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**NETWORK-BASED COORDINATION IN SMALL STATES:  
STEERING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ESTONIAN  
LIFELONG LEARNING STRATEGY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Network-based coordination has become increasingly popular in the public sector. It tries to bring different sectors and policy areas together in order to tackle “wicked” and boundary-crossing problems more effectively. However, as the successful functioning of networks largely depends on the relations between the actors in the network, the management of processes in networks is needed. The management of network processes has not been studied in small states, but as small states can be expected to have special characteristics like highly personalised relationships, informal means of communication and multifunctionalism that affect the functioning and management of networks, it is necessary to do so. The aim of this thesis is to bring fourth special characteristics of small states and how they affect the management of network processes, using the example of the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 steering committee. In order to do so, a theoretical framework for analysing the management of network processes in small states is developed. Data for the empirical analysis is gathered from semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The findings from the empirical analysis are used to develop the theory further. It is evident that the management of network processes in small states is mainly affected by a high degree of personalism, a lack of human resources, attempts to reach a consensus instead of applying hierarchical authority, the mixing of personal and impersonal opinions and objectives, and the higher significance of an individual.

**Keywords:** network-based coordination, small states, network processes, network management

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## INTRODUCTION

In the recent decades, a shift from hierarchical coordination to horizontal or network-based coordination has been noted in the public sector (Bouckaert *et al.* 2010, 4). The emergence of networks is, on the one hand, a reaction to New Public Management reforms, which created “silos” that are now addressed by Whole-of-Government, Joined-up-Government and other similar approaches to governance. On the other hand, networks are thought to be the most appropriate mechanisms to tackle “wicked” policy problems that cross the boundaries of organisations and policy domains and therefore require expertise and resources from various sectors and organisations. (Christensen, Lægreid 2007, 9; Raab *et al.* 2013, 480). Among other benefits, networks are seen as a possibility to bring state and society closer together (Peters 2015, 61), to share resources (Johansson, Bäck 2017, 326) and offer more flexible and natural ways of communicating (Peters 1998, 20).

Horizontal coordination and networks have central importance also in small states with decentralised civil services like Estonia (Metsma 2017, 88), where hierarchical practices of coordination are not always viable (Randma-Liiv, Sarapuu 2019). The reason for that lies in the special social ecology of small states, which is characterised by highly personalised relationships, reliance on informal means of communication and multifunctionalism of both, individuals and organisations (Randma 2001; Randma-Liiv 2002; Sarapuu 2010). As the public administration and the functioning of civil service in small states is different from ones in the larger states (Benedict 1966; Randma 2001; Sarapuu 2010; Randma-Liiv, Sarapuu 2019), one can assume that network-based coordination also has several special attributes in small states. Although network-based coordination has been studied thoroughly, there are not any works that concentrate on the functioning of policy networks in the small state context. Consequently, the aim of the thesis is to analyse one aspect of governance in small states: network-based coordination.

Small states can be defined both in relative and absolute terms. In this thesis, a small state is defined by the size of its population, because when discussing public administration and civil service, the smallness of population is more relevant compared to other ways of approaching smallness (Benedict 1966, 23). What constitutes as a small population, varies from author to author, but often (World Bank; Commonwealth Secretariat 2018, v), and also in this thesis, the line is drawn around 1.5 million people. Although the special characteristics of small states present themselves already around that number, it has also been suggested that the smaller the population, the more apparent the characteristics associated with smallness become (Sarapuu 2010, 38).

This thesis focuses on the management of networks, more specifically on the management of network processes. The management of network processes, which concentrates on actors in networks and relationships between them and is therefore aimed at developing, nurturing and changing these relations, is also named the management of strategic complexities (Klijn, Koppenjan 2016). Networks, more than other mechanisms of coordination, depend on communication and relationships (Peters 2015, 64), and for that reason management activities concerning actors and creating favourable conditions for them are important (Klijn 1996, 105; Hovik, Hanssen 2015, 509).

The main research question this paper aims to answer is: **What are the specific characteristics of small states and how they affect the management of network processes?** The empirical part of the paper is a case study about managing network processes in the steering committee responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020.

In order to answer said question, the thesis aims to:

- 1) develop a framework for analysing the characteristics of the management of network processes in small states;
- 2) study the working order and the functioning of the steering committee responsible for monitoring the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020;
- 3) draw conclusions on whether and how the theoretical framework could be used for analysing the characteristics of the management of network processes in small states.

The paper is divided into two main parts – theoretical background, and empirical analysis. The theoretical part gives an overview of the theoretical knowledge needed to understand the topic and develops a framework. First, it gives an overview of network-based coordination. Second, it introduces the concept of network management and, third, moves on to the management of

network processes. Finally, it gives an overview of small states governance with an emphasis on characteristics that may influence the management of network processes. The last chapter uses theoretical knowledge on the management of network processes and on small state governance to introduce a framework that can be used to analyse characteristics of the management of network processes in small states. For the empirical analysis, document-analysis and semi-structured interviews were carried out. The purpose of the empirical analysis is to test the theoretical framework developed in the first part of the thesis. The findings from the empirical analysis are used to develop the theory further. The paper finishes with a discussion where the management of network processes are analysed in the small state context.

# 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

## 1.1. Network-based coordination

From the perspective of public administration, coordination is the traditional response to tackling complex problems (Cejudo, Michel 2017, 752). It can happen through three fundamental mechanisms: hierarchy, markets and networks (Bouckaert *et al.* 2010, 6). Hierarchical coordination is most common to Weberian bureaucracy and is characterised by authority, top-down initiatives and control. Coordination through the market mechanism is based on exchange and competition, supply and demand, and bargaining. Networks as the third mechanism rely on mutual cooperation, interdependencies, shared goals and trust. (Bouckaert *et al.* 2010, 35–36)

The networks, being the focus of this paper, are also the most difficult to define compared to hierarchy and markets that both operate in a relatively straightforward fashion. In a way, it is possible to define all governance mechanisms that do not function based on pure competition or pure authority, as networks (Grandori 1997, 32). What, then, exactly sets network-based coordination apart from hierarchy and markets?

First, individuals and organisations are participating in networks more or less voluntarily (Peters 2015, 93). Second, compared to hierarchical coordination, network-based coordination is more dependent on solidarity and collaboration between actors (Bouckaert *et al.* 2010, 44) and it requires bargaining, negotiation and mutual co-optation instead of authority (Peters 2003 via Bouckaert *et al.* 2010, 44). Actors in networks have to negotiate and exchange or share resources with each other to make the network effective (Rethemeyer, Hatmaker 2008, 631). Third, networks are, or at least they may be self-organising (Scharpf 1990, 42; Morcöl, Wachhaus 2009, 48). This self-governing capacity can help to share the responsibility of the government with other actors participating in the network (Sørensen, Torfing 2017, 829).



Although networks may seem as an ideal coordination mechanism for Whole-of-Government and similar approaches, their role is not to replace markets or hierarchy, but to be an alternative or a supplementary coordination mechanism (Christensen *et al.* 2015, 318). Therefore, network-based coordination should remain different, and be more flexible, autonomous and diverse than other mechanisms (Pedersen *et al.* 2011, 388). Because of these characteristics, networks can also be regarded as somewhat unstable. However, as in networks there are two levels of relations – those in the current network and those that have developed between the participants in the past and may continue in the future – the network can be more stable because of these underlying relations (Scharpf 1990, 41–42).

Networks enable organisations to share resources better than hierarchy and markets (Johansson, Bäck 2017, 326), which is especially important when dealing with complex societal problems that are difficult to tackle by a single organisation (Christensen *et al.* 2015, 318). Because of its ability to cross policy areas and sectors, networks are often better for policy formulation as they bring together a variety of experts from different areas who can offer new insights (Peters 1998, 21). By including a variety of people and organisations from different social spheres, networks also play a role in bringing the state and the society closer together (Peters 2015, 61).

Networks can also make coordination more complicated (Christensen *et al.* 2015, 318) or limit it (Peters 1998, 20). Besides a lack of trust, there can also be a lack of a common goal, a lack of commitment to the cause or even an unwillingness to be a part of the network. In a Weberian bureaucracy, this problem could be solved top-down, but networks require more elaborate instruments to function. Coordination through networks needs longer time and more interactions to be reliable (Bouckaert *et al.* 2010, 45) and this may actually result in higher transaction costs in time and energy (Metcalf *et al.* 2006, 30).

When a network functions very well, another problem may surface: networks can become so successful that they drift away from other policies and networks (Peters 2015, 65). In this case – besides the obvious increase in transaction costs with parties outside the network (*Ibid.*, 62) – networks can become a closed elitist group where the introduction of outsiders and therefore, of new knowledge, is difficult (Peters 1998, 20). When networks become too separate from the rest of the system, it can also result in a lack of objective scrutiny as there is no one to challenge their decisions (*Ibid.*, 20). Besides, the “overly” effective networks can become a threat to autonomy of individual organisations (Brinkerhoff 1993, 3).

Whilst in some ways, networks can be considered more democratic and open than other mechanisms of coordination (Peters 2015, 60), this sometimes is not so. Contrary to the popular belief, networks do not necessarily decrease the asymmetries in power (Scharpf 1990, 40), but simply some type of asymmetries are replaced by others. Although the vertical division of power might be lacking, it is replaced by resource and task-dependence (*Ibid.*, 40). The stronger participant or organisation with more resources or key tasks may withhold resources or keep certain problems off the agenda (McGuire, Agranoff 2011, 267). This can happen because networks often lack legitimate mechanisms for decision-making or conflict resolution (Peters 2015, 60; Scharpf 1990, 40–41).

## **1.2. Network management**

In networks, there are several actors or organisations pursuing their own interests, bargaining and negotiating with each other, and doing it with much more complicated mechanisms of decision-making and conflict resolution than is present in hierarchical coordination. Because of these shortcomings, networks often cannot function on their own and attempts to govern processes in networks are needed (Klijn *et al.* 2010b, 1065). Whether named as network management, network governance, facilitating networks or metagovernance, this activity uses social “tools” to steer social processes toward goals or away from stagnation and blockages (Rethemeyer, Hatmaker 2008, 630).

Provan and Kenis (2008, 234–236) distinguish three types of network management depending on who does the managing: (1) participant-governed networks, (2) lead organisation-governed networks, and (3) network administrative organisations. Participant-governed networks can be considered internal management, network administrative organisations external management, and the lead organisation-governed networks could be positioned somewhere in the middle. External management influences the conditions for the cooperation in networks, but internal management, in contrast, means that actors participating in networks try to self-organise and coordinate themselves (Hertting, Vedung 2012, 32–34).

As is evident, network management is a functional concept, where not necessarily just one, but often a variety of people take responsibility for the successful management of the network

(Markovic 2017, 365). Regardless the type of network management, there is a consensus that it is crucial for network effectiveness (Provan, Kenis 2008, 231; Hertting, Vedung 2012, 28; Cristofoli *et al.* 2017, 275; Markovic 2017, 361; Klijn *et al.* 2010b, 1076). Management, whether done by participants themselves, a metagovernor, or an administrative organisation, helps to bring together organisations and actors with diverging goals to frame strategies and pursue a common purpose (Hertting, Vedung 2012, 33). The more complex the network, the more need is there for network management and less for hierarchical control because the possibilities to oblige actors from different sectors and organisations are limited (Verweij *et al.* 2013, 1037).

Networks can be managed via different strategies. There is a general consensus that without adequate network management strategies it is impossible to achieve outcomes (Klijn *et al.* 2015, 742). The number and essence of these strategies, however, varies to a great extent. Klijn *et al.* (2010a), for an example, see four main strategies for network management: arranging, connecting, exploring, and process rules. Bouckaert *et al.* (2010, 45), on the other hand, based on Alexander (1995, 36–37) bring out three strategies for coordination in networks: communicative, cooperative and cultural.

Based on Klijn (1996, 107), network management strategies usually address one (or all) of three aspects: actors (players in the game), perceptions (their images, preference, and knowledge in the game), and institutions (the context of the game). These strategies are used to solve complexities in networks. According to Hertting and Vedung (2012) there are two types of complexities in networks: substantive and institutional. They see complexities rise from different institutional settings and, also, from different perceptions and objectives. (Hertting, Vedung 2012, 30–31) Thus, they address relations between organisations but dismiss relations between individuals. Klijn and Koppenjan (2016) fill this gap and add the concept of strategic complexity into the equation.

Klijn and Koppenjan (2016) describe three types of complexities that can occur in networks – substantive, strategic and institutional – and suggest that network management is needed to solve these complexities. They bring out three areas which network management can focus on (Klijn, Koppenjan 2016, 67):

- 1) Network management focusing on substantive complexity, which tries to enhance variety, support learning processes and research;
- 2) Network management focusing on strategic complexity, which tries to initiate and strengthen contacts, arrange relationships and mediate conflicts;

- 3) Network management focusing on institutional complexity, which engages institutional redesign like changing rules, resource distributions, and organisational relationships.

As mentioned in the introduction, this thesis concentrates on the strategic complexity, because networks are more dependent on people and relationships between them than other mechanisms of coordination (Peters 2015, 64).

### **1.3. Management of network processes**

Network management that focuses on strategic complexity attempts to initiate contacts between actors, strengthens and arranges the interactions between them, and tries to resolve conflicts (Klijn, Koppenjan 2014, 67). The management of strategic complexities is essentially the management of network processes as it concentrates on changing interaction processes between actors and therefore influences the setting and ecologies of the games (Klijn 1996, 107). The management of network processes tries to be as dynamic and fluid as possible because it uses developments happening in the network to its advantage (Edelenbos *et al.* 2013, 135).

The management of relations between actors is a crucial part of network management, because relationships are likely to be central to the performance of most networks (Whelan 2015, 546). It has even been suggested that if structural and relational aspects are dealt with, networks can overcome some lack of resources (Raab *et al.* 2015). It has also been observed that many challenges in networks are related to conflicts among partners (Agranoff 2006, 61). Actors do try to pursue their go-alone strategies, but because of interdependencies between them, this cannot be done without influencing each other and thus creating strategic complexities. The management of network processes is here required to bring actors and resources together to search for common interests and mutual agreements. (Klijn, Koppenjan 2016, 152)

These strategic interactions between actors can be described as “games”. Klijn (1996, 98) defines a game as “an ongoing, sequential chain of (strategic) actions between different players (actors) governed by formal and informal rules that develop around issues or decisions in which actors are interested”. Actors in games are interdependent on each other, but as they practice different strategies, they try to gain an upper hand and achieve their intended goal. As some actors have

more successful strategies, more resources or a better position, power differences emerge in networks. (Klijn 1996, 100–101)

To manage complex processes in networks, strategies different from ordinary management are needed (*Ibid.*, 104). Klijn and Koppenjan (2016, 156) bring out three different strategies that can be used to manage strategic complexities in networks.

- **Connecting or disconnecting actors, arenas, and games**

Network manager must have a variety of contacts from different domains to select the ones needed for a specific policy (Edelenbos *et al.* 2013, 135). Connections can be made by informing and inviting actors, motivating them to participate and connecting them with other actors (Klijn, Koppenjan 2016, 157). In this stage, manager has to make “boundary judgements” which determine whom to include and whom to exclude (Edelenbos *et al.* 2013, 135). Contrary to an assumption, connecting actors in public sector that are a part of “the network of civil servants” and therefore have known each other for a longer time, is necessarily not easier than connecting actors from other social spheres (Peter 2015, 94). In some cases, mediating is even more important when actors have had previous contacts or are good friends, because these aspects might make reaching a consensus more difficult. Even if strong previous contacts exist, further relationship and trust-building might still be necessary. (Ansell, Gash 2012, 11).

There is no consensus whether personal or prior relations between actors are an advantage or a disadvantage. On the one hand, networks function more smoothly than other mechanisms of coordination because they often depend on relations that have developed over time and are therefore more natural (Peters 1998, 20). Existence of these prior relations may also decrease transaction costs inside the network (Peters 2015, 62). On the other hand, if these previous connections prove to be negative, then it will be nearly impossible for the network to function effectively: networks, much more than other mechanisms of coordination, need trust (Whelan 2015; McGuire 2002; Klijn, Edelenbos, Steijn 2010; Provan, Kenis 2008). In case of negative relations between actors, trust is missing, and the (re-)establishment of it is an extremely time-consuming endeavour (Ansell, Gash 2012, 11).

Whilst connecting actors helps to start necessary interaction processes in networks, in some cases, these connections might prove to be dysfunctional or simply unfruitful, and then it is also necessary to disconnect actors. These dysfunctionalities might emerge, for an example, as delays, sabotage or stagnation. (Klijn, Koppenjan 2016, 157) Usually the dysfunctionalities do not appear between all participating actors, but only between some of them. Therefore, the strategy of selective activating is needed to identify and activate only the parties necessary for a certain task or a problem (Kickert *et al.* 1997, 47).

The activity of connecting and disconnecting actors in networks is associated with *boundary-spanning*, because organisational boundaries are crossed. The role of a boundary-spanner is mostly to share knowledge and information between organisations (and contribute to solving substantive complexity), in the course of this process individuals from different arenas are also connected with each other. (Tushman, Scanlan 1981, 289–292) Boundary-spanning can connect actors from different organisations and help to create a common ground between them (Edelenbos, Van Meerkerk 2017, 14). Hence, while connecting actors to decrease strategic complexity, boundary-spanning can also help to decrease substantive complexity.

- **Designing and redesigning (new) interaction processes and rules of the game**

The role of the network manager in this stage is to create favourable conditions to all participants. The easiest way to do it is to establish norms and rules that all actors agree on (Klijn, Koppenjan 2016, 159). Rules can be either formal or informal, meaning they can be developed by actors themselves and agreed upon orally, but they might also be established via contractual arrangements (Klijn 1996, 102, 109). Although contracts or other formal agreements may in some ways hinder the dynamic and flexible nature of networks, they might sometimes be necessary for successful collaboration (Head 2008, 738). The lack of rules and agreements or the establishment of unrealistic ones may be fatal for networks (*Ibid.*, 740).

Klijn and Koppenjan (2016) distinguish between six types of different rules that have to be agreed upon: rules about (1) objectives, agendas, and conditions; (2) participation, access, and exit, and role distribution; (3) process steps and time schedules; (4) structuring of activities; (5) information, and (6) making decisions.

- **Facilitating the interaction between parties within games or game rounds**

Actors in the network must also agree on by whom and how much they allow to manage interactions between them (Klijn, Koppenjan 2016, 172). As mentioned before, network management requires different skill set than other types of management and there are often much more skills and abilities needed (Cristofoli *et al.* 2015, 494; Klijn, Koppenjan 2016, 174). In addition, network manager must also seem trustworthy and neutral to all participants in the network (Williams 2002, 116; Klijn, Koppenjan 2016, 172). To fulfil all these complex tasks, sometimes only one person is not enough, and networks might need both formal and informal leaders (Bryson, Crosby 2006, 47).

#### **1.4. Small state governance**

It has been noted that some ideas and practices that apply to large states, cannot be put directly to the context of a small state, especially in the field of public administration (Randma-Liiv 2002, 388). The context of small states presumably provides a different setting for the functioning of networks and, therefore, it is necessary to study network management in the small state context. Before the special characteristics of the management of network processes in small states are elaborated on, a short overview of the most important aspects of small state governance is given.

Burton Benedict (1966, 23) distinguishes two ways for defining small states: small-scale society and small territory. Small territory as a term is self-explanatory, small-scale society is defined through the number and quality of role-relationships – in small societies, individuals interact with each other over and over again in different circumstances (Benedict 1966, 23). The role-relationships where the same individuals are brought into contact in many different contexts, can be characterised as particularistic. In this setting people are defined by who they are rather than what they do, and this results in a strong emphasis on personal relations. In contrast, in universalistic societies the focus is on what people do. (Parsons 1939, 462) Small size of the community can make people so close to each other that it is not possible to separate their different roles (Randma-Liiv 2002, 379); because of that it is also easy to mix personalities and private interests (Corbett, Connell 2015, 449), occupational and personal traits.

An important characteristic of small states is personalism, which can be described by close, integrated relationships inside the community (Farrugia 1993, 221). This aspect can be both an advantage and a disadvantage. On the one hand, close personal relationships mean that there is a heavier reliance on informal means of communication (Raadschelders 1992, 28), which can make the flow of information more fluid. The swiftness of decision-making and feedback via informal means of communication makes it a lot easier to communicate and revise ideas, decisions, policies without bureaucratic obstacles (Sarapuu 2010, 40). Personal relationships between individuals in different organisations might also make interorganisational coordination easier (Randma 2001, 48). On the other hand, however, via informal means of communication it is much easier to make modifications and adjustments to decisions or even neutralise them (Farrugia 1993, 222–223). This may also result in undocumented decisions which create discontinuities when actors in the network change (Selwyn 1975, 138 via Randma-Liiv 2002, 386). Informal means of communication can also be used for career-related purposes and this may reduce the merit principle (Rees et al. 2005, 577). It has also been noted, – and though it seems contradictory –, that coordination and communication problems are more probable to occur in societies where there is a heavier reliance on informal means of communication (Sarapuu 2010, 40; Raadschelders 1992, 28), and hierarchical and routine-based structures are also more difficult to apply (Sarapuu 2010, 36). Besides individuals, governmental units can also become personalised. This creates similar difficulties as personalisation of lone positions: both individuals and structural units may be more difficult to coordinate and manage. (Randma 2001, 47)

Both particularism and personalism can be beneficial, but they can also create difficulties, especially if people that work together, do not get along because of previous relations or personal reasons. As it has been noted that people in small societies often develop either positive or negative relations with each other (Randma-Liiv, Sarapuu 2019), it is equally possible to have either positive or negative previous contacts. In a large state, personal antipathies could be solved by only connecting those experts that do get along, but in small states there might not be that many experts to choose from (Benedict 1966, 27).

To avoid problems described previously, people in small societies tend to avert conflicts because they can last for a long time and influence policy-making and implementation (Randma-Liiv, Sarapuu 2019). This avoidance of conflict can also mean that criticism is avoided, because it might be taken personally (Raadschelders 1992, 28), and instead false appraisals may happen based on personal relationships (Randma-Liiv 2002, 385). In addition, high degree of personalism may also



make applying of impersonal rules and contracts difficult (Benedict 1966, 29). Because of the importance of personal relationships, leaders in small states must find a balance between personal and impersonal rules (Randma-Liiv, Sarapuu 2019). It is therefore questionable whether impartial management tools could be used at all (Randma-Liiv 2002, 385).

Although small states often lack human resources, they are usually expected to have a bureaucratic structure similar to larger states because the same functions are necessary (Corbett, Connell 2015, 444). Due to a smaller population, however, sometimes multiple functions must be carried out by the same individual and the smaller the state, the more need is there to be multifunctional (Bray 1991, 513 via Randma 2001, 46). As the individuals need to carry out several different functions, there is less room for specialisation (Firth 1952, 47 via Randma 2001, 46). Inevitably, this also means that the knowledge and skills required from a civil servant are quite versatile.

The multifunctionalism in small states is characteristic to both, individuals and organisations (Sarapuu 2010, 35), and this has positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, civil servants that are engaged in many different activities have a much better overview of different policies and can therefore see the big picture more easily (Randma-Liiv, Sarapuu 2019). Besides that, through multifunctional jobs it is also possible to reduce the need for coordination (Randma 2001, 47). On the other hand, multiple roles can be an obstacle for civil servants, especially when civil servants must switch roles often and in a short timeframe (*Ibid.*, 46). Multifunctionality may also require more time spent on developing knowledge and skills and therefore it is difficult to be an expert in all the needed areas (Farrugia 1993, 222). Multifunctionalism also requires a lot of adaptability and flexibility (Randma 2001, 47); accountability can also be difficult to maintain in settings where individuals fulfil many different roles (Corbett 2015, 66).

Partly because of multifunctionalism and partly because of the lack of human resources, it is common for one individual to have a more significant role than in larger states (Raadschelders 1992, 28; Randma 2001, 47). A single person may have considerable effects on the functioning of the state and its social structure (Benedict 1966, 27). Although this can make decision-making and development and implementation of policies quicker, it might also put pressure on individuals and therefore make them act more spontaneously (Raadschelders 1992, 28). The representatives of small states in the European Union, for an example, often decide on their own how to proceed, but officials from larger states have either guidelines or must consult before making a decision

(Sarapuu 2010, 36). Small state officials are not expected to consult on every single matter (Thorhallsson 2000, 81–82), but instead their competence is trusted (Sarapuu 2010, 36).

As human resources are scarce, and a single individual has a more significant role, the expectations and recruitment of civil servants cannot follow the same patterns as in larger states. In small states, structures and jobs are often adapted to people, not vice versa (Randma-Liiv 2002, 380). This practice can create a situation where the rules and practices of the organisations do not matter and instead norms exist separately and are dependent on a certain individual (Christensen *et al.* 2007, 24 via Sarapuu 2010, 36).

In conclusion, the context of small states may influence the management of network processes mainly because of following traits.

- Highly personalised relationships, which means that people often know each other from previous interactions and trust between them might already be present.
- Heavy reliance on informal means of communication, which can make decision-making and other processes quicker, but may also result in discontinuities because of undocumented decisions or alterations in information.
- Particularism, which means that the emphasis is on who the person is, not what they do, and that it is often difficult to separate personal and occupational relations and interests.
- Sympathies and antipathies are usual, because people have often met with each other before.
- Applying of impersonal law and impersonal contracts is more difficult.
- A lack of human resources forces individuals to be more multifunctional and fulfil different roles.
- A single individual has a more significant role.

## **1.5. Framework for analysing the characteristics of process management in small states**

Based on previous chapters, this chapter introduces a framework for analysing the characteristics of process management in small states. For that, theoretical knowledge from the chapters on the management of network processes and small state governance are integrated. Based on the management strategies described by Klijn and Koppenjan (2016), possible characteristics for the management of network processes in small states are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of the management of network processes in small states

		Characteristics of the management strategies	Differences of management strategies in small states
Management of network processes as connecting or disconnecting actors, arenas, and games	Connecting activities and their potentials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selective activating is required to activate only the parties needed to solve a certain task.</li> <li>• The need for a variety of actors to choose from.</li> <li>• The need to invite and motivate actors to participate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actors that participate in networks may not be carefully selected, but simply only ones that are qualified to do the job.</li> <li>• Inviting actors and motivating them to participate is crucial, because only very few people may carry needed expertise or the right to make decisions.</li> </ul>
	Different ways of anchoring connections: arranging interaction processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mediating is important both when actors have had previous relations and also when they have not.</li> <li>• Development of trust between actors is needed for a more fruitful collaboration.</li> <li>• Trust-building is a lengthy process.</li> <li>• Mediating is also necessary to stabilise actors.</li> <li>• Informal agreements or contracts might be drawn to solidify cooperation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Due to close personal contacts, mediating might be even more necessary than in cases where people do not know each other, because compromising with a person you know well may be more difficult than with a stranger.</li> <li>• Building trust can be time-consuming, but it is nearly impossible to achieve it, if people know and distrust each other from previous interactions: conflicts might last for a long time.</li> <li>• Drawing impersonal contracts for continuing interaction might be more difficult.</li> <li>• Hierarchical methods for coordination may be more difficult to implement.</li> </ul>
	Disconnecting actors, arenas, and games as an option	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disconnecting can be done voluntarily, by no longer prolonging agreements and by making interactions between parties less intensive.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disconnecting might prove to be difficult, because <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ people are in close contacts with each other and therefore might take this disconnecting personally, and</li> <li>○ people may keep interacting in different contexts and these interactions may influence the functioning of a network.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Management of network	Rules about objectives,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Network manager must create favourable conditions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The establishment of common rules might be</li> </ul>

processes as designing and redesigning (new) interaction processes and rules of the game	agendas, and conditions	<p>for all participants to avoid the fear of actors of becoming victims to strategic behaviour.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before the establishment of other rules, the setting of a common goal is needed.</li> <li>• Rules can be both formal and informal, they might even be contractual.</li> <li>• Avoidance of too strict and restraining rules in the beginning is necessary.</li> </ul>	<p>difficult, because people in small states are used to the practice where jobs are adapted to people and therefore following more general rules can be a challenge.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finding a balance between impersonal and personal rules is more important than in large states.</li> </ul>
	Rules about participation, access, and exit, and role distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Important to select actors with the right expertise and experience without rounding up “the usual suspects” and making the network too exclusive.</li> <li>• The final criteria for participants should depend on the functions and needs of the network.</li> <li>• The selection should also depend on the ability of actors to interact with each other.</li> <li>• The Rules about leaving and accessing the network have to be flexible enough, but also not so lenient that it becomes too easy to join or leave in the middle.</li> <li>• There should be a division of rules to stakeholders and experts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Because of limited human resources, individuals might participate in several networks in the same policy domain and therefore there might be a lack of new insights and knowledge.</li> <li>• Difficult to select actors based on who get along with each other, because there might not be many individuals to choose from.</li> <li>• Due to limited human resources, one actor might have to fill several roles in the network, not just one.</li> <li>• Roles of knowledge producers / experts and stakeholders may overlap, because people have to be multifunctional.</li> </ul>
	Rules about process steps and time schedules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parallel development of different possibilities is needed.</li> <li>• Deadlines should not be too strict, but still motivate participants to manage their time in the best way.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It may often be impossible to develop several options at the same time because of the lack of resources, mainly human resources.</li> </ul>
	Rules regarding the structuring of activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The most effective way for structuring activities would be to establish top-level steering groups and operational level working groups.</li> <li>• Multiple levels of interaction enables to still continue work even if some groups reach blockages or stagnation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small states may not have the possibility to have both steering and working groups, because there simply might not be enough human resources to do so.</li> <li>• Multiple levels of interaction can also prove to be difficult because of lack of human resources.</li> </ul>

	Rules regarding information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rules on how information will be used and what can be shared must be established.</li> <li>• Sharing of information is more relevant in private sector as the public sector aspires to be as open and transparent as possible.</li> <li>• In politically complex matters, agreements on how to communicate information to the outside is necessary.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information may flow more freely, both inside and outside the network, because actors are in close contacts with individuals both inside and outside the network.</li> </ul>
	Rules about making decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the beginning, rules regarding decision-making should be relatively broad.</li> <li>• Decisions should be made as late as possible to have alternatives.</li> <li>• Agreements about conflict resolution have to create an even playing field for all actors.</li> <li>• The mandates of participants have to be clear for everyone; also, how much decision-making authority they have.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decision may be made quite early, because there are not enough resources to develop alternatives.</li> <li>• As the significance of a single individual is greater, actors in networks may have the possibility or an obligation to make a decision for the whole organisation.</li> </ul>
Management of network processes as facilitating the interaction between parties within games or game rounds	The role of process manager during the process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreements have to be made on the role and extent of activities of the network manager.</li> <li>• Both formal and informal leader may be needed.</li> <li>• Manager has to be trustworthy and neutral for all actors.</li> <li>• A successful network manager must have a wide array of skills and abilities.</li> <li>• Network manager does not have to be a single individual, a network can also be self-organising.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficult to find a process manager, whom all participants in the network believe to be trustworthy and impartial because of possible personal experiences.</li> <li>• As the network manager must be “a jack of all trades”, it might be difficult to find one of those for every network.</li> </ul>

Source: the author

Based on: Kickert *et al.* 1997; Edelenbos *et al.* 2013; Klijn, Koppenjan 2016; Ansell, Gash 2012; Head 2008; Bryson, Crosby 2006; Klijn 1996; Sørensen, Torfing 2017; Williams 2002; Cristofoli *et al.* 2015; Hertting, Vedung 2012; Randma-Liiv, Sarapuu 2019; Benedict 1966; Sarapuu 2010; Christensen *et al.* 2007; Raadschelders 1992; Randma 2001.

To sum up, the special characteristics of managing the network processes in the small state context can be expected to be the following:

- High degree of personalism, which presumably affects network management via many different aspects. First, due to close personal contacts there is a heavier reliance on informal means of communication and the network manager must take into account that people also interact with each other outside the main arena. Second, previous relations between the members in the network might make hierarchical methods of coordination more difficult to implement as people know each other. Third, the building of trust is a challenge if the members in the network have previous negative experiences with other members. Fourth, as people keep interacting with each other in other circumstances, disconnecting actors can be difficult. Fifth, conflicts and criticism may be avoided as they can last a long time and make continuous interactions difficult.
- Particularism, which might cause personal and impersonal relations and interests to overlap, and therefore make it more difficult for the manager to separate expert opinions from the personal ones.
- High significance of an individual, which, first, might put more pressure on a single person and make them act more spontaneously, and, second, might increase the individual's chance to affect the outcome.
- Lack of human resources, which, first, may affect the inflow of new knowledge and therefore limit the expertise, second, makes the formulation of different groups or levels of interaction challenging, and, third, narrows the number of alternatives discussed and brings decision-making into the earlier phase.
- Multifunctionalism, which, first, may cause one person or an organisation to fulfil several different roles, and, second, might cause an overlap between knowledge producers, experts, and stakeholders.

## **2. EMPIRICAL CASE STUDY**

### **2.1. The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020**

The preparation for the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 (hereafter LLS) started in the years 2009–2011, when the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, the Estonian Cooperation Assembly and the Estonian Education Forum prepared a project “Five Challenges in Estonian Education – Education Strategy for 2012–2020”. This document became the foundation for developing LLS 2020 in 2013. (HTM 2014a, 2) The strategy in 2013 was compiled by a task force that included 13 experts from the field of education and the labour market (HTM 2013a). LLS was approved by the Government on February 13, 2014 (HTM 2014a, 2).

The aim of LLS is to guide the most important developments in the field of education, it is also a basis for decisions concerning educational funding. It addresses the main obstacles in Estonian education like the lack of using skills in new contexts, the decline in age-related skills proficiency, low information-processing skills and the fear of using computers among older people. LLS tries to address these problems by creating better opportunities and encouraging people to learn their whole life through both formal and informal education and training. (HTM 2014a, 2) The vision of LLS for the year 2020 is that learning is a lifestyle, the opportunities for development are noticed and smart solutions are pursued (*Ibid.*, 4).

To fulfil the vision, five strategic goals are established: (1) change in the approach to learning, (2) competent and motivated teachers and school leadership, (3) concordance of lifelong learning opportunities with the needs of the labour market, (4) a digital focus in lifelong learning, and (5) equal opportunities and increased participation in lifelong learning. All five goals have strategic measures and activities to fulfil them. (HTM 2015a, 5)

The implementation of the strategy is coordinated by the Estonian Ministry of Education and Science (HTM 2014a, 20). The monitoring of the implementation of the strategy is done by a 14-

member steering committee (see the list of members in Appendix 3), which is comprised of experts from the fields of education and employment (HTM 2014b). In addition to monitoring, the steering committee must also revise the strategy in every two years and if needed, make proposals for amendments (HTM 2014a, 20). Besides that, the members of the committee will act as advisors in compiling the policy programs needed to implement LLS and give expert opinions on the Education Act compiled based on LLS (HTM 2014b). The aim of this thesis is to study the management of network processes in the context of a small state using the example of the aforementioned steering committee.

## **2.2. Research methodology**

The thesis is a qualitative case study that concentrates on the management of the steering committee that is responsible for monitoring the implementation of LLS. This particular committee is chosen because it can be regarded as a network-type coordination body, where people from different organisations and fields of expertise are brought together in order to pursue a common goal. As the people participating are presumably equals and as the committee is established by a ministry, both hierarchical and market mechanisms of coordination are probably lacking. Therefore, one can assume that network management activities are needed for the successful functioning of the committee. The policy field – education – the committee operates in is also directly influenced by small states characteristics as it affects all people in the country and therefore many have an opinion regarding the matter.

As the main research question posed in the introduction concerns the characteristics of the management of network processes in small states, the management of the steering committee is studied from this perspective. Management processes and the influence of a small state context are analysed based on the theoretical framework. The main focus is on members of the steering committee, their roles, relationships between them, and how the context of a small state affects the management of processes in this committee. Conclusions are made based on the theoretical framework and how well this case study helps to verify or contradict the characteristics described there.

The data for the case study was collected through document analysis and semi-structured interviews with the members of the steering committee. The case study method is chosen for this



paper because it can be considered suitable when developing new knowledge (Flyvbjerg 2006, 241) and when the object of interest that is studied cannot be separated from its context (Yin 2003b, 4; Yin 2003a, 23). Qualitative methods such as the case study also enable to study the case in depth and detail, and study perceptions of actors (Patton 2002, 14). Although qualitative methods are sometimes thought to be subjective, the subjectivity can be reduced by interviewing several members of the steering committee, not just a few. Semi-structured interviews (see interview topics and questions in Appendix 2) were chosen for data collection, because they are flexible enough, but still allow to cover needed topics (Rabionet 2011, 563–564). The interview questions were mainly based on the theoretical framework, but some questions were added to gather background information about the functioning of the committee (Appendix 2). The interview topics were necessary to better group similar questions together and make answering easier for the interviewees.

There were few documents to study: mainly directives by the Estonian Minister of Education and Science, which provided information about the members, the tasks and the working order of the steering committee (HTM 2014b, HTM 2017a, HTM 2017b) and the strategy itself (HTM 2014a). Most of the information about the management of the steering committee was gathered from semi-structured interviews.

The steering committee consists of 14 members. The choice of whom to interview was made based on the organisational affiliation of actors. Therefore, it was important that members from the Ministry of Education and Science, higher education, vocational education, general education, the student unions and the labour market were all represented. For the analysis, seven interviews were carried out (see the list of interviews in Appendix 1). The interviews were conducted between November 14 and December 4, 2018, they lasted from 35 minutes to two hours, an average being approximately one hour.

### **2.3. The functioning of the steering committee**

The main responsibilities and the working order of the steering committee are described in the directive of the minister (HTM 2014b). According to the directive, the main responsibilities of the committee are (1) to monitor the implementation of LLS, (2) to give an evaluation about the implementation in every two years, (3) to participate as experts in the preparation of the programs

of the strategy and give expert opinions about them, and (4) to give experts opinions about the Education Act based on LLS (*Ibid.*). The steering committee gathers in meetings, which are managed by the chairman of the committee (HTM 2014b). The meetings are held 2–4 times a year, between them the interactions are scarce (Interview D and F).

The basic rules about the functioning of the committee and the decision-making are set in the directive of the minister. The decisions are made by simple majority voting and in case of a tie, the tiebreaker is the vote of the chairman of the committee. The required quorum is two-thirds of the entire committee, the chairman or the deputy chairman of the committee also must be present. (HTM 2014b) The management is formally done by the chairman of the committee who is a secretary general or a deputy secretary of the Ministry of Education and Science (HTM 2014b, HTM 2017b). The agenda and the time frame of the meetings is prepared by the officials of the Ministry of Education and Science. The input and the feedback that is required from the members of the steering committee is put together by several officials of the Ministry of Education and Science, some of which are members of the committee and some are not. (Interview G)

According to several interviewees (Interview C and D), the functioning of the steering committee is somewhat formal, the committee does not gather that often and not many important decisions are made. Several interviewees mentioned that the people participating in the committee responsible for developing LLS, and in the committee responsible for monitoring the implementation of the strategy, were mostly the same and there were only slight differences in members (Interview A, C, F and G).

All the discussions and decisions made in the meetings are protocolled by an official of the ministry (HTM 2014b). The protocol could be defined as something between a verbatim record and an abstract (Interview A). After the meeting, the protocol is sent to all the attendants of the meeting for revisions (Interview B, C and E). In some cases, there are also short abstracts made about certain topics (Interview B and G).

## **2.4. Management of network processes as connecting or disconnecting actors, arenas, and games**

The empirical findings showed that the actors were chosen to participate in the network mainly based on the field they represented (Interview B, C and D) and their expertise (Interview A); in addition, most of the people responsible for compiling the strategy were also included (Interview A, C and G). There was no applying to the committee or other similar formal actions, but the officials of the Ministry of Education and Science simply decided whom to invite, and the potential members had the possibility to accept or to decline (Interview D and G). Therefore, at least in some part, the connecting of actors was a political decision (Interview F). However, as the steering committee mainly consists of the people that had developed LLS, it is important to know how the experts to the first committee were selected: the committee responsible for the development of LLS was assembled by one person, who had previous experiences and knowledge about the “appropriate” people in Estonia in the field of education (Interview F). Later on, while assembling the steering committee responsible for monitoring the implementation of LLS, the ministry took previous experiences in developing the strategy into account (Interview G).

Most of the members of the committee were the same ones that were responsible for the development of LSS (Interview A, C and G). This lack of human resources was also noted by one of the interviewees that said it would be difficult to find people in Estonia in the field of education that have not interacted with each other previously, and this also made the finding of unbiased experts challenging (Interview G). However, though the committee was compiled based on previous experiences with the people participating, no interviewee believed that there was someone in the network unsuited for the job (Interview A–G).

All in all, the composition of the committee can be regarded as representative, because all the needed actors are connected: experts from different fields and organisations – representatives from the Ministry of Education and Science, from elementary, general, vocational and higher education, also from the side of students and work life – are all present (HTM 2014b). According to one interviewee, however, the representativeness was not something that was required from this committee, because the members were there more as experts than representatives of some organisation or field (Interview G). During the years the committee has been active, some of the actors have changed (HTM 2017a, HTM 2017b). Some changes have happened because of officials leaving the ministry and then new ones had to be appointed instead, other times an actor

was added, because the side of the students and pupils was not represented (HTM 2017a) and one actor left on their own initiative (HTM 2017a, Interview G). However, these changes did not affect the representativeness of the network.

Everyone in the committee has had previous interactions and experiences with at least some other member of the committee. It was widely acknowledged that people knew each other well, some were even friends. Most said that they had worked or studied together before with several members of the committee. (Interview A–G) Mostly the previous interactions had been work-related, but some members also pointed out that they gathered outside the meetings, too, for an example at someone’s country house (Interview B). Because of that reason, the members of the committee clearly separated into groups according to who knew each other before and who did not. Those that knew each other from before kept together and discussed things amongst themselves, thus creating different arenas for interaction. (Interview D and F)

*“Everybody knows everybody.”* (Interview B)

*“The relations in the network mirrored previous relationships.”* (Interview D)

*“Everyone knows each other and last time, I heard, there was some hugging even.”* (Interview E)

As for the possible previous conflicts, it was a common conception, that the relationships between actors in the network are friendly and all tolerate each other, at least openly (Interview B). One member said that possible conflicts are not actively avoided and that the discussions sometimes become quite heated. However, the conflicts are work-related, based on different views over topics concerning the committee or on how to better implement the strategy, not personal vendettas. (Interview C) If there are any conflicts, then they are mostly apparent between the members of the committee and the officials of the Ministry of Education and Science, but not between the members themselves (Interview G). In general, it could be concluded that people were not chosen to the network or left out of it based personal sympathies or antipathies, and conflicts were not apparent.

*“Even if there are any conflicts between members of the committee, it does not show in professional contexts.”* (Interview A)

*“I have not seen that someone’s opinion is repressed, but there also has not been any conflicts.”*  
(Interview E)

*“I do not believe that people were chosen to the committee based on who gets along with others and who does not.”* (Interview B)

Although personal likes or dislikes were not a basis for connecting or not connecting actors, based on the empirical findings, previous interactions still affect the functioning of the network. Some people considered the effect of previous interactions to be a positive one (Interview A and G), another believed there is no way of saying whether this effect is a negative or a positive one (Interview E). In some ways, previous contacts with members of the network make interaction processes easier, because people know they can trust each other (Interview A, E and G). They also have a clear understanding of others’ views and beliefs and this makes communication easier (Interview D–G).

*“If you know people from before, then you are also aware of their values, world views and, in a way, it makes managing the network easier.”* (Interview F)

The connecting and disconnecting of actors somewhat changed the dynamics of the functioning of the steering committee, but as the more active part of the group remained the same, it was not that relevant (Interview D). Sadly, one member of the group died this summer and it also affected the functioning of the committee. According to two interviewees, the death of one central member of the group made the functioning of the committee slightly different: there is now less interaction outside the meetings, less discussion via e-mails (Interview E and G). Another interviewee also believed that some people are irreplaceable and the one that died, left a huge gap in knowledge (Interview F). Other than the death of one member, the changing of the chairman of the committee affected the functioning of the committee the most (Interview G). Different chairmen had different knowledge about the committee and LLS and not all of them have been equally interested in it (Interview E and G). Besides the aforementioned changes to the group, there were also important changes made between the developing and monitoring phases of LLS: when compiling LLS, the officials, especially the heads of departments and other leaders of the Ministry of Education and Science were not included so they would not represent only their interests. They were involved after the initial points were set. Though it might have been a reasonable choice, it was more difficult to make them a part of the group and it was also visible in the functioning of the steering

group responsible for monitoring the implementing of LLS. They were left out for too long. (Interview C)

As most of the people knew each other from before, disconnecting of actors did not have strong implications on the functioning of the network. As there has been no such rule saying that people have to stop talking about matters concerning the work of the committee when they have left the committee; for an example, when one advisor to the minister left, the topics concerning the committee are sometimes still discussed with them (Interview B).

## **2.5. Management of network processes as designing and redesigning (new) interaction processes and rules of the game**

Based on empirical finding, some informal rules were established besides the ones set in the directive of the minister, but these rules and norms between the members of the committee were guidelines and signs of good will, and mostly developed naturally during the process. For an example, the members agreed upon the length of speeches (Interview D) and on what to communicate to the media (Interview B). They also consented that they must represent not only their own views but the public opinion and therefore their opinions should try to address as wide audience as possible (Interview C). Most of the interviewees concluded that technical questions were discussed in the beginning of the cooperation, but there were no formal rules established, but rather simple agreements (Interview A–D).

Rules about objectives and agendas were not needed, because although the goals and agendas of actors vary to some degree, then in general, members in the committee have the same goal. The main differences rise in the ways on how the goal is expected to be achieved. (Interview F and G) Though it is understandable that every actor is somewhat responsible for their field of expertise and therefore wants to represent that view, a mixture of their expert knowledge, personal opinions and world views are present (Interview E and F). In the implementation of LLS itself, actors are consensual, main differences arise on the level of programs of the strategy: some experts are lobbying to have more money for their field (Interview B) or to further their specific ideas (Interview E). All experts want to participate because of interest towards education, but also to represent interests of their area of expertise (Interview A–D) and to be included in the information field (Interview E).

All the interviewees admitted that they had previously also participated in several networks and committees in the same field (Interview A–G). As experts in different committees often overlapped, sometimes the same topics and problems are elaborated on again and again, and new insights were lacking because of that (Interview G). Although these previous interactions might make coordination and functioning of the network easier, it also has some negative consequences. According to one interviewee, they meet with about half of the members of the committee at least once a month, sometimes more often in both informal and formal settings, and during these interactions, a lot of the topics concerning the work of the committee also come up (Interview B). It was also noted that education is such a wide topic that matters concerning it easily come up in different circumstances and circles (Interview C). In the Ministry of Education and Science, topics concerning LLS are often discussed with other officials not participating in the network (Interview G). Based on the empirical findings, it was apparent that sometimes there are also discussions before and after the meeting without protocolling them, and also in e-mails, so there is a lot of informal communication (Interview A). Because people know each other from several settings, the games outside the arena of committee meetings also take place.

*“When I see someone from the committee outside the meetings, then I sometimes also talk about topics that have come up in meetings. I try to take advantage of seeing someone elsewhere and ask about topics concerning the work of the committee.”* (Interview B)

The actors do not have any clearly defined separate duties, everything is expected from everyone (Interview A and B) and their roles are therefore multifunctional. When needed, actors have to bring in new knowledge or act as coordinators (Interview C), but mostly they are experts (Interview A, B and D). However, their duties are not narrowed by a certain topic, but everyone has the responsibility and the possibility to have a say in all areas (Interview A–E). Naturally, actors are more active when topics from their field are discussed (Interview D). The only members that had slightly different tasks were the officials of the Ministry of Education and Science that were also responsible for preparing the agenda and bringing in more new knowledge based on prior Estonian or international research (Interview F and G).

Regarding the rules about making decisions, most of the interviewees said they represented only themselves and their area of expertise, e.g. higher education, employers etc., but did not affiliate themselves with a certain organisation (Interview A, C, D, F and G). Two interviewees admitted

that they were appointed by their organisation to represent their interests, but in doing that, they were in no way limited by rules or guidelines set by the organisation (Interview B and E). If an organisation has named a representative, they are trusted and do not have to discuss with their organisation before making any decisions (Interview B and E). It is more seen as a symbiosis of organisations' interests and personal opinions (Interview E) than simply the voicing of organisation's interests. The topic of whether an expert opinion, a personal opinion or the view, and needs of an organisation could be separated from each other, came up in several interviews (Interview E–G). Some members of the committee and the officials of the Ministry of Science and Education were sometimes even somewhat sceptical as they were not sure who presents an expert opinion and who their own personal one or the one of their organisations (Interview G).

*“I do not know anyone in the committee that represents only their organisation and not their own opinion.”* (Interview C)

*“I believe it is not possible to remove your personal opinions and world views from your expert opinion.”* (Interview E)

In general, all the interviewees believe that it is possible for one actor in the network to influence rule-setting and decision-making (Interview A–G). However, some exceptions were also mentioned. For an example, one member of the committee believed that newer and less experienced members of the committee had less possibilities to influence discussions in a meeting. They believed it is easier to write down the ideas and send them via e-mail than to present the ideas in meetings. (Interview E). Several other members also admitted that if you have more experience or just a louder voice, you have a better possibility of making yourself heard (Interview B, E, F and G). In theory, all members of the committee are equal, but in reality, it does not necessarily turn out that way and some are clearly in a better position to lobby for their interests than others. The possibilities of influencing the discussions in the network depend on who wants to raise a topic: if it is someone who has a wider view of things, for an example, based on international trends, then they have more possibilities of making themselves heard (Interview B and F). Therefore, on the one hand, it matters what the topic is, on the other hand, it also matters who does the talking (Interview B). Regardless, it was widely agreed upon that when someone has an opinion concerning some topic, they can express their thoughts and others will hear them out (Interview G).



As mentioned previously, the decisions are made based on simple majority voting. However, in reality, all the interviewees concluded that the decision-making *per se* does not occur in the network; instead all the possibilities are discussed openly, and decision are made unanimously (Interview A, B and E). When disagreements occur, they are elaborated on until a consensus is achieved (Interview B, C and E) or it is simply concluded that there are disagreements on some topics (Interview D). As the decision-making in its most straightforward sense does not happen, there are also no clear parallel activities happening or alternative possibilities open for discussion. Mainly different ways for achieving the goals set in LLS are discussed, but these could not be defined as clear alternative approaches, but rather as a part of a discussion. In addition to the lack of human resources, time is often a critical factor, so there is not always enough time to consider alternative ways of handling topics (Interview B). There has only been one case of working in smaller groups, other than that there were no separate groups established for meetings and discussions (Interview G).

## **2.6. Management of network processes as facilitating the interaction between parties within games or game rounds**

The finding of an appropriate manager that all participants agree on was not an issue in the studied committee as the chairman of the committee was appointed by the Ministry of Education and Science prior to the assembling of the committee (Interview F and G). As the chairman is the official of the Ministry of Education and Science, they cannot be regarded as impartial, and as the chairman of the committee changed several times and their expertise and interest in the committee varied (Interview G), all of them cannot be regarded as experts either. Consequently, the members of the committee simply had to accept their formal leader.

However, it was probably not a problem as the management of the committee can be regarded as administrative: documents are prepared and sent to the members beforehand, and meetings are led by the chairman of the committee (Interview B–E). The chairman of the committee is somewhat responsible for the agenda, but they do not have a central role (Interview A and E). Although the directive of the minister sets some basic rules about the managing of the committee (HTM 2014b), then in reality, the committee is managed by the officials of the Ministry of Education and Science (Interview A–G). The minister's adviser or some other ministry official prepares the materials and all the advice that is given by the members of the committee also goes to them. The secretary

general or a deputy secretary directs the topics in the needed direction, but otherwise the experts of certain topics lead the discussion; the introduction and conclusion are done by the chairman of the committee. (Interview B) When the discussion sometimes goes too broad, the chairman manages it and does not let it go too far away from the original topic (Interview E).

As the composition of the committee could be regarded as somewhat “difficult” meaning that people there can be quite stubborn, the analysis department of the Ministry of Education and Science usually prepares certain topics they want opinions on, and direct the discussion to them, otherwise the committee would be too difficult to manage (Interview F and G).

In conclusion, the committee has a formal leader, who does not manage people, and mostly also does not prepare the agenda or direct topics. These more substantial matters are done by the officials of the Ministry of Education and Science collectively and otherwise it can be said that regarding the managing of processes in the network, the committee mainly manages itself.

### **3. DISCUSSION**

Several conclusions can be made based on the empirical findings from the interviews. Before analysing how these findings help to further develop the theory, the empirical results are discussed.

Connecting and disconnecting actors, arenas and games in small states can prove to be more difficult than in larger states because people interact in several different contexts, but it is not necessarily so. Due to limited human resources there are also a limited number of experts to choose from, but in the committee studied in the thesis, the expertise and needed knowledge of included actors was never questioned. However, it was possible to conclude that the actors participating in the network were the most important ones in the field, and the compiling of two similar committees in the field of education would have been extremely difficult. Therefore, the participation of these individuals was particularly important, and they were invited to participate instead of applying to the committee. All the people participating were highly appraised experts and specialists, and it would have been extremely difficult to replace several of them.

While anchoring connections between actors, the building of trust was not necessary as it was already present from previous interactions, but the importance of it cannot be overstated. It was widely understood that trust that had developed during previous interactions between actors made the functioning of the network more fluid, natural and easy. However, the existence of strong previous relationships between members of the committee was by some regarded to be a positive, and by some a negative trait. The same has been noted by the authors studying small state administration: in a way, previous relationships between the actors can make, for an example, coordination easier, but in a way, it might make it more difficult (Randma 2001, 48; Sarapuu 2010, 40; Raadschelders 1992, 28). As seen from studying this committee, the fact that some people knew each other better than others meant that there formed two groups inside the committee: ones that were in close contacts with each other and others that were not. This probably also meant that some topics concerning the work of the committee were discussed in a smaller group amongst

good acquaintances who also met outside the meetings. Therefore, trust can be regarded as an important part of the network as it can mean closer relations and more interactions between members, but it can also mean that some are left out because of lack of trust or other previous interactions, and this places people that do not have close contacts with others, to a disadvantaged position.

Process management as (re)designing (new) interaction processes and rules of the game also has several distinguishable characteristics in small states. Drawing of impersonal contracts and following hierarchical modes of coordination can be regarded as more difficult based on this committee. Besides the rules set in the directive of minister (HTM 2014b), members of the network developed rules and norms organically in the process; only some very basic guidelines about the length of speeches and what to voice to the media were agreed upon in the beginning. This avoidance of formal and impersonal contracts is characteristic to small states (Benedict 1966, 29) and it was also present in the studied committee. As most of the people in the committee knew each other, the disconnecting of actors does not work well, because people come to contact with each other again and also discuss topics concerning their previous work together.

As mentioned previously, there are not that many experts in the field of education to choose from, and there probably would not be enough to form several similar committees. From studying this committee, it was clearly evident that the people participating had been a part of many similar networks and committees in the past or were part of some in the present, too. Because of that, some lack of new insights can be noted. It was also difficult to find unbiased experts for certain discussions and meetings. As the roles of actors usually overlapped, and everyone had to give an input in all areas, the individuals were expected to be multifunctional generalists that need to have knowledge and experiences from different areas of expertise. The members of the studied committee did not have clear roles and duties, instead everyone had the opportunity and the responsibility to contribute in all areas. When needed, they brought in new knowledge and when necessary, they acted as coordinators or experts. Multifunctionalism of individuals, often associated with small states (Sarapuu 2010, 35), is also evident in studied committee.

Because of limited human resources and a lack of time, alternatives were usually not discussed, and with only one exception, smaller working groups were not established. However, it is possible to conclude that there probably were not enough experts either to establish two or more separate groups. This is also apparent because the people that were responsible for developing LLS and the

people that are monitoring its implementation, are mostly the same. The latter is probably unavoidable as there are not that many experts in the field of education to choose from.

A heavier reliance on informal means of communication can also be noted. This is, in part, because people know each other and therefore meet in several different circumstances, for an example, at the meetings of other committees. But these interactions can also be personal like being old friends from school. Due to these informal contacts and interdependencies of actors, there is also a fair amount of discussions happening outside the meetings and outside the official e-mail exchanges.

Individuals in small states often have a larger role to play (Sarapuu 2010, 36) and they are necessarily not bound by certain agreements, but instead their competence is trusted. The empirical findings also show that individuals have a greater significance. Although most of them were there as experts and only represented themselves and their opinion, some of them were appointed by their organisation. In latter cases, however, no one was bound by prior agreements and their opinions were trusted by their organisation, they did not have to consult on more complicated or unexpected matters but could trust their own views and share them. The importance of a single individual could also be seen in the management of the committee: anyone was able to guide discussions in a meeting, it all depended on the topic. Besides that, one person could carry that much expertise that when they leave, it creates a gap in knowledge and experience that is very difficult to fill by someone else.

An important finding was also that it was difficult to separate expert knowledge, personal opinions, and the views and needs of an organisation in one person. This has also been noted in public administration research in small states (Corbett, Connell 2015, 449). The people participating were meant to be unbiased experts, but sometimes their contribution to the discussion was suspected to be a personal one or one based on organisational affiliation.

Process management as facilitating the interaction between parties within games or game rounds was the most difficult aspect to study. It was evident in this committee that there was no clear leader or manager other than the one appointed by the ministry to fulfil administrative duties. A clear leader was missing, and it was not chosen, because it was probably easier to give everyone an opportunity to guide discussions. Decision-making was probably easier to do in the form of consensus than in the form of actual voting, where there could have been a larger possibility of a conflict. In the aspect of managing relations between actors in networks, this committee can be

regarded as self-organising as there lacked one person responsible for the management of network processes.

From the functioning of this committee, one cannot say whether previous negative experiences would manifest themselves more clearly in small states and impact the management of the network, because no members of studied committee mentioned any prior negative relationships. Because of the lack of previous negative experiences, the re-building of trust was also not mentioned and could not be studied based on this committee. The difficulties of finding a trustworthy and impartial network manager was also not an issue, because there was no manager besides the chairman appointed by the Ministry of Education and Science.

Comparing the theoretical framework developed in the first part of this paper and material gathered from the interviews, several conclusions can be made that will help to further develop the theory on the management of network processes in the small state context.

- Networks can be very personalised, because people participating often know each other from previous work-related or personal contacts. This has implications on network management, because having good relations between members and maintaining trust between them is more important than in larger states. Due to personalism, members in the network may form different groups based on interactions in other arenas which might consequently affect the flow of information and not only influence network management via heavy reliance on informal communication, but also create several arenas of interaction outside the official meetings. The network manager must notice these different arenas, and connect them when necessary.
- Expertise is often limited as there is a lack of human resources, and it is therefore even more important to find relevant people and motivating them to participate in the network. The limited number of experts forces individuals to be multifunctional and fill several roles in the network, and also to participate in many different networks. The specialists in small states not only need wider knowledge, but they might also be included in several phases of policy-making, for an example, in the phases of development and implementation. As there often are a limited number of specialists to choose from, the inflow of new knowledge is also limited. The network manager should here try to find experts that are as impartial as possible, and might also consider bringing in new knowledge from outside the network or even outside the state.
- Conflicts and arguments are often avoided in networks and instead members try to reach a consensus. For the management, this means that hierarchical authority is not easily accepted, and formal rules based on authority are more difficult to establish as people would rather

discuss matters with colleagues that are their equals than accept hierarchy when making decisions or posing arguments.

- Personal and occupational opinions and interests are often difficult to separate from each other and the network manager must find a way to bring fourth the occupational, not personal opinions in discussions. However, as sometimes it can be a challenge, the topic of trust becomes important once again: the network manager, and also other members of the network need trust in their colleagues that they are indeed representing an expert opinion, not their personal one.
- A single individual carries greater significance, which puts more pressure on them, and also makes it easier for one person to affect the outcome. The management of network processes is here needed to avoid some people dominating too much, and to distribute tasks more evenly so that no one would feel overwhelmed.

## CONCLUSION

Network-based coordination has become a popular mechanism of coordination for tackling complex problems and bringing different sectors and policy domains closer together. As the functioning of networks is more complex than the functioning of other coordination mechanism like hierarchy and markets, it also needs more comprehensive strategies to solve emerging complexities. The three main complexities that may emerge in networks are (1) strategic complexity, that involves actors and relationships between them, (2) substantive complexity, that focuses on perceptions, knowledge and learning, and (3) institutional complexity, that tries to change the rules, distribute resources and manage relations between organisations. As the strategic complexity focuses on processes between the actors in networks, it is known as the management of network processes. The relationships between actors can be regarded more important than other complexities emerging in networks, so focusing on them can contribute the most to the effective functioning of the network.

As the context of the studied phenomenon is important in social sciences and especially in public administration, this paper also concentrated on one specific context the network operates in, namely the one of a small state. Small states are known to have special characteristics such as a high degree of personalism, heavy reliance on informal means of communication, multifunctionalism of both individuals and organisations and a greater significance of an individual. Therefore, it was assumed that the management of network processes in small states also had its own special characteristics. The aim of this paper was to bring out special characteristics of small states and see how they affect the management of network processes based on the example of the Estonian Lifelong Strategy steering committee.

In order to achieve said aim, a theoretical framework summarising the characteristics of network process management in small states was developed. For the case study, semi-structured interviews



with the members of the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy steering committee were carried out and documents were also studied. Based on the empirical findings, conclusions were drawn on how to further advance the theoretical framework developed in the first part of the paper.

The most important finding was that networks in small states can become highly personalised, because people know and trust each other from previous interactions. This can make the management of processes in networks both easier and more challenging. On the one hand it means that the information flows more fluidly, communication between the members of the network is more natural and quicker, trust between them is already established and therefore the network manager does not have to concentrate on building interaction processes and connecting actors. On the other hand, however, trust and long-time relations might only exist between some actors that interact with each other more and this might create different arenas for interaction inside the network. The role of the network manager there is to connect different arenas, create trust between actors that have not had long-time relations, and create equal opportunities to participate for all actors.

Other implications on network management could also be found. The networks in small states often suffer from the lack of human resources, which affects the inflow of new knowledge and insights. The lack of human resources also means that individuals often have to fulfil several different roles and be multifunctional generalists. As all people know each other and some are even friends outside the network, conflicts and arguments are often avoided and instead people try to reach a consensus. This also means that hierarchical means of coordination cannot be used as effectively as in larger states, because people tend to see each other as equals rather than subordinates. Personal and impersonal opinions and agendas are often difficult to separate, and the network manager must therefore find appropriate ways to contribute to the presentation of expert opinions rather than peoples' personal ones. Besides that, single individuals carry greater significance and it is the role of the network manager to make sure that no one dominates too much or becomes overwhelmed by the workload.

It is possible to make a primary assumption that at least to some extent, theoretical framework developed in this paper could be used when analysing the network process management in small states. However, as only one committee was studied, it is not possible to make extensive conclusions, and in order to continue developing the theory, further interviews with members of other similar committees need to be conducted. The theoretical framework needs to be more

flexible, and, for an example, take into account the specific policy domain that the network operates in, because there may also be distinctive differences.

## **SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN**

### **VÕRGUSTIKUPÕHINE KOORDINEERIMINE VÄIKERIIGIS: EESTI ELUKESTVA ÕPPE STRATEEGIA RAKENDAMISE JUHTIMINE**

Kristina Rebane

Viimaste aastakümnete jooksul on toimunud avalikus sektoris nihe horisontaalse või võrgustikupõhise koordineerimise suunas. Võrgustike tähtsuse tõusu on ühelt poolt nähtud vastureaktsioonina uue haldusjuhtimise reformidele, mis lõi avalikus sektoris eraldiseisvad “silod”, teisalt aga on võrgustikke peetud kõige sobivamaks koordineerimise mehhanismiks organisatsioonide ja poliitikavaldkondade piire ületavate “riukalike” probleemide lahendamiseks.

Võrgustikel on keskne roll ka detsentraliseeritud avaliku teenistusega väikeriikides nagu Eesti, kus hierarhilised koordinatsioonimehhanismid alati ei toimi. Selle juured peituvad väikeriikide eripäras, mida iseloomustavad personaliseeritud suhted, mitteametlikele suhtlusviisidele tuginemine ja nii indiviidide kui ka organisatsioonide multifunktsionaalsus. Kuna väikeriikide avalik haldus ja avaliku teenistuse toimimine on erinev suurte riikide omast, võib oletada, et erinevused ilmnevad ka võrgustikupõhises koordineerimises. Kuigi väikeriike on võimalik defineerida mitmetel viisidel, on siinses töös lähtutud rahvaarvu suurusest ning tõmmatud piir 1,5 miljoni elaniku juurde. Käesoleva magistr töö eesmärgiks ongi analüüsida ühte aspekti väikeriikide valitsemises: võrgustikupõhist koordineerimist.

Siinses töös võetakse vaatluse alla võrgustike juhtimine, konkreetsemalt võrgustikus toimuvate protsesside juhtimine, mis keskendub võrgustikus olevatele osapooltele ja nendevahelistele suhetele, viimaste arendamisele, hoidmisele ja muutmisele. Kuna võrgustikud sõltuvad

inimestevahelistest suhetest rohkem kui teised koordineerimismehhanismid, on neile keskendumine oluline ka võrgustike juhtimist uurides.

Peamine uurimisküsimus, millele töös vastust otsitakse, on: millised on väikeriikide iseloomulikud jooned and kuidas need mõjutavad võrgustike juhtimist? Töö empiirilises osas uuritakse „Eesti elukestva õppe strateegia 2014–2020“ elluviimist seirava juhtkomisjoni tööd.

Uurimisküsimusele vastamiseks üritatakse töös teha järgnevat:

- 1) luua teoreetiline raamistik, mille põhjal analüüsida võrgustike juhtimise iseloomulikke jooni väikeriikides;
- 2) uurida „Eesti elukestva õppe strateegia 2014–2020“ elluviimist seirava juhtkomisjoni tööd;
- 3) teha järeldusi, kas ja kuidas saaks loodud teoreetilist raamistikku kasutada võrgustikus toimuvate protsesside juhtimise analüüsimiseks väikeriikides.

Magistritöö koosneb kolmest osast: teoreetiline osa, empiiriline juhtumianalüüs ning järeldused. Teoreetilises osas antakse esmalt ülevaade võrgustikupõhisest koordineerimisest, teiseks tutvustatakse võrgustike juhtimist, kolmandaks võrgustikus toimuvate protsesside juhtimist ning neljandaks vaadeldakse väikeriikide eripärasid, mis võivad võrgustikus toimuvate protsesside juhtimist mõjutada. Teoreetilise osa viimases peatükis kasutatakse teadmisi võrgustikes toimuvate protsesside juhtimisest ja väikeriikide eripäradest, et luua teoreetiline raamistik, mille põhjal analüüsida võrgustikus toimuvate protsesside juhtimist väikeriikides. Töö empiiriline osa on juhtumianalüüs, mille jaoks viidi läbi seitse poolstruktureeritud intervjuud „Eesti elukestva õppe strateegia 2014–2020“ elluviimist seirava juhtkomisjoni liikmetega ning uuriti ka asjasse puutuvaid dokumente. Empiirilisest osast saadud informatsiooni kasutati teoreetilises osas esitatud raamistiku edasiarendamiseks.

Kõige olulisemaks järelduseks on, et võrgustikud väikeriikides võivad olla väga personaliseeritud, sest varasemate korduvate kokkupuudete tulemusena inimesed tunnevad ja usaldavad üksteist. See võib muuta võrgustikes toimuvate protsesside juhtimise nii lihtsamaks kui ka väljakutsuvamaks. Ühest küljest tähendab see informatsiooni kiiremat ja sujuvamat liikumist ning omavahelise suhtluse loomulikkust, samuti usalduse olemasolu, mille tõttu võrgustiku juht ei pea osalejate kokkutoomisele ja nendevahelise suhtluse kujundamisele nii palju tähelepanu pöörama. Teisalt aga võib see tähendada, et pikaajalised suhted ja usaldus eksisteerivad vaid osade võrgustiku liikmete vahel ning see võib luua erinevaid grupe võrgustiku sees. Seetõttu peab võrgustiku juht

ühendama erinevaid gruppe ning looma usaldust nende osapoolte vahel, kel pole olnud varasemaid kokkupuuteid.

Võrgustike juhtimist mõjutavaid tegureid ilmnas teisigi. Väikeriikides on tihti puudus inimressursist ning see mõjutab uute teadmiste sissevoolu. Inimressursi piiratusel on tagajärjed ka spetsialiseerumisele, mis tähendab, et inimesed peavad olema multifunktsionaalsed generalistid, kes täidavad mitmeid erinevaid rolle. Kuna võrgustikus osalejad tunnevad üksteist, välditakse tihti konflikte ja vaidlusi ning selle asemel püütakse jõuda konsensusele. See tähendab ka, et hierarhilised koordineerimismeetmed ei ole nii lihtsalt rakendatavad kui suuremates riikides, kus inimesed üksteist ei tunne ning on seetõttu enam valmis autoriteedile alluma. Samuti võivad väikeriikides kattuda isiklikud ja tööalased rollid ning võrgustiku juht peab koostööd suunama sellisel viisil, et inimesed esitaksid oma ekspertarvamusi, mitte isiklike veendumusi. Lisaks eelnevale mõjutab võrgustike juhtimist ka üksikisiku suur roll ning võrgustiku juht peab hoolitsema, et üks inimene ei hakkaks liialt domineerima.

Käesoleva magistritöö teoreetilises osas loodud raamistikku on võimalik vähemalt osaliselt rakendada võrgustike juhtimise analüüsimiseks väikeriikides. Teooria edasiarendamiseks on aga tarvis läbi viia täiendavaid intervjuusid teiste sarnaste komisjonide liikmetega. Teoreetilist raamistikku oleks vajalik muuta ka paindlikumaks, nii et see võimaldaks arvesse võtta näiteks erinevaid poliitikavaldkondi, sest erinevad valdkonnad võivad mõjutada võrgustike toimimist ja juhtimist.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1. Members of the committee

The following list presents the members of the committee responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Lifelong Learning Strategy 2014–2020. The list of members with their positions and the organisational affiliations are as of 27 September 2017.<sup>1</sup> The members marked with an asterisk are the ones interviewed for this thesis.

Ivar Sikk – Ministry of Education and Science, deputy secretary of planning

Heli Aru-Chabilan\* – Information Technology Foundation for Education, chairman of the board

Heli Mattisen – Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education, chairman

Ants Sild\* – Baltic Computers System, chairman

Olav Aarna\* – The Estonian Qualifications Authority / OSKA, academical adviser

Tiia Randma – The Estonian Qualifications Authority, member of the board

Aune Valk\* – Ministry of Education and Science, PIAAC coordinator

Mati Heidmets\* – Tallinn University Centre for Innovation in Education, head of the centre

Viive-Riina Ruus (3.09.1936–11.07.2018) – Tallinn University, *professor emeritus*

Margit Sutrop – University of Tartu Centre for Ethics, head of the centre

Mart Laanpere – Tallinn University Centre for Educational Technology, head of the centre

Ago Tuuling\* – Estonian Employees' Unions' Confederation TALO, chairman of the board

Epp Rebane – Ministry of Education and Science, adviser

Britt Järvet\* – The Federation of Estonian Student Unions, chairman

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<sup>1</sup> The list of members is compiled based on the following directives of minister: HTM 2014b, HTM 2017a, HTM 2017b.

## **Appendix 2. Interview topics and questions**

### Actors and their roles

1. How were the participants selected to the network?
2. In your opinion, is the network representative?
3. Why some actors left the network and why were some added?
4. How did the removing and adding of actors affect the functioning of the network?
5. Does every actor have a certain role and certain duties in the network or are everyone supposed to do everything?
6. What is your role in the network?
7. Do you represent only yourself or your organisation in the network? If your organisation, then is your decision-making limited by the organisation?
8. How would you describe your interest and motivation to participate in the network?
9. In your opinion, are all the actors in the network working towards the same goal?
10. What are your previous experiences in taking part in networks and committees in the same field?

### Rules and decision-making

1. How is the management and cooperation in the network arranged?
2. Were there any common rules established in the beginning of the collaboration? How were they established?
3. How is the decision-making arranged?
4. Are several different options discussed before making a final decision?
5. How are the discussions and decisions made in the network documented?
6. How would you describe the possibilities of one actor to influence decision-making in the network?
7. In your opinion, does every actor have an equal say in the network?

### Relations between actors

1. How would you describe relationships between the actors of the network?
2. How is the interaction process between members arranged?
3. Please describe your previous interactions and experiences with the actors of the network.
4. In your opinion, how do these previous interactions and experiences influence the functioning of the network?

5. How is the communication between the actors arranged and managed?
6. How often and with whom do you discuss the matters concerning the network outside the network?
7. In your opinion, what has been the greatest challenge in this collaboration?

Additional question

In your opinion, do the characteristics specific to small states influence the functioning and management of the network? How?

### **Appendix 3. List of interviews**

**All interviews were conducted by the author.**

**Interview A** – member of the steering committee. Audio recording, 14 November 2018.

**Interview B** – member of the steering committee. Audio recording, 19 November 2018.

**Interview C** – member of the steering committee. Audio recording, 21 November 2018.

**Interview D** – member of the steering committee. Skype interview, audio recording, 21 November 2018.

**Interview E** – member of the steering committee. Audio recording, 22 November 2018.

**Interview F** – member of the steering committee. Audio recording, 30 November 2018.

**Interview G** – member of the steering committee. Audio recording, 4 December 2018.