based services for training/ learning *and/or* development of related support infrastructures.

At the level of **trans-national comparisons** the '*scenarios of practice*' can serve as tools to *bring coherence to diversity* and provide *points of comparison between different training cultures* and underlying training landscapes. At this level it is possible to conclude whether the national training cultures are characterised by convergent tendencies or whether the national developments are characterised by decentralisation and/or privatisation. Equally, when looking at similar initiatives and developmental trends, it is possible to relate them to parallel phenomena on the basis of '*scenarios of practice*' to which they contribute in their respective action contexts. Therefore, with the help of the scenarios the somewhat static background analyses and the more dynamic analyses of curricular changes can be linked to specific information that can be interpreted with the help of the instruments. Altogether, the scenarios can be presented as cultural configurations which may be convergent or divergent and give seemingly similar ideas a different status in the national training culture.

### 3.3. What kind of *use cases* can be constructed *at the micro level*?

According to my interpretation the '*use cases*' are to be developed as more specific narratives that address more directly key developments in which the *trainers perceive themselves to be involved* and in which they *consider themselves as participating actors* who are contributing to the developments. In this respect the '*use cases*' are episodes and stories that exemplify the co-participating and co-shaping role of trainers in the national training culture and in more overarching '*scenarios of practice*'.

In the light of the above the main distinction between the two levels of scenario setting is that

- a) **the 'scenarios of practice'** are based on *combined information* and *integrative knowledge processing* in order to make the key developments transparent (as a part of the national training culture and in the context of a national training landscape);
- b) **the 'use cases'** are based on *contextualising information* and *specifying knowledge processing* in order to make transparent different inputs to trainers' professional development and in order to promote trans-cultural knowledge enrichment.

Thus, the '*use cases*' can be seen as micro-scenarios that illustrate the development of training cultures and provide the basis for knowledge enrichment. Therefore, it is essential that the cases provide sufficient information on the following aspects:

- i) **The contextual adjustment of training:** What is the scope of training activities and what are the trainers' criteria for optimal contextualisation of training/learning activities?
- ii) **The adjustment of pedagogic support to target groups:** What are the reasons that make the adopted pedagogic strategies and instruments usable (or less usable) in the context-specific interaction between trainers and learners?
- iii) **The functionality and effectiveness of training:** What are the trainers' and stakeholders' criteria for delivering functional know-how and sustainable learning results?

In this context it is essential to note that the '*use cases*' are constructs that are related to the trainers' professional '*working consciousness*' at two levels:

- Firstly, they are related to trainers' *contextual images* on the preconditions for functioning learning in the training and learning environments of which they are responsible.
- Secondly, they are related to trainers' *professional self-understanding* on the kind of pedagogic support that they can themselves provide *or* of which they need to learn more to improve the effectiveness of their own work.

From this point of view the context-specific inputs that can be presented in the use cases can vary considerably regarding the format of delivery, the role of trainers' involvement and regarding the use of facilitating tools, shared instruments and common platforms. In this respect it is essential to pay attention to trainers' experiences and ideas that are related to the following kind of issues that may appear in the use cases:

- Integrative working and learning tasks that link learning processes more closely to conceptual interpretation of work processes and related quality criteria;
- Partnership-based learning arrangements, learning within industrial cooperation projects and knowledge sharing across work-related developmental initiatives;
- Use of learning arrangements and facilitation methods that promote learners' awareness of their capabilities and of competences that have been acquired via non-formal learning;
- Use of web-based facilities to promote interactive learning linked to personal learning environments and with the use of context-specific portfolio applications.

#### 4. Research strategy: What kind of research questions, hypotheses, guiding principles and strategies of inquiry can be considered in a trans-cultural study?

The sections above have given a role for basic analyses, prospective analyses and for scenario methodologies in conjunction with empirical studies. Altogether, the research approach is expected to support transformation of knowledge from empirical and analytical knowledge elements to building blocks for ‘scenarios of practice’ and ‘use cases’ and of related reasoning how to promote continuing professional development of trainers. In this respect this section discusses three key elements of the research strategy – the research questions, the guiding hypotheses and the strategy of inquiry – from the point of supporting such transformation.

##### 4.1. What kind of *research questions* can be formulated for the study?

In the kick-off meeting of the TTplus project an open brainstorming session was organised to develop common ideas on possible research questions. However, because of the novelty of the scenario methodologies that were presented (i.e. the ‘*scenarios of practice*’ and the ‘*use cases*’), the discussion of research questions could not be concluded with a clear interpretation on the role of empirical studies in supporting development-oriented knowledge processing. Therefore, the discussion could not reach a focal point and formulate basic questions that would guide the further knowledge processing.

Based on the above presented preparatory reflections it seems appropriate to formulate **basic research questions** in such a way that they create a balance between

- empirical-analytical interests of knowledge (finding facts),
- cultural-interpretative interests of knowledge (interpreting meaning-structures) and
- practical-transformative interests of knowledge (articulating change agendas).

Equally, in the light of the above it is essential that the basic research questions create a balance between factors that are related to

- a) broader societal environments (reflected by ‘*contextual images in a wider sense*’ and by ‘*scenarios of practice*’) and to
- b) immediately experienced action contexts (reflected by ‘*contextual images in a closer sense*’ and by ‘*use cases*’).

In the light of the above the basic research questions can be formulated in the following way:

<i>Interests of knowledge</i>	<i>Empirical-analytical interests of knowledge</i>	<i>Cultural-interpretative interests of knowledge</i>	<i>Practical-transformative interests of knowledge</i>
<b>Levels of analysis</b>			
<b>Contextual images in a wider sense – ‘<i>Scenarios of practice</i>’</b>	In what ways are the working contexts of trainers challenged by technological, market-related and educational pressures towards renewal and change?	To what extent are training organisations interpreting these challenges as risks factors or as possibilities for the renewal of the current training patterns?	In what ways are the challenges being met by change agendas that focus on technological, market-related and educational renewal of the training landscape?
<b>Contextual images in a closer sense – ‘<i>Use cases</i>’</b>	What kinds of problems are trainers facing in the current context?	To what extent can trainers themselves deal with such problems?	In what respects can trainers be supported via schemes for professional development?

#### 4.2. What kind of role can be given for *hypotheses* in the study?

In the kick-off meeting of the TTplus project the coordinator of the project presented the following statements as tentative 'hypotheses' for the project (see Attwell 2006)

- "Lifelong learning is leading to wider context and processes of learning including informal and e-learning."
- "Diffusion of training processes, increasing numbers of people responsible for some form of training."
- "Professional trainers discover new roles and responsibilities at the work place (e-learning, environments for informal learning, continuing professional development)."
- "Traditional structures and systems have failed (to follow these developments)."
- "A need for continuing professional development (CPD) that is linked to the actual practice of training."

Since these statements were presented in the beginning phase of the meeting and they were followed by the partners' opening statements, it was difficult to specify the status of these statements and their role in the research strategy. Clearly, the research approach could not be derived from these 'hypotheses' alone. Equally, the conceptual and methodological status of the issues that were raised by partners was not clarified up to common conclusions. From this point of view I propose the following cornerstones for the research approach of the TTplus project in addition to the above formulated basic research questions:

##### A. *The basic assumptions*

**A1:** "Lifelong learning is leading to wider contexts and processes of learning including non-formal, informal and technology-mediated learning."

**A2:** "The ongoing diffusion of training and learning processes is increasing the number of people who are responsible for some form of training."

**Commentary:** To me these statements can be taken as joint *assumptions* that need not be put supported or confronted by specific evidence. Yet, as underlying assumptions they do have their relevance regarding the treatment of the hypotheses and the generative themes.

##### B. *The working hypotheses (WH) and the contrastive hypotheses (CH)*

**WH1:** "Professional trainers discover new roles and responsibilities at the work place (e-learning, environments for informal learning, continuing professional development)."

**CH1:** "New working concepts in training at the workplace are leading to wider distribution of training functions instead of consolidating the central position of professional trainers."

**WH2:** "Public education/training provisions and their curriculum development initiatives will have new roles in supporting workplace learning."

**CH2:** "Public education/training systems and their curriculum structures will have a less important role regarding because of alternative developments in workplace learning."

**WH3:** "The above mentioned developments create a need for continuing professional development (CPD) linked to the practice of training. Such CPD measures can be promoted with a joint framework that is based on '*scenarios of practice*' and '*use cases*'."

**CH3:** "The above mentioned developments are linked to new needs for continuing professional development (CPD). The dispersion of training function puts into question the usability of a European framework based on '*scenarios of practice*' and '*use cases*'."

**Commentary:** In the way that the ‘hypotheses’ have been revised as ‘working hypotheses’ it is possible to find some evidence during the studies. In this context the use of the concept ‘working hypotheses’ is particularly appropriate because the evidence is dependent on developmental ideas and efforts to which the study can partly contribute. In a similar way, the alternative developments are characterised by ‘*contrastive hypotheses*’ that may bring into picture *contrastive evidence* that doesn’t necessarily have the character of counter-evidence.

### C. The generative themes

- **GT1:** Because of the emergence of new training concepts and due to the wide distribution of training functions there is a broad variety of ‘career models’ to be observed both regarding ‘full-time trainers’ and ‘part-time trainers’. This gives rise to different degree of commitment to the role of ‘trainer’ and to a related career perspective.
- **GT2:** Due to the different role of ‘curricula’ in diverse training cultures (and in related training arrangements) trainers have respectively different views on, what kind of support curricular frameworks can give to the actual training practice. This gives rise to different expectations on the role of curricula or training schemes that are designed to support the continuing professional development (CPD) of trainers.
- **GT3:** Obviously, workplace based training has to meet the demand of ‘connectivity’ between the training and learning context and the real working life in which the learning results and the acquired competences are to be put into practice. Yet, when pursuing such immediate *educational connectivity*, the pedagogic development of training arrangements may lose the perspective to wider social needs, interests and (personal) development goals that can provide a basis for alternative *societal connectivity*.

**Commentary:** The above mentioned themes indicate possible contradictions that cannot be formulated as clear working hypotheses or counter-hypotheses. Instead, they can be indicated as generative themes that need to be observed during the studies and can be taken up as support tools for interpreting the materials.

### 4.3. What kind of guiding principles for the knowledge processing can be considered?

The above presented reflections are related to a research approach that differs from the typical empirical-analytical or observational-interpretative or innovation-accompanying research designs in which the role of research is primarily related to explanatory, interpretative or conceptualising functions. The research context of the TTplus differs from all basic models. Therefore, there is a need to consider what kind of knowledge processing can be related to such a research context. In particular there is a need to consider, how the status of the project as a European cooperation project and the task to articulate the findings vis-à-vis the perspective of European Qualification Framework (EQF) can be taken into account.

Below, the guiding principles for knowledge processing are discussed in the light of two alternative but mutually complementing strategies (s. Ritsert & Brunkhorst, Bracher):

- a) Strategies to concretise a given *central reference for conceptualisation (CRC)* vis-à-vis the context of empirical studies and developmental work;
- b) Strategies to construct *contexts for demonstrative interpretation (CDI)* to upgrade the empirical-practical knowledge basis with the help of theoretical re-processing.

### ***A. Regarding the concretisation of a central reference for conceptualisation (CRC)***

A strategy for knowledge development that is based on ‘concretisation of a *central reference* for *conceptualisation*’ would be applicable if the study were based in strong theoretical foundation. Alternatively one could argue for such a strategy if the process of making a common European qualification framework had reached an advanced stage and if the field of ‘training’ and ‘training of trainers’ were being discussed in terms of common concepts across Europe.

However, as things stand now, there are no strong theoretical concepts that could claim to provide a coherent ‘central reference’ for the diverse European training cultures (and for related issues on ‘training of trainers’). Neither has the European discussion on ‘European Qualification Framework’ progressed in such a way that one could assume that the common European (intergovernmental) policy processes could create a strong reference structure. At best the broad European consensus on the principle of lifelong learning has created the possibility to discuss education/training policies and the culture learning in terms of European Area for Lifelong Learning.

### ***B. Regarding the construction of contexts for demonstrative interpretation (CDI)***

A strategy for knowledge development that is based on construction of *contexts for demonstrative interpretation* (CDI) is applicable when there is no strong theoretical foundation for studying the field and even the common European policy processes appear to leave the field conceptually fragmented.

In this respect the preparatory reflections that have been presented above on the mapping instruments, scenario methodologies, research questions and hypotheses have altogether prepared the grounds for the latter kind of knowledge processing. According to this kind of strategy there is a need to keep the research dialogue with the respondents relatively open (in order to trace their own situation assessments, modes of reasoning and strategic orientations) but at the same time bring into picture contextualising and interpretative tools that help to locate the information into a broader group picture:

- 1) The methodological role that has been given for the *working hypotheses* or *contrastive hypotheses* and for the *generative themes* is based on the idea of ***constructing empirical contexts for demonstrative interpretation***.
- 2) The application of scenario methodologies (i.e. producing ‘scenarios of practice’ and ‘use cases’) can be seen as a subsequent step towards ***constructing empirical and practical contexts for demonstrative interpretation***.
- 3) The comparative analyses and the effort to articulate the findings vis-à-vis European Qualification Framework pose a challenge to progress towards ***constructing theoretical contexts for demonstrative interpretation***.

In the light of the above the research strategy represents a relatively open architecture of knowledge development. The architecture has already been put into practice in the pilot study of Bracher and it has been made explicit in the conceptual and methodological groundwork by Ritsert and Brunkhorst. In the next sub-section some ideas are outlined, how to apply to the empirical inquiry such guiding principles that are in accordance with strategy of knowledge development that has been outlined above.

#### 4.4. What kind of strategies of inquiry can be considered?

Finally, it is necessary to make some methodological remarks on the strategies of inquiry that are to be developed to obtain the kind of information that is needed. In this respect it is essential to note the differentiation between macro- and meso-systemic analyses (that are expected to contribute to ‘scenarios of practice’) and micro-systemic analyses (that provide the basis for ‘use cases’).

##### *a) Concerning individual interviews*

The relative openness of the strategy for knowledge development (including the formulation of the research questions and the working hypotheses/contrastive hypotheses) leaves room for a controlled-explorative research dialogue. Thus, the aim of the individual interviews is to trace the views of trainers and stakeholders as *genuine actor’s perspectives* (and the related meaning-structures) inasmuch as it is possible. Therefore, the interviewer should suggest ‘building blocks’ for the contextual image but leave it open to the respondent to interpret to what extent the issues, developments and activities are central for the respondent’s contextual image and to what extent they are peripheral.

In order to contribute to the kind of ‘*use cases*’ (that are to be constructed on the basis of the interview materials) the interviews should make it possible get holistic insights into typical problem situations or into exemplary training arrangements that the trainers consider as innovative practice. Equally, the interviews should make it possible to trace the respondents’ reasoning, how the problems could be overcome or how dissemination of innovative practice could be promoted.

##### *b) Concerning the creation of ‘group pictures’*

However, the results of the interviews are not only of interest as a basis for ‘contextual images in the closer sense’ and for ‘use cases’ that refer to action contexts of individual trainers. The aim of the study is to create a wider picture of adjustment, responsiveness and co-shaping contribution of trainers’ and stakeholders in their respective training culture. Therefore, it is of importance that the interviews are not seen as disconnected items. It is also worthwhile to consider the interviews as parts of a cultural sample that may be informative when different statements are compared with each other. The aim of such comparisons is to validate and/or to differentiate the situation assessments, to trace indications of cultural commonality and to trace indications of different actor- and stakeholder-interests regarding the development of training activities.

In order to contribute to the kind of ‘scenarios’ of practice’ (that are to be constructed on the basis of the interview material) some sets of individual interviews should make it possible to reconstruct processes of change or efforts to work with change agendas and the role of (and interaction between) different actors in such contexts. Furthermore, at least some of the interviews make it possible to relate the local episodes to wider national, sectoral or regional and company-level policies. In this respect the ‘use cases’ would not be seen as isolated phenomena but as exemplary cases that can be related to wider developments.

## 5. Conclusions: How to present foundations of the research strategy in a nutshell?

At this point it is necessary to put an end to the preparatory reflections and to shift to the preparation of the empirical studies in the respective countries. This shift of emphasis will certainly bring into picture more specific views that are helpful in clarifying some of the points that have been only touched upon in the previous sections. Below I will try to summarise in a nutshell the main points and the main conclusions of this working paper.

**The introductory section** makes a distance between the traditional research designs that have been used in European ‘comparative’ projects and efforts to develop trans-cultural research designs. In this respect the work of the project TTplus is related to its predecessor projects and some preliminary characteristics are given for the ‘trans-cultural’ dimension of the project.

**The section on basic analyses** outlined two mapping instruments for presenting country-specific ‘training landscapes’ and for exploring the profiles of ‘trainers’ and the distribution of training functions in different contexts. These instruments have been designed to present overviews that specify the centres of activity, eventual cooperation patterns and related centralisation or distribution of training functions.

**The section on prospective analyses** made preliminary remarks on different educational genres to be taken into account (‘vocational particularism’ vs. ‘vocational professionalism’) and on the uses of curricular frameworks. Then, the section outlined mapping instruments for exploring curricular changes in the training culture and the role of curricula and schemes in supporting ‘training of trainers’. These instruments have been designed to specify frontiers of curricular change and patterns of renewal in different training cultures.

**The section on scenario methodologies** made a distinction between two levels of scenario setting. The concept ‘scenarios of practice’ was related to knowledge processing that addresses changes at the macro- and meso-systemic levels of training cultures. The concept ‘use cases’ was related to knowledge processing that addresses changes that can be experienced at meso- and micro-systemic training contexts. This distinction draws attention to the possibility to portray wider developments in the training cultures and to the specific characteristics of exemplary use cases.

**The section on research strategy** relates the previous issues to strategic discussion on the role of common *research questions*, underlying *hypotheses*, guiding *principles for knowledge processing* and the adjustment of the *strategy of inquiry* to the strategic reasoning:

- **Firstly**, the *basic research questions* were formulated in a matrix that presented three parallel interests of knowledge and two levels of analysis.
- **Secondly**, the initial ‘hypotheses’ were reworked into *basic assumptions* and *working hypotheses* (or *contrastive hypotheses*) to be related to three generative themes (on ‘career’, ‘curriculum’ and ‘connectivity’).
- **Thirdly**, two *alternative perspectives for knowledge processing* were outlined in the light of the three interests of knowledge (concretisation of a given *central reference for conceptualisation* vs. construction of *contexts for demonstrative interpretation*). In the context of the TTplus project only the latter approach was concluded as applicable. In this respect the above discussed points were linked to such a research strategy.
- **Fourthly**, specific *quality criteria* were outlined *for* planning the *individual interviews* and *for creating group pictures* that enable deeper insights into different training cultures and into related training landscapes, frontiers of change and curricular change agendas.