AN ANALYSIS OF THE FACTORS THAT ENHANCE PARTICIPATION IN EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY NETWORKS – A CASE STUDY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TARTU, ESTONIA

by

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Abstract

This thesis provides an analysis, from the institutional perspective, of the factors that are contributing towards mutually beneficial participation in European University Networks. Previous research about institutional networks has concentrated mostly on the networks’ perspective on beneficial operational factors. Joining institutional university networks has been stated to be a recent strategic trend in Europe. Therefore it is important to provide detailed data from the institutional point of view to enable other institutions to make informed decisions about joining such networks. The University of Tartu provides an interesting case study of its experience of participation in the Coimbra Group and the Utrecht Network. Strategic management theory was used as a theoretical framework for this analysis. Relevant documents were reviewed. Twenty three e-mail interviews were conducted among the University of Tartu administrators, faculty members and representatives of both networks. Ten cross-cutting themes were identified as having impact on network participation.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Purpose and Aim

Today’s world is a networked world. Those who are better connected have powerful opportunities to benefit from obtaining first-hand information in this world of global competitiveness. Universities are seen as the primary producers of knowledge; therefore connectivity among institutions is a valuable tool in knowledge production and in order to respond in a timely way to the needs of society. A variety of multilateral university consortia or institutional networks have been formed for this purpose.

The remarkable rise in recent years in the number of such university partnerships and networks among higher education institutions allows us to postulate that these international alliances among universities are not random, but have become a strategic trend that is expected to bring remarkable benefits to the institutions involved. Economic, cultural, political and academic reasons are often stated as the generic motives for universities to engage in international cooperation (de Wit 2002). During the last decade, with enhanced globalization, the shift in motives towards economic factors is clear. It is known that in an era of globalization, networks are expected to enhance the global or regional competitiveness of partners by uniting the strengths and best resources that each institution can offer (Knight 2008).

The research done on institutional networks has mainly focused on the potential factors for success and failure from the networks’ perspectives (de Wit 2004). However, there is very little written about these issues from an individual institutional perspective. Considering the fact that

“Strategic partnerships in research, teaching and transfer of knowledge between universities and business and beyond national borders - will be the future for higher
education in order to manage the challenges that globalization will present” (de Wit 2004, p. 48),

it is of utmost importance to study this practice from the institutional point of view. What is the institutional experience of participation in the work of an institutional network: what are their motives and anticipated benefits, achieved goals and obstacles faced? These are the main themes explored in this thesis. In addition, the advantages and disadvantages of this multilateral form of university cooperation versus the traditional bilateral partnership are also examined.

Inter-organizational university networks have not been the subject of a great deal of research. De Wit (2004) comments that not many success stories about international collaborative arrangements can be told yet. This study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of mutually beneficial institutional networks as a strategic phenomenon from the institutional perspective by identifying the components that can be effectively used in order to maintain and enhance those partnerships.

University networking is closely tied to the regions universities operate in. Regionalisation refers to the integration of nations or the formation of groups of countries usually around specific themes or interests. Regional blocks are often based on historically defined characteristics such as physical features, culture and religion (Beerkens 2004). Examples of region-based higher education cooperation are especially well developed and to some degree most successful in the European region. The Bologna Process and the attempt to create a harmonized European Higher Education Area within the European Union is the most vivid example of regionalization where higher education institutions play a major role. According to Knight (2008): “Europeanization has been part of the deliberate, planned agenda motivated by the political and economic objectives of the European Agenda” (p. 7). In the late 1980s and the
1990s, many institutional networks emerged in the European domain e.g. Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe (UNICA), the European Consortium for Innovative Universities (ECIU), the Coimbra Group and the Utrecht Network, just to name a few. Some are engaged in influencing and advocating for European educational policies (The Coimbra Group, UNICA), while others are focusing primarily on providing exchange opportunities for their members (the Utrecht Network).

Marginson and der Wende (2007) state that university-based close cooperation bilaterally or regionally is especially important for smaller nations which tend to be more dependent on global linkages than their larger counterparts. The University of Tartu in Estonia has been identified as a progressive research-focused institution in the European Union, which has set internationalization as a strategic institutional and national priority. The University of Tartu has developed long-term international bilateral partnerships with a number of institutions of higher education and has recently become actively involved in various multilateral regional university networks. The institution has been a member of the Baltic Sea Region University Network since 2000, the European University Association since its founding in 2001, the Coimbra Group since 2003 and the Utrecht Network starting in 2004. Therefore, the University of Tartu constitutes a very interesting case-study to illustrate contemporary strategic developments in higher education of a European borderland country that has experienced 50 years of Soviet occupation, subsequently re-built its higher education system and now very clearly links itself with the European region and its universities through institutional networking. This case study is written from the perspective of Estonia’s premier research university, the University of Tartu, and
provides important knowledge about the crucial factors that may influence institutional networking.

The main research question for this study is

- **How does the University of Tartu develop mutually beneficial participation in European university networks?**

An analysis of an institution from a disadvantaged small country that has become very actively engaged in international cooperation helps to provide valuable insights into the question of why university networking has become such a strategic phenomena, even a trend. Do faculty members, administrators and leaders of the networks view economic benefit solely as the overall long-term rationale (as indicated by several authors)? Or are there other significant motivators for this type of cooperation? The first two sub-questions for the study are:

- What are the motives and goals of the network representatives in entering into cooperative university networks?

- What benefits do the university network representatives perceive in cooperating as a network?

Contemporary knowledge production has become inseparable from the politics of production and profit, becoming inevitably treated in economic and commercial terms (Weiler 2001). Universities are playing significant roles in those processes by producing up-to-date knowledge and working closely with national and international authorities who expect productivity and profitability. The theoretical framework of this study includes the strategic management approach, where university cooperation is primarily seen as a means for resource sharing. It is based on the assumption that universities establish ties with other institutions in
order to gain global competitiveness by sharing valuable resources that each member institution possesses. Those resources might involve research expertise, administrative resources, funding, access to policy advocacy etc. It is necessary to find partners who share the same expectations and goals according to their respective institutional strategies, so that the alliance among institutions can make a positive contribution to the objectives of each party. The membership in university networks is often limited, the selection process is very strict and includes direct invitations to member institutions, even recommendations. Therefore, each new member has to be seen as possessing some unique resources that have important value to the network. The next sub-question for the study is:

- What strategically valuable resources are possessed by the University of Tartu?

The success of networking outcomes and expected benefits are only gained when close and active communication among network members (universities) is present. That is, in turn, based on smooth, collaborative internal communication among the university’s administration, faculty coordinators, university leaders and students. The goals and strategies set for the institution by the university management can only be fulfilled if faculty is supportive and interested in such partnerships. The issue of faculty involvement is crucial as several network projects involve teaching, research, cooperative knowledge production, joint program creation and articulation of the faculty’s needs for policy change. The need to motivate faculty to participate in university-wide partnerships is acute, as faculty members are usually overloaded with various assignments and responsibilities. The next sub-question for the study is:
• How is information disseminated and dialogue between different groups within the University of Tartu managed in terms of opportunities available through the university networks?

Higher education institutions are historically seen as having a central role in preserving and enhancing a nation’s understanding of the past, its culture and democratic values. The intensive interaction regionally and globally through networks or other disciplinary partnerships can challenge the role of nation states, their control over higher education systems, and nation-centred assumptions about the public role of higher education. As stated by Beerkens (2002), by engaging in relationships with partners from other countries, universities start operating in an environment that is no longer only determined by ‘their own’ national actors and ‘their own’ organisational routines. Instead, they will have to adjust to the traditions and norms of other nations which carry a different institutional heritage and may well have a different language.

Altbach (2002) stresses that there are values of the national and social common good that must be protected and preserved in a globalized educational environment. If countries no longer have the ability to control the basic elements of the curriculum, the language of instruction, the pedagogical philosophies and other key elements of the delivery of higher education, much is lost. It can be argued that creating the “harmonized” European Higher Education Area with the help of universities as main actors poses threats to indigenous ways of education delivery, making the curriculum homogeneous, causing a brain drain or jeopardizing the quality of knowledge. The loss of cultural identity and language is a real threat to Estonia, which consists of only 1.3 million people, 70% of whom are Estonian-speaking. The last sub-question for the study concerns the perception of risks in university networking:
What are the potential risks (perceived by university representatives) of international university networking?

Contemporary international collaborative activities are reaching more deeply into the heart of the university than previously. These activities present more challenges to existing structures and routines of the university. The formation of and participation in university networks have often been articulated as a target policy level issue, so it is important that informed decisions be made concerning these matters. My intention is to analyse the factors that enhance the collaborating mechanisms within an institutional structure in order to help raise awareness and foster better managerial decision-making strategies within an institution, also to provide recommendations on how to maximize the involvement in networking, while still preserving national culture.

The unintended risks that various internationalization strategies might bring to the institution must be carefully monitored. As smaller nations may be more vulnerable to the negative aspects of internationalization, the higher education institutions in those countries have an important role in balancing those risks, especially risks related to the national heritage.

Universities must remain vigilant regarding their inter-organizational cooperation. While it will strengthen a university’s position regionally and globally, there are risks that such cooperation may bring to the institution with respect to the national heritage. In this way, the benefits of globalization through strategic networking and the preservation of the nation’s language and culture can both be realized.

As an overview, the thesis is structured as follows. The thesis first lays a theoretical foundation for understanding networks in the context of higher education. Strategic management
theory is discussed and implications for the university networks are highlighted. The next section presents data from the literature on various aspects of university networks: the driving factors, the definition, the typology, the motives, the factors that contribute to success of networks and the possible risks of institutional university partnerships. The third chapter introduces the reader to the study cases with an overview of the University of Tartu and the two networks, the Coimbra Group and the Utrecht Network. Understanding the national, regional and international context of the University of Tartu provides an awareness of why university partnerships are so important to the University of Tartu. In chapter four, the methodology and methods used for the study are explained. Chapter five presents the detailed findings from the four study groups. This chapter follows the structure of the designed questionnaires and the answers to each question are presented in separate section. Chapter five ends with a summary of cross-cutting themes which provides answers to the research questions as well as the main framework for the analysis. The author’s interpretations of the study results will be given in chapter six, followed by the conclusion. The recommendations for further academic research are given at the end of thesis. The practical value of the thesis derives from the specific recommendations for study participants that are suggested in a separate section.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

2.1. Strategic Management Theory and its Application to University Networks

Rapidly increasing international university cooperation, including partnering in university consortia or networks, has been documented by several scholars and shown to be occurring all around the world (Safu, Mamman 2000; der Wende 2001; Chan 2004; Enders 2004; Altbach, Knight 2007; Robertson, Keeling 2007 etc.). Higher education institutions themselves have listed international institutional agreements/networks as the most quickly expanding element of internationalization both on national and institutional levels (IAU 2005). Clearly, this is a phenomenon that is not occurring accidentally, but rather is a calculated, strategic managerial decision.

Strategic inter-organisational behaviour has been the primary concern of economics theorists, but this approach has been gradually applied also to those inter-organisational relations where efficiency and effectiveness may not be as salient, such as education, healthcare and other fields (Pennings 1981). Today, universities are operating as entrepreneurial and “market-oriented” organisations and therefore have developed meaningful networks to respond to the demands of the globalized world. As a result of marketisation and massification of higher education, effective marketing and external relations have become strategically important for the success of universities (Chan 2004). Therefore, it is relevant to provide a theoretical foundation, rooted in the economics literature, on cooperation among firms to understand and to explain the rationales behind the strategic coping mechanisms that universities as organizations are applying.

Strategic management theory states that cooperative activity among firms or organizations is a stable way to combine competencies of multiple partners to achieve a competitive advantage. Knowledge, skills, core competencies and superior products are what
strategic networks are hoping to achieve, in situations where the partners believe that they cannot achieve these alone (Faulkner 2003). The resource-based perspective is a central feature of organization theory, derived from strategic management theory. The resource-based perspective is concerned with contributing necessary resources in the expectation of receiving valued returns. It indicates that, when resources and competencies are not readily or sufficiently available to firms, they are more likely to establish ties with other organizations (Child, Faulkner 1998). A resource-based view of inter-organisational arrangements perceives collaboration among organisations as an opportunity to gain access to these strategic resources, resources that would otherwise not be available to a firm, because such resources are valuable and may not be easily substitutable. Research projects in higher education require knowledge and expertise as well. Usually the knowledge is spread throughout different universities and therefore intensive inter-organisational cooperation is needed to open access to those who wish to use it.

According to Pennings (1981), another important reason for strategic networking is reducing the uncertainty caused by the environment. Commonly found sources of uncertainty in the modern business world are the scarcity of resources and the lack of knowledge of environmental fluctuation, of available exchange partners and of the cost of transaction with them (Faulkner 2003). Child and Faulkner (1998) classified the motives for alliance formation into internal and external factors:

1. The need for specific assets or capabilities not currently possessed (resource dependency perspective);
2. The minimization of transaction costs;
3. The need for speed to market not achievable by other means;
4. The spreading of financial risk.

Most of this classification is applicable to higher education institutions, as rapid information flow through advanced technologies has caused uncertainty and the need for constant and timely responses to the demands of clients through the most economical means. Thus, strategic networking can also be regarded as an attempt by an institution to reduce its vulnerability.

The perspective on cooperative strategy offered by strategic-management theory, draws attention to the need for prospective partners to achieve a fit between their respective strategies, so that the alliance among them makes a positive contribution to the objectives of each party. There exist several views in strategic management theory on the criteria for selecting the right partner. Geringer (1991) distinguishes “task-related” and “partner-related” criteria. “Task-related” criteria involve access to important resources like finance, managerial and employee competencies, site facilities, technology, marketing and distribution systems and a favourable institutional environment. “Partner-related” criteria refer to the following variables: size, national and corporate cultures, structure, compatibility and trust among management teams. Child and Faulkner (1998) state that alliances among partners from developed and less developed countries differ. The developed partners are generally oriented towards market access, low-cost production and access to scarce materials. The less developed group seeks access to technology, know-how, managerial expertise, capital and international markets. The relations in these arrangements are thus reciprocal, where each individual organisation has to do its share to make the arrangement work and therewith profit from the cooperation. This also explains why membership in higher
education networks is not open to every institution and the selection of appropriate partners forms an important part of the cooperative strategy (Beerkens 2002).

Reciprocal strengths and complementary resources, or a ‘‘fit’’ between partners, are identified as a premise for successful university consortia (Beerkens, der Wende 2007). Organisations will search for partners who will bring some sort of fit or synergy between their resources and those of their targeted partner. The strategic resources of a university that are interesting for international partners can be very diverse, ranging from physical resources, such as research facilities or library collections, to educational resources such as specific programmes or teaching methods, human resources, or more symbolic and intangible organisational resources like reputation and prestige. Although these resources are difficult to measure, they can be accessed through engaging in a cooperative arrangement (Beerkens, der Wende 2007).

Beerkens (2004) also points out that strategic resources are often hard to identify in contemporary universities. Obviously, the quality of education and research are important resources, but at the same time they are difficult to identify and measure. However, he states that the resource-based view makes us aware of the opportunities that arise through cooperation in an international context. In addition, one also becomes aware of the international opportunities that have often remained rather under-developed by the university network members.

In an era of globalization, where university cooperation has become an important strategy, the strategic management approach gives a theoretical explanation to network formations. The approach is based on combining various competencies (knowledge, skills, research projects, quality courses, etc), sharing resources (managerial competencies, reputation, prestige, facilities) and reducing uncertainty caused by the environment. Network formation
often allows for minimizing operating costs, gaining new markets and working together in order to create synergy between the resources possessed by selected institutions. All these factors help network members to better face the challenges of globalization. The following section provides an overview of specific drivers in society that have motivated the need for universities to cooperate as networks.

2.2. Networks as a Tool for International Collaboration

2.2.1. The Drivers of Institutional International Cooperation

Higher education institutions have always been international by nature. The cooperation among individual academics is the oldest but still most important form of linkage. Nation-supported international cooperation, for example by providing funds for student mobility or offering development aid through east-west, north-south or south-south linkages, has consistently involved universities in building international partnerships.

However, the last two decades have seen a shift in international cooperation among universities. A major intensification of various forms of international cooperation activities has occurred among higher education institutions, as exemplified by the formal university consortia (Beerkens, der Wende 2007). Consortia, networks, alliances, joint ventures, associations and partnerships are just some examples of inter-organisational arrangements that have emerged in higher education, reaching often regional or global dimensions (Beerkens 2002, Denman 2002, de Wit 2004).

The drivers behind this phenomenon can be largely described by the events that have recently occurred in our societies and globalizing economies. The end of the Cold War, the massive spread of the Internet and other new technologies, have significantly influenced this
intensification in international cooperation (de Wit 2004). Beerkens and der Wende (2007) indicate that this shift has been caused mainly by the processes of globalization and regionalization. Globalization gives rise not only to new economic dynamics but also to new social relations. These, in turn, have consequences for social and organizational structures (Stromquist 2007). Stromquist (2007) sees in the institutional internationalization strategies efforts to promote a greater global presence. This often means seeking multilateral collaboration among universities, and the creation of worldwide university networks. Chan (2004) adds that the massification of higher education has changed the nature of international cooperation. The universities are no longer serving the privileged few but have the need to efficiently respond to the massive range of their clients’ diverse needs by maintaining good external relations with employers, parents and other institutional organizations.

The most comprehensive analytic approach has been provided by Beerkens (2002). He lists several important factors that have caused the emergence of large-scale university networking through formal international arrangements. First, there has been a major shift in the production of knowledge. The traditional disciplinary nature of research has changed to a transdisciplinary, outcome-based and more efficient way of doing science. This is achieved by uniting the best knowledge from different fields offered by different universities (Gibbons 1998). A transdisciplinary approach requires inter-organisational coordination and cooperation, obtained through linkages with those institutions that can provide the best skills or resources. Relevance and quality are no longer exclusively determined and judged by peers but require the involvement of representatives from other sectors, thus calling for cooperation with associations, organisations and individuals from outside the university.
Second, there has been a change in **resource dependencies**. The funding base has become diversified and institutional autonomy has increased. Government funding has been increasingly distributed on a competitive basis and is typically related to output indicators. Through inter-organisational arrangements, universities can work with potential competitors to make them allies in the struggle for scarce resources or to gain access to the complementary assets that they each bring into the arrangement. In addition, they can combine their specific strengths and competencies in order to achieve added value through the synergy created by cooperation.

Third, the emergence of **new technologies** can help with research exchange. Inter-organisational relations are very much dependent on information exchange and personal communication. Through the emergence of the internet, students throughout the world have access to information about courses in other countries and about arrangements for financial support. The internet allows researchers to communicate and exchange information with colleagues on a global level. With the internet, degree programmes can be offered on-line to students in all parts of the world. This promotes the demand for international exchange, the need for access to foreign markets and other opportunities for creating international arrangements.

Fourth, there is also pressure created by stakeholders within a university. Students, scholars and employers demand and value the experience gained through international involvements. Due to globalization processes, the curriculum and the content of research has become more international. This is achieved by networking. Liberalisation of trade, markets and new modes of delivery expand the opportunities for transnational education and the need for inter-organisational interaction. The encouragement of cooperation among the universities and of
the mobility of students in the European Union, provides a well-known example of ‘region-
building’.

In conclusion, the intensification of international university cooperation is driven by various changes in our society. The globalizing economies demand effective and efficient interdisciplinary knowledge production, which can be implemented through rapidly developing technology.

International university cooperation within a network or consortium will be distinguished from other forms of international university cooperation in the next section. Various definitions of and criteria for university networks will also be provided. The section will also explore why formal inter-organisational networks are the focus of this study.

2.2.2. The Definition and Typology of Institutional Networks

Networks and networking are very broadly used words and are defined in many different ways, usually describing relationships, contacts, connections and cooperation among people. Various disciplines such as political studies, sociology, psychology, business studies, anthropology and higher education have contributed to the understanding of the concept of networks.

In sociology, networks describe a process in which several participants or groups of participants are involved who work towards a common goal on the basis of a common conviction or vision. This process is not, as a rule, based on formal contracts, but is founded on trust, partnership and the conviction that all those concerned benefit from it (Sprenger 2001). Networks of higher education institutions fall into the inter-organizational network category. The
overwhelming number of descriptors (consortia, networks, alliances, joint ventures, associations, partnerships) that have been given for naming the different types of institutional inter-organizational cooperation in higher education remain confusing. There is a need for clear understanding through defining those arrangements. Unfortunately not much research has been done on this issue so far. Only a few authors have managed to provide distinguishable parameters for each form of cooperation.

Sprenger (2001) has suggested four factors that differentiate inter-firm networks from other strategic alliances, joint ventures and working groups:

1) Inter-firm networks allow for all types of cooperation. In addition to horizontal and/or vertical relationships dominant in other forms of cooperation, allowance is also made for lateral relationships to partners outside the value-added chain;

2) Inter-firm networks are not characterized by detailed contracts or by a particular legal form. Loose networks based on agreements are the rule;

3) Inter-firm networks are formed without a time limit in view;

4) Inter-firm networks do not dissolve when one partner withdraws. The remaining partners continue the network and can accept new partners.

It seems that Sprenger’s criteria have helped those researchers concentrating on higher education institutional cooperation to build their arguments on his work, focusing often on the time-limit, the equality factor and the level of control among participating institutions.

Denman (2002) looks at the emergence of international university consortia, but does not provide specific criteria for distinguishing those from other forms of international arrangements. He defines international consortia as
voluntary, participatory organisations of at least three higher educational institutions with a primary mission of disseminating and advancing knowledge on an international level. This dissemination and advancement of knowledge may include two or more of the following: collaborative projects and programs that are international in scope; faculty and student exchanges; curriculum-sharing; resource sharing; developmental assistance; and faculty training. Moreover, international consortia must possess the following administrative characteristics: a governing body; a manager; a mission; an active commitment by member institutions; and a funding source that serve to support, expand, diversify and, perhaps more precisely, supplement inter-institutional cooperation on an international level (Denman 2002, unpaginated Web site).

In Denman’s definition, the aspects of stressing the common goal, the importance of resource sharing and the administrative coordination of the cooperation are the most valuable factors in understanding the nature of the institutional networks.

In the innovation literature, the main focus is on the outcome – the knowledge production through university networks. Lyrette (2002) argues that networks are about building on each other’s knowledge. Instead of creating a competitive edge through information, they create a competitive edge through knowledge sharing and knowledge generation. Networks thus make it possible to create intellectual capital in a collaborative and virtual way. In the context of innovation, networks have become the instrument of choice in the innovative economy. They provide a platform to maintain connections, to move within and between organizations, to build relationships and to share knowledge.

De Wit (2004) categorizes international university partnerships into academic associations, academic consortia and institutional networks. Based on several dictionary definitions for each term, he identifies common features among those three types: partnership, group, system and connection. Differentiating aspects are also detected: common versus specific purpose, multipurpose versus single purpose, “once only” versus permanent, individual versus
institutional membership, centered versus flat structure, people-oriented versus object-oriented, complementarity versus commonality. De Wit cites Neave’s (1992) definition of institutional networks:

An institutional network is a group of academic units (departments, centres, schools, institutions) who come together for multiple academic and/or administrative purposes, are driven by the president’s/rector’s offices and have an indefinite lifespan (p.36).

De Wit (2004) points out that institutional networks are less focussed on objectives and goals than associations or consortia. He mentions that it is this type of organisational arrangement that seems to be emerging most recently. He sees a trend towards leadership driven multilateral institutional networks, mostly within the European Union, but also elsewhere.

Knight (2004) states that participation in university networks is an important trend in institutional internationalization strategy. Networks tend to have clearer and more strategic objectives but, in many cases, are more difficult to manage than bilateral agreements because of the complexities of working with so many different education systems and cultures.

The most comprehensive approach to distinguishing different types of institutional arrangements has been provided by Beerkens (2002). He has developed a typology to describe multidimensional international inter-organizational cooperation. He argues that the critical dimensions in university cooperation are size (number of organizations represented and the nature of the interests pursued - either individual or collective), scope (in time and in activities), nature of integration (composed horizontally or vertically) and intensity of collaboration (loose or formally coordinated). Based on these characteristics, there are three broad types of interorganizational arrangements: associations (with numerous members), partnerships (with two
Beerkens identifies higher education consortia as a specific type of institutional networks, as inter-organisational arrangements with three or more, though a limited number of members; with membership being restricted and based on the agreement of partners; where universities cooperate to serve their own interests; where the time-span is indefinite and not defined in advance; where cooperation takes place simultaneously on several themes and in several disciplines; where cooperation primarily takes place between universities or other higher education institutions and not for instance between universities and industry or political actors; where relationships are based on equality, with an equal say and equal distribution for all members; and where cooperation is based on coordination, differentiating them from informal cooperative arrangements on the one hand and mergers and amalgamations on the other (Beerkens 2004, p.223).

He points out that these criteria do not mean that all the consortia are totally similar in nature. There is variety on dimensions such as the number of members, the interests represented and the intensity of collaboration.

In higher education, institutional networks can take very different forms based on trust and sharing of common goals. Some are membership-based consortia created around specific institutional characteristics (“research universities”, “traditional universities”, “innovative universities”) while others represent specific types of higher education institutions (universities; other institutions like polytechnics, fachhochschulen, hogescholen, etc; distance education universities). The thematic organisations are the biggest part of this group. These organisations can represent a wide range of interests, for instance relating to religion, to educational themes or to particular activities such as international cooperation, university management or quality assurance (Beerkens 2008). The cooperation may also be based on the institution’s geographical characteristics, like networks of universities located in capital cities (UNICA), The Baltic Sea
Region University Network (BSRUN) or the International Association of Marine-Related Institutions (IAMRI).

It is important to note that Beerken’s definition does not look at the effectiveness of the networks. Lyrette (2002) has referred to this problem by stating that the return on investment on interactions between people (linkages and networking activities) is difficult to measure. It also takes a long time for tangible benefits to be seen.

This study has taken institutional networks as its focus for several reasons. First, as many authors have indicated, it is a current phenomenon and a rising trend. In the OECD 2008 report on policy proposals for tertiary education, the need for improvement and widening channels for interaction and encouragement of inter-institutional collaboration is stated.

Second, institutional networks are often defined as mainly management-driven, where the initiatives have been led by the rector’s office with the institution’s strategic goals in mind. The departments and administrative coordinating staff are expected to fulfill those rationales by cooperating in and coordinating the process. We need to know more about the success factors and working mechanisms in institutional networking to make it beneficial for the institution. The current study is aspiring to provide a deeper understanding of the issues that contribute to the enhancement of institutional networks.

2.2.3. The Motives for Institutional University Cooperation through Networks

Each institution has different motives for choosing to participate in formal institutional networks. The reasons vary depending on the goals of the institution and the national, political, geographic and economic environment it operates in. The rationale for developing key, strategic,
international-education alliances at both the national and institutional level is not so much an end unto itself but a means to achieving academic, scientific, economic, technological, or cultural objectives. Knight (2004) questions whether there is a subtle but discernible shift away from the social and cultural rationales toward more the economic and commercial interests of internationalization? The recent studies conducted by the majority of scholars seem to suggest this.

Denman (2002) is convinced that international consortia have been formed solely on the basis of economic need and financial incentives. In his opinion, higher education consortia can be perceived as vehicles to reduce transaction costs. Through integration of specific activities, transactions such as student mobility and staff exchange can take place in an administrative framework by which such transactions can be executed more efficiently (Beerkens, der Wende 2007). A key motive for entering into consortia is to combine the resources of the partners in order to be able to compete in the global arena. Strategic alliances and consortia have become an attractive alternative to mergers and acquisitions as a means to acquire resources, precisely because alliances usually are faster and cheaper ways for accessing various resources, including financial (Beerkens 2004).

In Europe, regional university cooperation and partnerships are favoured by the European Commission, which provides grants for various projects. For example, in the framework of Erasmus Mundus, the Commission requires the establishment of higher education consortia in order to offer a joint Masters programme (Beerkens 2008). Needless to say, financial support for those initiatives comes largely from European Commission funds. As Enders (2004) notes, there is a case for establishing cooperation among neighbours in order to counteract pressure from
other parts of the world. Knight (2004) suggests that it is done in order to gain a competitive edge in the market.

Safu and Mamman’s (2000) research results indicate that this may not always be the case. The motives for Australian universities to enter into strategic alliances may be described as partly altruistic and partly commercial. For instance, the most important motive for Australian universities entering into collaborative relationships was to share scholarship and knowledge with overseas partners (71 per cent of cases studied) followed by the opportunity to expand into new markets (62 per cent), acknowledgement as an international center for research and teaching (57 per cent), and going into an international alliance as a means of raising additional revenue (33 per cent). However, the authors also point out that the Australian universities are expanding their market share to the Middle East, suggesting that the financial incentive might still be present.

Clark (2004) notes, that it is difficult to exaggerate the importance of prestige in higher education systems. Universities are “prestige maximizers” that are interested in gaining prestige rather than monetary profit. Prestige allows a university to exert some control over a variety of markets it encounters: among students, prospective faculty, possible employers and in agreements among various external partners. High prestige is an essential part of the character of the proactive, self-reliant university, concludes Clark (2004).

Seeking a greater global presence is an important rationale for entering into multilateral university networks (Stromquist 2007). According to Weiler (2001) the transformation of knowledge production has relied heavily on the relationship between knowledge and power. Weiler claims that the modern state draws increasingly on respectability and an increase of
knowledge in order to enhance its own legitimacy. Institutional arrangements in knowledge production are therefore characterized by hierarchies of domination and subordination, prestige and influence. Some enjoy greater status than others. Often these power relationships are directed by the interests and the resources of commercial users of knowledge while the politics of knowledge becomes less and less separable from the politics of production and profit. Universities play a major part in this process.

Altbach (2004) argues that the powerful universities, “the centers”, have always dominated the production of knowledge. He specifically cites a few American elite universities. Therefore the weaker educational systems, “the peripheries”, which have fewer resources, must cooperate to compete for resources. Partnerships have therefore been achieved with foreign universities, carefully choosing reputable institutions with leading departments or schools. Altbach (2002) also raises the concern of universities pursuing commercial gain and causing the loss of intellectual and cultural autonomy in those institutions that are less powerful. He sees clear signs of a new neo-colonialism due to globalization.

Chan (2004) raises a very important point in her case study on international cooperation at Hong Kong Baptist University. She states that university cooperation is very clearly dictated by the external environment as well as by the developmental needs of the university. As a recently established institution, Hong Kong Baptist University was primarily seeking to gain recognition of its status as well as validation of its academic programmes. For international collaborators, accepting a new member to an association or to a well-established university network provides visibility and reputation for the incoming member.
Through those contacts, an opportunity for faculty and student exchanges is created. Joint distance programmes can also be established. In the recent phase of the university’s development, she mentions establishing fellowship programs and offering office space for other partners, which indicates a change in the motives. Chan argues that the motivations of cooperation seem now to be more “altruistic” and “diffused”. She encourages others to make sure that international engagements are in line with the institutions’ missions and supported by appropriate infrastructure. Knight (2004) further suggests that developing strategic alliances, like networks, with clear purposes and outcomes, is a sign of a mature institution.

Another important rationale for participating in institutional networks is the opportunity to be able to advocate for the interests of the institution in regional level policy making. By operating collectively, consortia can open up policy channels to gain better access to these authorities. Der Wende (2007) and Beerkens (2008) note that European institutional networks have become full partners in the policy-making processes. These organisations have collectively evolved into a political community at the European level, actively shaping and influencing European policies. Many of these organizations are involved in the key European policy processes like the Bologna process (e.g. the European University Association (EUA) and European Student Information Bureau (ESIB)). They advocate for European rules to be extended or interpreted in such a way that the interests of their constituents are best served or their thematic priorities are best supported.

In conclusion, the rationales for cooperating as institutional networks vary depending on individual institutional needs, its goals and the environment it operates in. However, the
economic rationale seems to be dominating. There are several factors that have to be considered to make participation in a network beneficial for the institutions involved.

2.2.4. Factors that Contribute to Success in Institutional Networking

Only a few scholars have studied the factors that contribute to successful network functioning. This is because the emergence of institutional networks is a recent trend and as stated by de Wit (2004) not many success stories have yet been shared. The following list of factors has been composed from the work of de Wit (2004), Prichard (1996, cited in de Wit 2004), Beerkens (2003) and Beerkens and der Wende (2007) giving the network perspective on institutional cooperation. I have grouped them taking into account the effort that either the network or institution has to contribute toward enhancing the partnership. Since we are dealing with the partnership and cooperation, the third category involves mutual effort that both the institution and the network should be investing in.

**Institutional factors**

Based on the strategic management resource-based approach, institutions get involved in a network to contribute to and get access to the resources that other institutions might have. Before entering the network, it is important to consider what those valuable resources might be. According to this perspective, the university should rationally identify and acquire resources that are valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable and imperfectly substitutable (Beerkens 2004).

Networks can be seen as tools for lowering operation costs. Budget allocations for memberships as well as appointments for the liaison officers to coordinate the partnerships are issues that should be resolved within an institution. As institutional networks are often
strategically important and leadership driven, it is expected to have the operating funds easily allocated.

Smooth and timely communication is vital in networking. As networking is essentially a communication between individuals, good interpersonal relationships have to be established. The institution should be committed to building a long-term relationship between the partners and energy has to be invested in this. Often it happens that the membership proposals to join the network are done to institutions that have already had previous bilateral partnerships with some of the network members.

Faculty involvement in network projects is crucial for institutional success. These projects are usually oriented around teaching and research. It is also important to recognize the potential discrepancies between institution-level needs and the needs at the faculty level as it applies to a network. The fact that all departments may not be interested in being involved should be accepted. For example, some departments may already have their own discipline-based networks.

The institution should be aware of the differences in structure, culture and funding among the partners. If the partners are not aware of this diversity, it will create misunderstanding of the objectives and goals of the network as a whole. There is also a need to be aware of the tension between the interests of the founder institution and other members. However, at least a minimal level of compatibility has been shown to be one of the preconditions for collaboration to succeed.

**Network factors**

Networks operate optimally when membership is limited in size. Too many partners may lead to too diverse a group, with too many interests involved. It will be difficult to coordinate the
partnership and fulfill the expectations of the partners. It is suggested that the network would benefit more from targeting specific areas for cooperation. The more an institutional network is comprised of broad comprehensive institutions of higher education, the more difficult it will be to base the network on the character of the institutions. But it is also of concern that smaller networks can be prone to elitism and exclusivity.

Having clear, limited and reasonable goals is essential for success. It is advisable to have goals for short, mid and long term development. The mission of the network should be based on more than just geographical proximity or historical identity, factors which do not provide a sufficient basis for successful partnership in a network.

The efficient coordination of the network operations is crucial for setting up the working relationship among the partners. It is important to have some project leaders in key institutions who will lead the network projects. The best way to keep partners in frequent contact, share timely information relevant to projects and discuss the partners’ needs is to set up a network list-serve. The exchange of experiences, the opportunity to learn from each other’s successes and failures, is most relevant and should be provided through timely communication.

It is dangerous if the network is mainly organized around external funding sources, as this might develop into dependency and jeopardise continuity. As soon as the external funding ends, the network activity will likely be at risk.

The issue of branding should be discussed within a network. Sometimes in targeting new markets, the network brand may be more beneficial to use than the individual institution’s brand.
Institutional and Network factors (mutual contribution)

The relationship among the individual member universities plays an essential role in the mechanisms of networking. Communication, organisation and commitment within the consortium become imperative factors in the ultimate outcomes of cooperation. The need to invest in long-term relationship-building should be acknowledged.

Emphasis should be placed on congruence of missions of the network and of the participating institution so there is mutual understanding and commitment to reach a common goal. The mutual strategically important resources must be identified and offered to the members.

Beerkens and der Wende (2007) argue that alliances or consortia are based on both compatibility and complementarity of members. The following sources for complementarity were identified: the partner university proximity; country; access to new student markets; language of instruction; financial resources; physical infrastructure and facilities; academic quality in research; academic quality in education; management and leadership quality; the existing external relations; the reputation; standard of the use of internet communication technology.

The following sources of possible incompatibility were identified: heterogeneity of legislation on higher education and the national higher education systems; heterogeneity of national culture of the countries in which the universities are located; heterogeneity of conceptions of academic work and ideas about how academic work should be organized; heterogeneity of the division of authority between government/universities/faculties/academics;
heterogeneity of formal organisational procedures of the universities; heterogeneity of the character of the universities (based on size, scope and age).

It is suggested that performance is likely to be enhanced when organisations are able to manage the paradox involved in choosing a partner that is different, yet similar. The authors argue that complementarity needs to be accompanied by the appropriate strategic coping mechanisms. These coping mechanisms are aimed at the acquisition, identification, dissemination and exploitation of complementary resources. In general, closer cooperation and tighter integration require more complex coping mechanisms that are aimed at the exploitation of complementary resources. This can be done by creating sufficient incentives and motivations for staff of universities to commit themselves to consortium activities, by adapting the consortium activities to the existing activities in the universities, by adapting them to wider regional programmes in order to access funding or by creating internal (financial) incentives or obligations to become active in consortium activities.

It is clear that the influence of regional higher education policy makes an important impact on the success of a network. The authors argue that adaptation to the external environment of organisations is seen as a definite determinant for network performance. The consortia that were very much connected to regional (political) institutions and had adapted their activities to the programmes and policies (and the available funding) of these institutions (e.g. the European programmes for mobility and cooperation), were more successful.

This section has outlined the main characteristics of networks, described the drivers and the motives of institutional university cooperation, provided the definitions of networks as various authors have expressed it and outlined some of the institutional and network factors that
have been noted to have an impact on the success of network operations. These various aspects of networking have largely been driven by economic considerations. The following section will review the work of those scholars who have focused their research on the unintended risks and possible challenges of global competitiveness. The unique effects on the institution and to the host country are of special concern.

2.3. Risks and Challenges for the University

Pursuing mutual goals and individual benefits through international institutional networks can sometimes be challenging for an institution. Most of the risks that are discussed are caused by a broader internationalization process where institutional networks play their small part.

Many cross-border activities are driven mainly by institutional rather than governmental initiatives. Even if there is growing awareness at the governmental and policy level of the issues of international cooperation, the modern university is expected to serve the nation state and enhance its cultural identity (Enders 2004). Symbiotic relationships, such as university networks, have been described by several authors as relationships full of inequality (Galtung 1971, Weiler 2001, Altbach 2004). Galtung’s (1971) structural theory of imperialism is focused on the dominance of one collectivity or nation (center) over another (periphery). He describes economic, political, military, cultural and communicational imperialism and sees scientific imperialism as one form of cultural domination. A dominating center-country may create a demand for a peripheral-country to follow its values and culture, becoming eventually dependent on the center’s way of doing things. Globalisation has a strong cultural component, which tends to encourage the establishment of a (usually Western) global-brand culture (Enders
2004). Dei (2000) claims that globalization has accelerated the flow of cultures, causing the “crisis of knowledge” which has resulted in the fragmentation of traditional values and beliefs, the distortion of local, national and regional ecosystems and economies and created a tension over efforts at cultural revitalization and reclamation. Hayhoe (1989) expresses a deep concern with equity of participation and massive multilateral influence in knowledge transfer in contemporary China. She sees the World Order Model Project as a global framework that avoids absolutism and deals with knowledge and culture in a flexible way. She argues that the “redemption of modernity” should take place through dialogue among civilizations, identifying the policies and measures that could ensure both a fairer participation of the most oppressed groups in educational opportunities and a more just and mutually beneficial role for peripheral countries within the world system (Hayhoe 2000).

Altbach (2004) sees high inequality in the field of higher education caused by the processes of globalization in developing countries and smaller academic systems. He emphasizes that involvement in the larger world of science and scholarship dominated by the powerful universities might bring considerable benefits to the periphery institutions but at the same time cause the loss of intellectual and cultural autonomy.

Language plays an important role. English is spreading as the medium of instruction in non English-speaking nations, particularly in programmes designed to attract foreign students. English is also the medium of communication in university networking and project coordination. There are debates taking place in countries that use “minority languages” about whether the production of courses and programs in English will end up in diminishing the local language and finally destroying the cultural heritage (Teichler 1999). Altbach (2004) argues that the
temptation to change the medium of instruction into English in countries of “small language” increases the dominance of center universities and might turn into a new form of neo-colonialism in the 21st century. Der Wende (2007) adds that although mobility and networking could engage individual researchers from these countries, the consequences for national capacity, linguistic and cultural diversity could still be serious.

Mazrui (2001), representing the African perspective of cultural dependency, is concerned with how modern universities can transform their roles as factories of cultural dependency into a new role of cultural self-defence. He suggests five strategies for universities to implement this change:

- the strategy of indigenization, that is including more indigenous materials in courses, using indigenous language in education;
- the strategy of domestication, that is making the university more relevant to its local situation;
- the strategy of diversification, exposing and learning from the knowledge of multiple civilizations through a dialogue;
- the strategy of horizontal interpenetration through wider South-South cooperation among universities;
- the strategy of counterpenetration with the South counterpenetrating the North by seeking influence in the power corridors and making northern educational systems respond to Afrocentricity and multiculturalism (p. 97).

According to Mazrui, working regionally together can be seen as a strategy for stressing the awareness of cultural uniqueness. A similar view is expressed by Weiler who sees the signs
of hope in newly formed alliances among scholars of the periphery countries (cited in Hayhoe 1989). Galtung’s (1980) more theoretical view suggests some guiding principles that oppose the imperialism described above: equity, autonomy, solidarity and participation. In his opinion, equity is achieved by ensuring equal benefits for both sides, autonomy is described by the power to be able to withstand the power of others over oneself, solidarity is seen as the extent of direct relationship among those involved at the bottom of the hierarchy and participation refers to integration and influence that is bi-directional. Galtung suggests that ideally these principles should be implemented on an individual as well as on a societal level to avoid the imposition of a more powerful society’s values on another group. This view is applicable to various inter-organizational partnerships as it encourages mutual respect, dialogue, reciprocal influence and integration between cultures and countries. Using Galtung’s theory as a basis, one of the possible implications for successful networks is that they should operate with principles of equality among all member institutions and mutual respect towards cultural diversity. The contributions of various ideas coming from its members should be considered equally valuable and domination of one group should be avoided.

As stated by Marginson and der Wende (2007) the smaller nations can scarcely afford to abstain from global engagement, yet must struggle to maintain their sovereignty and autonomy vis-à-vis the larger players. Globally successful middle sized and smaller nations tend to be more dependent on global linkages than are their larger counterparts. They go on to say that smaller nations must be ahead of the field to retain individual control over their own destiny. One possible strategy suggested is to develop strong regional networks through which they can advocate and actively articulate their needs.
Many universities – and countries – lack the willingness or capacity to be involved in close and intense cooperation. It is related to the institutional (nationally and organizationally moulded) contexts in which the universities operate and have developed (Beerkens, der Wende 2007). There lies the paradox: universities face global opportunities while being strongly embedded historically in national institutional environments.

The more micro level operational challenges in institutional networking according to Safu and Mamman’s (2000) study, which was conducted among Australian university representatives, show that the most challenging aspects of the management of strategic alliances are the lack of resources, “red tapism”, poor communication, cultural differences and differences in goals.

The challenge of finding the right balance between complementarity and compatibility of network members is often the key to success. Beerkens and der Wende (2007) stress that even if complementarity is present, this does not always mean that it is known by the right persons and that it is utilised and exploited. There are often many resources that are not exploited in university partnerships which could contribute to the enhancement of the network.

It is also important to remember that higher education consortia are multi point alliances, engaged in a wide array of activities. This results in different challenges and risks in outcomes and different levels of success for different consortium activities. So the challenges discussed here might apply to a network’s operation as a whole or might be applicable to only one single activity or project.

Overall, the economic and political power of a country, its size and geographic location, its dominant culture, the quality and typical features of its higher education system, the role its
language plays internationally, and previous internationalisation policies (Teichler 1999) have all to be taken into consideration when discussing the challenges and risks of a university participating in international university networks.

The following chapter provides important background information about the selected cases for this study: the University of Tartu and the two European University Networks – the Coimbra Group and the Utrecht Networks. The overview of the history and the outline of the current developments of these organizations provide a context for understanding institutional university networks in Europe.
Chapter 3: An Overview of the University of Tartu and the University Networks

The reason for active network participation may often be related to the history of the institution. This aspect is clearly demonstrated in this chapter, providing an overview of the historical developments that have affected the University of Tartu. Deeper knowledge of the University’s history as well as recent developments in higher education, enhances the understanding of what the University of Tartu might hope to achieve by actively engaging in university partnerships in this era of global competitiveness.

One of the responsibilities of the University of Tartu is to not only preserve but enhance the Estonian language and many other aspects of Estonian academic culture. This significant task must be balanced in the current environment of international cooperation with the practical need of using the English language in the activities of the networks.

The operations of university networks are often defined by the regional characteristics they exist within. Institutions in specific regions often have similar needs, motives, goals, expected benefits as well as unintended risks among member institutions. Through similarity and partial cultural diversity, the members of the network can contribute their own unique ideas for the success of the network. The overview of the two networks (the Coimbra Group and the Utrecht Network) including their mission and future goals for specific activities, provides awareness of the potential institutional contributions and benefits expected between the University of Tartu and the other network members.

3.1. Overview of the University of Tartu in a National, Regional and International Contexts

The University of Tartu, one of the older universities in Europe (founded in 1632), is Estonia’s leading research-based national university. The University of Tartu’s mission is
to act as the leading force driving the development of knowledge-based society in Estonia and the guarantor of its continuity. In order to fulfil its mission, the University of Tartu advances research, education and culture and serves society through teaching and research, creating the preconditions for development of world-class research fields through international cooperation and, as Estonia’s national university, assuming its share of responsibility for the preservation of the Estonian people and nation. As the national university, the University of Tartu, in cooperation with the state, works to ensure the continuity of an educated Estonia and the development of Estonian language and culture. The university seeks to promote disciplines that are concerned with Estonia and the Estonian people, and to guarantee the preservation and development of its cultural heritage (University of Tartu Strategic Plan A(2015)).

As indicated in the mission statement, the university is aiming to provide high-quality education through international collaboration. At the same time the University distinguishes itself as the only national university with full responsibility for the development and sustainability of the Estonian nation and culture. The University of Tartu has always strongly identified itself as a carrier of Estonian national culture through providing quality higher education in its national language, Estonian. The historical context provides a deeper understanding of the development of the country’s top university in becoming the national flagship of Estonian higher education.

In 1632, the Swedish king Gustav Adolf II established the predecessor of the University of Tartu, *Academia Gustaviana*, which was one of the first higher education establishments in Northern and Eastern Europe\(^1\). The university was comprised of four faculties (theology, medicine, law, and philosophy). Instruction was in Latin. The *Academia Gustaviana* operated until 1710 when it was forced to close by the Great Northern War. In 1802 the University of Tartu was re-opened, with the language of instruction as German. The quality of instruction and research was widely acknowledged. During the 19\(^{th}\) century many outstanding scholars received

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\(^1\) The oldest university in that region is the University of Uppsala in Sweden, founded in 1477, followed by the University of Vilnius in Lithuania, founded in 1579.
their education there, including the first native Estonians (Piirimäe, 1994). This was the start of
the development of Estonian higher education, with strong influences from the German higher
education model. Russification in the Baltic provinces (since the 1880s) curbed the autonomy of
the University of Tartu and the language of instruction was changed to Russian.

In 1918, after Estonia gained its independence from Russia, a national educational system,
including universities, began to develop. Great emphasis was placed on Western-European
values and culture. The first Estonian national university – the University of Tartu- was opened
on December 1, 1919. Instruction in the Estonian language was introduced in 1919 at the
University of Tartu and it has remained the language of instruction ever since (Piirimäe, 1994).
Even during the Soviet occupation between 1941-1991 the majority of the professors of Tartu
State University belonged to the generation who had received education at University of Tartu in
the Republic of Estonia and thus were the bearers of the continuity of national traditions in the
process of instruction and scientific research.

Today the University of Tartu consists of 10 Faculties, 5 regional Colleges (located throughout
the country), approximately 17 000 students (including 630 international students) and 1 700
academic staff (including 180 professors). The University of Tartu contributes two thirds of
Estonia’s scientific production, including publications and doctoral degrees conferred. The
institution has set research as a top priority for development. It participates in six out of seven
nationally funded Centres of Excellence for Research. The University of Tartu leads four of them
– in the fields of Biodiversity, Translational Medicine, Chemical Biology and Cultural Theory –
and is also an active partner in the Centres of Excellence in Genomics and Computer Science.
The total amount of funds assigned to the seven Centres of Excellence for the period 2007-2013 is 34 million euros (University of Tartu booklet).

Being deeply rooted in national values and traditions, the University is actively involved in internationalization processes as is any research-based institution in Europe, supported by the national internationalization strategies and higher education reforms that have laid a solid foundation for the process. By the time Estonia joined the European Union (EU) in 2004, several major higher education reforms were already in place in the country:

- the adoption of a common framework of comparable degrees, including the implementation of the Diploma Supplement - an 11-page document that provides detailed explanations of the educational system in the country as well as the workload required for one credit hour;
- the introduction of undergraduate and postgraduate levels, a two-tiered system, in which the first degree is a minimum of 3 years and is relevant to the labour market. This is followed by 2 years of specialized studies at a Master’s level;
- ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) – a compatible credit system within the EU;
- European standards of quality assurance.

Several national higher education policy documents have been formulated within the past couple of years to establish and support internationalization as one of the priorities for the country and its universities. Here is the list of the most relevant national and institutional documents that provide a strategic approach towards higher education and support international cooperation:
• **Estonian Higher Education Strategy 2006-2015.** The document was adopted by the Estonian Government and it sets priorities for higher education in the country for 10 years. Its main objectives are assuring the quality of higher education, providing a highly qualified workforce for Estonia, ensuring the continuation and development of Estonian-medium higher education in the European open education space, and providing a level of funding close to the OECD average per student.

• **The Strategy for the Internationalization of Estonian Higher Education 2006-2015:** sets the following goals - the creation of a supportive legal environment so that it helps towards the recognition of qualifications issued in different countries’ systems of higher education; simplifying the process of offering joint curricula and the recognition of degrees; establishing a migration policy that will support international students and instructors in coming to study and work at institutions of higher education in Estonia.

  In terms of student and staff mobility, by 2015, 2000 non-resident foreigners are expected to be enrolled in full-time study at various institutions of higher education in Estonia, including those studying under joint curricula. The percentage of foreign nationals among the doctoral graduates to have defended their theses in Estonia is anticipated to be 10% in 2015. By 2015 at least 3% of full-time academic staff should be of foreign origin.

• **Agreement on Good Practise in the Internationalisation of Estonia’s Higher Education,** which was signed by the Rectors of the six public universities. This forms the foundation for any internationalisation-related actions of participating higher
education institutions, including actions not funded from the national budget and services provided outside Estonia. This agreement for cooperation is significant since it emphasizes that the six public universities are the key actors in the higher education field in Estonia.

- **The Internationalization Strategy of the University of Tartu (A2008).** The Strategy expects to increase the international student body up to 10% by 2008. The general directions for strengthening the international dimension in the university’s operations are set. It specifically states the necessity of supporting the participation of university representatives in various discipline-based and regional institutional networks. The need for disseminating information about various opportunities offered through EU programs is also stated as a strategically important issue.

All Estonian universities are focusing their efforts on graduate studies and are establishing numerous Masters level degree programs that are taught in English. For example at Tartu, there are currently 10 Master’s level degree programs offered in English, while, in comparison, the number of single courses taught in Estonian for undergraduate and graduate students reaches several hundreds. This constant pressure to follow the lead of the English-speaking world has created a situation where closer attention to protect the status of the national Estonian university is needed.

- **The Development Strategy of the Estonian Language 2004-2010**, is the first development plan of the Estonian language covering all the major areas of language use. It provides a research-based description of the situation of the Estonian language, objectives that need to be achieved, the necessary steps, and the institutions involved. The
main objectives for this strategy are to grant Estonian-medium higher education (to cover all the specialities with terminological dictionaries and Estonian-language educational literature, to essentially retain Estonian-medium teaching in higher education institutions, and to publish the major research results also in the Estonian language), avoiding the full use of foreign languages in any field of science. The universities have to ensure a high level of proficiency in Estonian among university graduates.

- **University of Tartu Strategic Plan 2009-2015 A(2015)** states clearly that the university takes the responsibility of offering all undergraduate and graduates (first and second tier) degrees in Estonian. However, it stresses the continuous need to develop new graduate programs targeted for international students, which means instruction in English.

All those policy documents illustrate clearly how important international cooperation has become for the country and for the University, recognizing at the same time the need to protect its unique language and cultural heritage that might be at risk as a consequence of the internationalization process.

The University of Tartu has set its long-term goal to be among the top 100 European research universities while remain the pre-eminent national university in Estonia (The Internationalization Strategy of the University of Tartu (A2008)). Internationalization is seen as a key tool for reaching this aim. The creation of the International Relations Office in 2004 indicated the high importance of internationalization processes within the University and the strategic attention given to internationalization activities by its senior administrators.

The regional importance of the University of Tartu can be described by its participation in several regional institutional networks. In April 2003 the University of Tartu became a
member of the Coimbra Group. In 2006 the Coimbra Group’s Annual Meeting was held in Tartu. This provided the University a unique opportunity to introduce itself to other network members and therefore increase the awareness and trust among partners.

There are several other regional networks in which the University of Tartu is a member: The European University Association (EUA), The Baltic Sea Region University Network (BSRUN), The Baltic University Program (BUP) and the Conference of Baltic University Rectors (CBUR). The most recent is its membership in the Utrecht Network, as of 2006.

Regional and international cooperation takes place not only on the network level. The University currently has 46 bilateral cooperation agreements with 46 universities from 18 countries and this number is most likely to grow. In the academic year 2007/2008 there were about 400 Erasmus agreements with more than 100 European higher education institutions within the field of mobility of students and teaching staff.

3.2. Overview of the Coimbra Group

The Coimbra Group (CG) was founded in 1985 and formally constituted by Charter in 1987. The Charter was signed by the representatives of 19 member institutions from 11 Western European countries. It aimed to create a network of elite institutions focusing on establishing special academic and cultural links by setting up advanced facilities and privileged channels of information and exchange (Coimbra Group Charter, 1987). The group started as an integrated study abroad network that was primarily intended to foster student and academic mobility. It offered tuition waivers to its members and committed to recognize the credits earned in other Coimbra member institutions.
Currently it consists of 39 European multidisciplinary universities of high international standard (see the full list of universities in Appendix A). The Coimbra Group’s goal is to create special academic and cultural ties among its members and foster the commitment to internationalisation, academic collaboration, excellence in learning and research, and service to society. At present the group is actively devoted to policy advocacy with the aim to influence European higher education policy and to develop best practices through the mutual exchange of experience. It seems that the issue of involvement in higher education policy design has gradually become the key element in the Group’s activities as the majority of the actual working strategies have focused on this theme:

- Work with the European Union (EU) institutions with a view to participating in or organising EU higher education and research projects to the benefit of its members;
- Contribute to the debate within Europe on quality in higher education and promote the adoption of quality assurance mechanisms within its member institutions;
- Become a driving force in the creation and further development of the European Higher Education Area and promote the academic expertise of its members within this area and the European Research Area.
- Be recognized as an expert body, able to advise its members and the EU institutions on various matters relating to higher education, such as Information Technology (IT) as applied to new teaching methods and life-long learning (The Coimbra Group Mission Statement, 2003).
The activities of the Coimbra Group are organized around Task Forces. There are 9 Task Forces and Committees established to carry forward the work of the Group, each having its own objectives:

- The African, Caribbean and Pacific Countries Task Force (ACP) is focused on internationalization activities within the group in this specific geographical area. It disseminates knowledge about the Coimbra member institutions and the European Higher Education system among the ACP countries and vice versa. By supporting and facilitating the links between the institutions involved, it strives to strengthen the relationships between academics and administrators in these institutions.

- The Culture, Arts and Humanities Task Force (CAH) aims to foster cultural awareness and expertise, the commitment to cultural uniqueness and linguistic diversity. It also aims to advocate for the centrality of Arts and Humanities in European universities and societies.

- The Doctoral Studies and Research Task Force (DSR) supports and advises the member universities in the organisation of doctoral studies, provides knowledge on management of research programmes and the transfer of the outcomes of research to society and economy.

- The eLearning Task Force aims to support Coimbra members in using the information and communication technologies in traditional, blended and distance education.

- The Eastern Neighbouring Countries Task Force (ENC) facilitates partnerships between Coimbra member institutions and the universities outside the eastern border of the EU by promoting various collaborative projects among Coimbra members and those partners.
• The Education, Training and Mobility Task Force (ETM) serves as the advising body in higher education matters within the Group by gathering information from the EU agencies and advising the Group’s Executive Board concerning possible actions to be taken to influence European educational policy.

• The Latin America Task Force (LA) promotes various internationalization activities between the Latin American countries and Coimbra members by providing relevant information about the Coimbra members and the European higher education system. The Task Force provides short term research scholarships for young researchers from Latin American universities to conduct their research in Coimbra member institutions.

• The Employability and Career Guidance (ECG) Task Force is the most recent Task Force and is still working on its mission statement.

The Task Forces have been created to reflect the current needs of the member institutions and discuss the relevant issues that the European universities are facing today. The University of Tartu is a member of six Task Forces: The Culture, Arts and Humanities Task Force; The Doctoral Studies and Research Task Force; The Eastern Neighbouring Countries Task Force; The Education, Training and Mobility Task Force; The Employability and Career Guidance Task Force and The ELearning Task Force. The choice of task force memberships reflects the interests, strategic goals and hoped-for benefits for the University of Tartu.

The Coimbra Group members have been actively involved with various joint projects that have brought significant funding from the European Union to the participating institutions. Currently there are several ongoing projects that have received financial support from the EU. The funded projects consist mainly of various international cooperation activities promoting the
EU’s higher education developments and providing region-based knowledge to other geographic areas like Africa and North America. The AUDIS project, for example, helps strengthen African Universities’ internationalization processes by joint activities with the participation of the two CG members, the CG Administration Office, 12 African Universities and several other European associates. The EU funds about 80% of the total budget which is 459 753 EUR (732 708CAD). Another project to help reform the HE system of Moroccan universities was granted 150 000EUR (239 055CAD) from the EU. The main objective of the Balance Project is to balance academic mobility between Europe and North America, by strengthening the knowledge of European higher education reforms (Bologna Process) in North America. This is accomplished by forging and strengthening links between international offices in Europe and North America in order to increase mobility in both directions, establishing stable and sustainable information links, sustaining a high level of information on European higher education in North American Universities and promoting professional development of international office staff. Funding those activities from the EU reaches about 200 000EUR (320 000 CAD).

These examples provide evidence that participating in the Coimbra Group can provide considerable economic benefits and access to significant funds that can be used to promote the university regionally and internationally through various cooperative activities and joint projects. However, becoming a member of this elite network is not available to every institution. (The CG annual membership fee is about 9 000 EUR (~14 300 CAD), indexed to the inflation rates). The Coimbra Group is very selective in accepting new members, taking into account former relations of the applicant university; as well as historical, geographical and scientific requisites that are set by the founding members. Any university that wishes to become a member of the Coimbra
Group needs to have at least two recommending universities among the existing members. The General Assembly is the only body that decides on membership and there has to be at least a 75 per cent majority. Over the past three years the Coimbra Group has accepted only one new university member.

3.3. Overview of the Utrecht Network

The Utrecht Network (UN) characterizes itself as a European network with a global outlook. It is mainly focusing on activities in the broad field of internationalization. The Utrecht Network started off as a small group that was active in student exchanges since the early 1980s. Currently the Utrecht Network represents 33 European universities in 28 countries (see the full list in Appendix B). The group is particularly committed to student and staff mobility, offering summer schools, the internationalisation of curricula, cooperating to design joint curricula and double/joint degrees. It has established cross-regional partnerships with the Mid-America Universities International (MAUI) and Australia-Europe Network (AEN) to offer wider and more attractive mobility opportunities for its members. Each academic year student mobility within the Utrecht network totals about 1200 students.

The network has established a few Task Forces similar to the Coimbra Group. Those have developed from the Special Interest Groups that reflect new areas of activity within network members. Task Forces have a more systematic and more strategic approach to the targeted issues. Task Forces are provided with long-term funding to achieve their goals. Once the objectives have been achieved, the Task Force expects to be dissolved. There are currently three Task Forces:
• The Degree Mobility Task Force aims to increase the degree mobility among the Utrecht Network members;

• The Summer School Task Force focuses on the development of a variety of training products (summer schools) and co-ordinating existing training modules at the Utrecht Network universities;

• The Joint Programs Task Force aspires to administer the implementation of Joint Programmes at Master and PhD level, within and outside the EU, among the Utrecht Network members and partners.

For 2008/2009 several new initiatives have been established: researchers’ mobility, internships database, administrative staff mobility (organizing seminar sessions to share knowledge), and student mobility. Among these initiatives, the University of Tartu is involved with administrative staff mobility.

It seems that the Utrecht Network is very flexible and open to the needs of its members. Smaller in size than the Coimbra Group, it can quickly act upon the new issues that are raised by its members. The Network’s goals are very specific and practical in nature. The work of the Task Forces is evaluated every year at the Network’s Annual General Meeting, where the need for new initiatives is also discussed and necessary actions are taken.

The Utrecht Network is increasing its visibility through the development of materials and tools such as its website, database, brochures, publicity materials and specialized publications as well as through participation of the group in international conferences and higher education fairs such as the annual European Association of International Education (EAIE) conference and the European Higher Education Fairs.
In its Strategic Plan (2008-2012) the Network’s priority areas are stated. The network aims to foster academic links through supporting research, establishing links with additional consortia and networks in Asia, Latin America and Canada, as well as deepening cooperation with other European networks, in particular in ways that enable it to draw on its specific areas of expertise and its strengths as a group.

The Utrecht Network is also planning to more actively target new collaborative projects to obtain funding and serve as a means for individual members to come together in participating in such joint programmes as Erasmus Mundus. So far the project EXAMPLE (joint Erasmus Mundus action 4 program) is considered to be the most successful of the Utrecht Network joint projects. It received about 400 000 EUR from the EU. The comprehensive database of the Utrecht Network is the main result of this project. The database includes all the programs by network members offered at Bachelor or Master level including the Summer Programs (http://utrecht-network.multimove.nl/master-programme). Recently the project JOIMAN, with the aim of providing support for managerial difficulties that are often faced in joint graduate programs management, was awarded EU funding of about 400 000 EUR. This is about 50% of estimated the project costs. The rest will be covered by other projects and the participating universities.

Aspects related to quality will be a major priority for the network in the future. There are plans to conducting an evaluation of the Utrecht Network, to define quality standards and the distinctive profile of the network. The network also aims to establish criteria to determine how well members are contributing to the goals of the network as a whole, along with measures for improving their individual contributions. This research study will help to provide valuable input
from the institutional perspective on the factors that enhance institutional participation, benefits and contribution to the network performance. The network members have expressed an interest in obtaining the results of this study.

3.4. Summary of the Study Cases

According to the majority of researchers, university networking has become a strategic trend in the era of global competitiveness in the higher education market. Therefore participation in the work of regional inter-organizational networks has become an important part of international cooperation among universities in Europe. Those networks consist of members leading knowledge production through research and high quality academic teaching. The member universities are usually also the premier institutions. The reasons for joining such networks vary depending on the geographical, economical, political or cultural situation of each university. The University of Tartu in Estonia presents a very interesting case in which the political and cultural factors have significantly influenced the decision to join networks.

The University of Tartu has historically been a premier research-based university, serving its country through different political eras. It has provided education in Latin, German, Russian and Estonian, while being at the same time the continuous custodian of Estonian traditions in instruction and scientific research. The University’s international cooperation in Europe and beyond was compromised during the period of Soviet occupation, since knowledge production had strict political borders and ultimate dissemination required translation into the Russian language. After Estonia re-gained its independence in 1991, the University had to quickly re-establish its position among the European scholarly community and fight for renewed acceptance
among Western universities. Numerous strategic policy documents were amended as a foundation for international cooperation. The European networks presented an ideal opportunity to become part of the scholarly community and gradually build the University’s visibility among many European institutions. Joining a network also provided an opportunity for the University to distinguish itself culturally from the other post-soviet universities by being accepted within the European community, where the university felt it should belong. The turbulent political times affecting higher education funding in Estonia gave an extra motive to look for international allies beyond the Estonian higher education field.

The choice of joining the Coimbra Group and the Utrecht Network was derived from the networks’ different goals and therefore the opportunity to achieve different institutional objectives. The Coimbra Group functions at the university’s top management level (the Rector) and has mainly turned its focus on European higher education policy debates. The Group actively participates in higher education policy design by issuing statements and position papers on various topics which are forwarded to the politicians in the European Commission. Membership in the Group provides the University of Tartu with an opportunity to get firsthand information about the key trends and developments in higher education policy making. It would also provide an opportunity to express its unique culture and language specific concerns to the larger political and scholarly community. Being accepted in this elite circle of European premier universities would also help to significantly enhance global and regional competitiveness for the University of Tartu.

The Utrecht Network has mostly focused its attention on providing large scale student and staff exchange opportunities among its members, but also among other networks based in the
USA and Australia. It also organizes summer schools and is involved with marketing its member institution programs worldwide. The network operates mainly on the administrative level providing practical tools for various issues relevant to student exchanges or other administrative matters. These network objectives serve to enhance its mobility opportunities for the University of Tartu. It also helps in building the University’s international visibility through cooperative marketing events or networking with colleagues in the same region. The active sharing of knowledge, best practices, innovative ideas or issues of concern builds mutual trust and makes the network stronger. The University of Tartu must also remain alert to its responsibility for the preservation and advancement of the Estonian traditions of language and culture.

Participation in inter-organizational networks should be beneficial to all parties involved. Specific contributions are expected from every institutional member. The following chapter explains the methods of the study, leading how answers were found for the core research question: – How does the University of Tartu develop mutually beneficial participation in European university networks?
Chapter 4: Methodology and Method

4.1. Methodology

This chapter will provide a rationale for selecting a qualitative case study research methodology to examine an institutional perspective on participation in European university networks. According to Yin (1994), the case study is an appropriate methodology when “how” or “why” types of questions are being asked. These lead the researcher to explore and explain a particular phenomenon. For the purpose of my study, the broad goal is to identify the factors that enhance institutional participation in European university networks, based on the case of the University of Tartu. The case is interesting because it provides an analysis of a specific strategy for internationalization (institutional networking) which takes place in the national university of the easternmost borderland country of the European Union. Several economic, historical, geographical, political and cultural factors influence the contemporary developments in Estonia that have led the University of Tartu to join several European institutional networks.

As the focus of the study is a contemporary issue where the researcher has no control, a qualitative case study methodology is an appropriate tool for investigating such a topic. A qualitative case study approach permits holistic, in-depth investigation to understand and examine a contemporary issue (Merriam 1988, Yin 1994). Emphasis is placed on examining the context, history and cultural background of the institution. The analysis then uncovers the interaction of those significant factors.

Such an institution-focused approach to networking has not been the subject of much research, to date. Patton (1990) points out that the desire to evaluate individualized client outcomes is seen as the major reason for selecting a case study method, as in this study of the University of Tartu.
Merriam (1988) emphasizes the importance of the role of the researcher in a qualitative case study. Data is collected and analyzed through the researcher, the human instrument. The researcher is responsive to the context but also has to be aware of personal bias. The author of this thesis recognizes her personal biases.

This institution has been the alma mater for the author in many ways. The author’s first employment as a teaching assistant and internship supervisor was offered during her Masters studies at the University of Tartu. The first personal experience with the benefits of internationalization occurred when the author participated in the Oslo International Summer School. At that time the author became interested in university partnerships and student mobility opportunities, as those were very rare initiatives in the early 1990s in Estonia. After the return to Estonia, the author was selected to become the Head of the EducationUSA Advising Center in the University of Tartu’s Office of Academic Affairs. This Center offered information to students about studying opportunities at North American universities. Working for the center that was affiliated with the US Department of State, Education and Cultural Bureau, deepened her interest towards comparative higher education issues. Various opportunities to participate in NAFSA (Association for International Educators) Annual and Regional conferences as a presenter, meeting with American university representatives, talking about recent trends and developments of higher education in the US and Europe enhanced her deep curiosity towards the field of internationalization in higher education. In all those meetings, the author represented the University of Tartu and its international student programs. Holding one of the Leadership positions within NAFSA as OSEAS-ADSEC Liaison for the Western Europe and the Baltic States from 2002-2006, she was actively involved with the European credential evaluation issues
which enabled her to develop comparative perspectives on higher education systems. In 2006, the author moved to the University of Tartu’s International Student Office to start administering the incoming and outgoing exchange student programs. This provided her with the opportunity to become more knowledgeable and involved in institutional university partnerships through serving as a contact person for the Utrecht Network. The practical experience gained throughout these years encouraged the author to search for a graduate program that could offer the theoretical knowledge in the field of comparative higher education. The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto was the perfect fit for such an academic aspiration.

Throughout her life, the author has had a passion for her Estonian heritage, culture and language. Although the author has been fortunate to learn other languages, especially English, and can easily relate to how important English is for globalization, she is aware of the balance that must be found between preservation of one's heritage and moving forward in an interconnected global world. The future career aspirations envision her returning to Estonia to help the University of Tartu in particular, and the Estonian higher education system, in general, to craft its unique place in the global higher education arena.

Case study has its limitations. One concern with a case study is that it does not provide a basis for scientific generalization. As Yin (1994) suggests this criticism is often misdirected and case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes. Stake (1994) points out that the essence of the case study is to understand the uniqueness of the case, not to be concerned about theory creation. A case study is useful if seen as a small step toward generalization. Merriam (1988) argues that a case study is
selected when one wants to understand a particular situation in depth, not because one wants to know what is generally true for many. Clark (2004) emphasizes that case studies allow us to get “much closer to on-the-spot crucial interactions than is possible through remote statistical analyses” (p.6). Clark (2004), referring to the university context, asserts that when dealing with such complex systems as modern universities, derived concepts from one case study can inform other institutions about possibilities they might consider taking into account with regard to their own heritage and setting.

The strength of the case study lies in the opportunity to bring about holistic understanding that can affect and perhaps even improve the practise being studied (Merriam 1988). Therefore based on the analyses of the results, a chapter of recommendations is provided in this thesis about the factors that could enhance one institution’s participation in university networks.

4.2. Methods

The data collection in case study research consists of multiple sources of evidence (Yin 1994). The unit of analyses, “the case”, is the University of Tartu’s participation in two institutional networks (the Coimbra Group and the Utrecht Network). In the current study the review of relevant institutional and national policy documents (like Strategies, Development Plans, Agreements etc.), archival records of networks (like Charters of Foundation, Internal Regulations, Statutes etc.), Estonian newspaper articles and other documents (workshop presentations, descriptions of projects, memos etc.) was conducted as well as e-mail interviews with the key informants. Due to the geographic, financial and time constraints, in-person interviews were not an option.
For the e-mail interviews, a criterion-based sampling (Merriam 1988) of key informants was utilized and four research-groups were identified:

1) The University of Tartu senior administrators (people who serve as the University of Tartu representatives and coordinators in the Coimbra Group and/or the Utrecht Network. (8 people.));
2) The University of Tartu faculty members (faculty members who serve as contacts for internationalization activities within their departments. (10 people.));
3) The Coimbra Group members (a sample of senior administrators, one from each Task Force in which the University of Tartu is involved in. (6 people.));
4) The Utrecht Network members (a sample of senior administrators that are actively participating in the work of network and its Task Force activities. (5 people.)).

The names and the contact e-mail addresses of those people are presented on the public web sites of the University of Tartu and the respective networks.

A questionnaire was designed to be the basis for the e-mail interviews. The questionnaire consisted of 11 questions, with a set of common questions and a few questions specific to each specific sub-group (see the questionnaires in appendices C, D, E and F). The content of the questionnaires, research methodology and method was reviewed and approved by the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board in January, 2009 (see appendix G).

A pilot study was conducted among three Estonian administrators who hold positions in the field of international higher education and are familiar with the essence of networking (two from the University of Tartu, one from Tallinn University). They were asked to provide feedback about the appropriate wording of the questions, the clarity of the meaning and their opinion about
the overall accuracy of the terminology used in the questionnaire. Very minor changes were suggested and were subsequently incorporated into the revised questionnaire.

Thereafter, the Rector of the University of Tartu, Prof Alar Karis, was contacted, to request institutional consent (see Appendix H) for conducting the study on the institution and interviewing the selected representatives of the university, for research purposes. The consent was received in early February (see Appendix I). The first contact with the selected key informants was made by e-mail in early February. The aim of the study was explained and individual voluntary consent to participate in it was requested (see Appendix J). The opportunity to follow up was requested in the consent letter. When the consent was received, the informant-specific questionnaire was sent to the informants.

The questionnaires established the main themes for the type of information that the researcher was interested in collecting, but the opportunity to follow up provided the chance to request additional information on the subjects that seemed relevant or unclear from the original answers. The informants were generally willing to help with additional information and the communication turned into back and forth e-mail exchanges on several occasions. This is the main reason the author calls the method of the data collection e-mail interviews and not surveys. While surveys are often impersonal, these e-mail interviews turned into personal contact where information was shared, discussed and individual viewpoints, even suggestions or additional contacts, were offered on various subjects concerning university networking or even my thesis design.
4.3. Responses from the Key Informants

All selected 29 key informants were contacted on February 8th, 2009. Every one of the University of Tartu administrators responded positively to the consent letter within a week. The second e-mail consisted of the thematic introduction to the topic, which helped the informants direct their thoughts when answering my questions, sent together with the attached questionnaire. Three informants sent their answers within two weeks. The other five received an e-mail reminder from the author after two weeks had passed. Four administrators responded to the reminder by sending their questionnaires within a week. One did not send the questionnaire back, referring to the busy times in the office. In total, seven questionnaires with the answers from Tartu administrators were received.

Ten Tartu faculty members were contacted, one from each department. Seven contacts sent a positive reply to agree to participate in the study. Three of them suggested contacting more appropriate people for the topic within their department, so three faculty members who were not initially on the list were contacted. They responded positively, too. However, the majority of the faculty members replied that they had heard about but were not familiar with the work of those networks. They expressed concern about not being knowledgeable enough to provide any useful answers for the study, but they agreed to participate nonetheless. After two weeks had passed the majority of the faculty members received the reminder. The reaction was positive - by the 11th of March the author had received the responses from eight faculty members from different departments. The two contacts from the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Physical Science did not respond to the second reminder.
The representatives from the Utrecht network consisted of those member institutions that seemed most active in the work of the network according to their website. The author contacted five university representatives, one from each country: the Netherlands, Czech Republic, Austria, Poland and Romania. All of them responded positively and the questionnaires were sent to them immediately. Within two weeks answers from two informants from the Netherlands and the Czech Republic were received. After no further response to the reminders, the author contacted the Secretariat of the Utrecht network for some suggestions about additional representatives I could approach. Following their recommendations, Denmark was also included in the list of the contacts. By the end of March the author did receive responses from two more representatives from Austria and Denmark, which made the total number of respondents four.

Members of the Coimbra Group were targeted according to the six Task Forces that Tartu is actively involved in from the following countries: Ireland, the Netherlands, Belgium (two) and the United Kingdom. The majority of those contacts served as the Chairs of their respective Task Forces. Five out of six gave their consent to participate in the study, and excused themselves for not being able to respond quickly due to their busy schedules. Additional contact information about the unofficial “benchmarking” institutions for Tartu was received from the Head of the International Relations Office of the University of Tartu. Thereafter, Finland, Germany and Italy were added to the contact list. Reminders were sent to every person, considering their initial indication of a timeline when they were able to work on the questionnaire. By the end of March the author had managed to collect responses from four out of six people from the Coimbra Group representatives from the following countries: the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Belgium and Finland, representing the following Task Forces: The eLearning Task Force; The Doctoral
Studies and Research Task Force; The Eastern Neighbouring Countries Task Force; The Education, Training and Mobility Task Force.

All the answers from the network representatives were provided in English. The majority of the University of Tartu administrators and faculty members preferred to answer in Estonian. Their comments were translated into English by the author. The quotations that were not translated from Estonian into English are marked with an asterisk in the following chapter. The author has the sole responsibility for any possible misunderstandings or grammatical errors that might appear in the translations.
Chapter 5: Findings

The main research question, composed of several aspects of the topic of network participation, was explained in the literature review. These aspects were separately addressed through the questionnaires presented to the four study groups. The layout of the findings, described in this chapter, follows the order of those questions by starting with the questions common to every group and concluding with answers to the group-specific questions.

All participants were first asked to elaborate on their personal views on motives, goals and benefits for participating in the institutional networks. The researcher was particularly interested in whether there was an overlap of opinions among the study groups.

The question about contributing strategically valuable resources to the network activities was included to solicit practical evidence which might support the strategic management theory. The views of study participants describe what is valued and what can be offered towards mutually beneficial operations.

In the literature review, several authors listed various aspects that might help or hinder the work of institutional networks. Two separate questions about those factors were included in the questionnaire.

Depending on the country and the role of the university in its culture and language, unintentional risks might be an outcome with international activities, as was expressed by several scholars. The question of possible risks was asked to probe for opinions on this aspect.

Timely network information dissemination within an institution was said to be the key for successful networking. The University of Tartu groups were asked their opinions on the various
channels available for obtaining information on network activities. In addition, the faculty members were asked about the need for being directly involved.

It was indicated in the literature that the involvement of faculty members is essential for having successful network experience for the institution. The Coimbra Group and the Utrecht Network members were approached with the question on how their network could enhance the possibilities for faculty members to be more involved in their activities. The University of Tartu groups were asked to comment on how the institution could support the involvement of faculty academics in network activities.

The two network groups were asked to provide their opinions on characteristics that would contribute towards mutually beneficial network participation. An opportunity was provided for them to comment specifically on their experience in working together with the University of Tartu members. The University of Tartu administrators were asked to comment on the advantages of multilateral network cooperation in comparison to the bilateral cooperation.

The answers to these questions were collected into thirteen subsections of this chapter and were illustrated with direct quotations from the respondents.

5.1. Motives, Goals and Benefits for Participating in Institutional Networks

Understanding the rationales and anticipated benefits helps to explain why international partnerships are important, why networking has been chosen to be the strategy and what are the values triggering an institution to participate in those inter-organizational collaborations. The respondents’ opinions about the motives, goals and benefits of institutional networks were
solicited in three separate questions. The responses received to these questions were very similar, and therefore they are collected into one section.

While the University of Tartu administrators were very specific in their answers, the Tartu faculty members recognized their lack of knowledge on the subject. The majority of the faculty members gave short and general answers to the questions and mentioned repeatedly that they were not familiar with those networks and that those two networks played an insignificant role at the departmental level and in the everyday work of faculty members:

“Unfortunately, I have not heard of those networks mentioned, therefore my answers are not detailed. My interests are primarily discipline-based (discipline-based networks), the academic-curriculum-based developments inspire me less to write or think about.”

“I’m truly sorry, but I do not know how to answer those questions. At the departmental level the international cooperation takes primarily place through discipline-based partner agreements (content based, between universities/institutes). These networks [the Coimbra Group and the Utrecht Network] are operating more on the institutional level of the university. [...] The network [the Coimbra Group] gives an opportunity to exchange information, design joint viewpoints etc. But as we are dealing with the matters of higher education and science administration, I don’t see a reason why this should be of interest to every single faculty member, who is mainly interested in discipline-based cooperation”.

“It seems that I don’t have enough information and competence to provide copious answers. I do not know much about the Utrecht Network. I have been a part of the Coimbra Group activities which were held in Tartu. It seems to me that it is more of a visibility mission where the old universities get together to network, to take on a few general consensus statements and recommendations. The real academic work takes place with content and discipline based networks. I support that kind of cooperation more. The role of the Coimbra Group and the Utrecht Network is marginal at the departmental level.”

“I’m not an expert on the Coimbra Group and have not even heard of the Utrecht Network.”
**PREFACE: In answering the following questions, I am afraid I can respond only in relation to the Coimbra group, in relation to which I gained somewhat of an impression following a major meeting of the group in Tartu (I believe) in 2006. I have never heard of the Utrecht Network.**

The positive sign is that their overall opinion towards institutional networking was supportive and positive. The faculty members expressed the opinion that on the institutional level the participation in networks is useful and needed:

“Participation in the Coimbra Group and the Utrecht Network is definitely a good thing for a university, but seems more of a labelling thing when looking at it from here. Obviously I have not shown more interest myself, and therefore cannot say much about their content based activities.”

“I have heard of the Coimbra Group only to the extent that I know that our university is a member of it and supposedly it unites the most advanced universities in Europe. I haven’t heard a thing about the Utrecht Network. Somehow I tend to think that I am not the only person in my department who hasn’t had the will to delve into those things. But I imagine that if those groups and networks already exist, then belonging to those is necessary for the university as it gives better understanding about the trends and developments in Europe.”

However, several common themes were detected in the answers of four study groups to these three questions. Gaining of **reputation, prestige and international visibility** was the dominant theme seen as a motive, goal and benefit in the answers of all four groups. The following quotes illustrate the answers of the two Tartu groups:

**Administrators:**

*“The motives [for joining the Coimbra Group] were (1) prestige and visibility – being part of a prestigious European network like CG enhances a particular image of Tartu, as a venerable research university of high standing, which UT wishes to project and promote; [...] to reach partners with excellent profiles.”

“Joining the Coimbra Group was an opportunity to be among the selected ones. It is also an external matter of honour (this is not the EUA, which is very strong, but accepts every single institution).”*
“To be internationally visible – networking helps definitely towards rising visibility, fame and recognition. Here I remember first my contact with the network, when I saw their promotional materials which invited me to apply to the European best international Masters programs.”

“There were definitely several reasons when joining the Utrecht Network, the most powerful of those was the knowledge that this network unites leading universities with overlapping orientation in internationalization.”

Faculty members:

*“Enhancing visibility / institutional reputation.”
*“Honour, respectability, being in good company.”

“to put the University on the map or to make it known among the other Universities in the group.”

Similarly to the Tartu respondent groups, both of the network representatives mentioned reputation and prestige as a motive, goal and benefit for that type of cooperation.

Coimbra representatives:

“as the members in the CG are all well-known universities the invitation was considered to be an “honour”.”

“Working with well-known and reputed peers in a friendly relationship helps in establishing the right contacts at the right time for the right things we are all supposed to do in our academic lives.”

Utrecht representative:

“You have partners you can trust, who share the same interests, who are willing to work hard otherwise they would lose their reputation.”

The two Tartu groups were more likely to provide reasons why visibility is important for the University of Tartu. The historical context of the University of Tartu was mentioned as one of
the causes (and in one case a strength of the University) for seeking wider international reputation.

Administrators:

“We have been in an era where we have not been open to other universities for a long time. Therefore internationalization is one of our university’s top priorities.”

Faculty members:

“It is important for the Baltic universities (maybe to the whole of Eastern Europe) to get rid of the reputation of being an ex-soviet country.”

“In my opinion, joining both of those networks has been done foremost to stress the University of Tartu’s historical background as a brand in some sense and this is done through the international network.”

One of the University of Tartu administrators noted that the unstable **political situation** can present a rationale for joining the networks:

“It is good and safe to belong somewhere – it goes also for the institutions, especially when one is small and marginal.”

**National level competition** among Estonian universities was offered as another potential explanation for seeking international profile and prestige. This is illustrated by the following opinions of the respondents:

Administrators:

“Joining the Coimbra Group was an opportunity for the university to differentiate itself from other universities (in Estonia, and elsewhere).”

“the more so when one tries to maintain its leader position within its country.”

Faculty members:

“On the national level it also helps to raise its reputation in comparison to other Estonian higher education institutions.”
Rankings were mentioned once by one University of Tartu administrator as the triggering motive for seeking enhanced international visibility:

“our position in university rankings is often not outstanding enough. Reason: we are not visible enough, we do not disseminate our results sufficiently.”

A second common theme identified among the answers of all groups was the drive for development of knowledge production. Most of the University of Tartu administrators were striving for practical achievements by increasing real cooperation through joint initiatives between network partners. This theme presents a logical link between the visibility and prestige motives that were frequently mentioned – visibility can be gained through working together and participating as an active member in joint activities. The following quotations by the University of Tartu administrators illustrate this opinion:

“[...] and to foster cooperation with the Coimbra Group members, because research-university-centered thinking is central here and in other CG universities. By developing activities separately we could reach our aim but cooperating together makes things go smoothly.”

*“Increasing real cooperation through joint initiatives like joint teaching, joint conferences and seminars.”*

This theme was not mentioned by the Tartu faculty members.

The University of Tartu faculty members expressed their interest in building departmental-level academic contacts but unfortunately could not present any concrete examples in their respective departments. They saw the benefit of networking in building links with researchers at other European universities and that way possibly being involved in joint research projects:
“Be connected to a network of experts, programme implementers, researchers etc.; (access to financial, human, infrastructural, administrative) resources. Find out who is active where and engage with those who have faced similar challenges.”

“These events might help in building contacts between departments (for the administration they have been beneficial already). At the moment cannot present any examples from my department.”

“There is an opportunity to build new research contacts with the researchers from other universities with good standing. The exchange of ideas and experiences takes place and through that the generation of new ideas. The prerequisites for competing for the international research projects are created.”

The administrator group did not mention the benefit of building faculty based contacts. Only the need for “finding and building partnerships in a variety of activities” was mentioned several times.

Two faculty members described their participation at the international conferences organized by the Coimbra Group as an example of concrete benefits received through networking. The information about the conferences was forwarded to them by the International Relations Office and both respondents got partial funding for their travel expenses covered by the International Relations Office’s budget. One of the faculty members described a direct benefit received from the conference (organized by the Coimbra Group Culture, Arts and the Humanities Task Force) to her respective discipline. As a member of the national committee in the field of Humaniora, the views and opinions of European colleagues will help to design the overall directions and standpoints of the development planning in the field of humanities in which she is involved. The knowledge gained from the conference was disseminated among the Department Dean and other relevant faculty members in the form of a 4-page-memo (this
document was also sent to a researcher to read), giving an overview of the presenters, the general themes, the main points made and overall conclusions of the conference results.

There was also some confusion expressed by one of the faculty member in terms of internationalization and the need to participate in those networks in general. The disappointment about the ongoing changes is vividly expressed by the following opinion:

“ I’m not so sure about whether all those changes caused by the Bologna process, or in fact the eager implementation of those reforms in Estonia, are right and useful to Estonia. From my answer, do not assume that I’m one old fashioned elderly professor that doesn’t see beyond my teaching courses. These constant changes, development plans, projects etc. are about to annoy me lately. I’m lacking time for my peaceful work. I have my international contacts developed long time ago based on the mutual research interest and I feel this is the right way to go. No networks have been helpful there. The same goes for my colleagues, too.”

A few of the Utrecht Network members identified the same theme of knowledge production as did the University of Tartu groups by pointing towards the opportunity to find new approaches for university operations through cooperating together.

“associating with a large group of dynamic universities providing different models for innovation and change.”

“Pool ideas and share expenditures. It is important that the network has transparency in goals and structure to enhance honesty in operations.”

One of the Coimbra representatives saw a clear motive for participating in university networks as the possibility of creating a tool for faculty based academic collaboration which was briefly mentioned also by only one of the University of Tartu administers:

“The network gives us access to academic collaboration, both educationally and in the research area, with like-minded academics, departments, faculties and students from across Europe.”
Exchanging experiences with network partner universities and learning from these interactions was another common theme that was observed among the answers in both of the Tartu groups. This theme is linked with the motive of knowledge production in the answers of the two Tartu groups. The goal of connecting with new partners among European universities was also seen as important.

Administrators:

“Exchange experiences with the Coimbra Group members.”

“compare itself with others.”

“to find trustworthy contacts.”

Faculty:

“probably exchange experience for some people, getting experience in some other university.”

“Strengthen local capacities.”

“to find new cooperation partners.”

The answers of the network representatives indicated that the qualities of the partners are important. The need for finding trustworthy partners with common interests and similar background for various cooperative activities was frequently mentioned as a key theme:

Coimbra representatives:

“My personal motivation lies in the networking possibilities itself: meeting people with similar interests, backgrounds, and professional aspirations. This results in common projects, in common activities (like seminars and/or workshops), and eventually in joint publications.”

“Europe is a natural area for us to look to when making links with partner universities. Many of our network’s member universities have similar and shared histories, and we feel comfortable in the company of our partners.”
“Finding natural partners for cooperation in educational and research networks.”

Utrecht representatives:

“forging strong links with a large number of similar universities.”

“You have partners you can trust, who share the same interests, who are willing to work hard.”

A few comments made by the study respondents pointed towards the possibility of having institutional equality issues in the institutional networks. The following quote by the University of Tartu administrators illustrated the issue of some members having less value in networks than others:

“The University of Tartu has rather the status of a little brother in this particular cooperation, we show initiative and wish to prove ourselves – the people are trying more than usual.”

Maintaining high quality standards was mentioned as an important indicator for belonging to the network. The respondents from the University of Tartu expressed the opinion that international cooperation with top research universities (as is the case with both networks) leads potentially to higher standards in teaching and research production as well as in to further advancement of university support systems:

Administrators:

“Higher education without cooperation cannot develop and that goes for the research as well as for the teaching and learning. International cooperation with similar (in some perspectives) universities raises our ability to compete and develop services."

„Unified goals, unified quality and unified development are not possible without work of the networks. The universities in the Coimbra group are joined by similar goals and standards/criteria.”
Two of the Coimbra Group representatives highlighted the importance of **quality enhancement** as a goal through mutual cooperation. These quotations illustrate their opinion:

“In addition, active participation in network’s projects will certainly have its positive internal effect on the quality.”

“Enhancement of quality of education and research.”

The theme of **benchmarking the activities** of the University of Tartu by comparing the relevant issues with other research institutions in the region was another theme that was noticeable in the answers of the two Tartu groups. The benefit from networking with colleagues at seminars or conferences was mentioned.

Administrators:

“Validation of our ideas – do we do things in the right way.”

“Good overview of the activities in research universities (there are many interesting presentations in every large conference which otherwise would be missed because most of the conferences are focused on one specific theme, but Coimbra conferences provide good overview on new good ideas that work).”

“to see what are the important topics for others, positioning our activities for those people who participate in the actual content-based work.”

Faculty members:

*“Discuss emerging issues, find out who is active where and engage with those who have faced similar challenges;”

*“to hear what their current views are, what the main worries/concerns of Europe’s top university’s are.”

Wider **mobility opportunities** that are offered through the membership in the Utrecht Network were highlighted by the Tartu administrators and faculty members in the context of various cooperative activities as well as the demographic decrease of Estonian youth entering university.
Administrator:

“cooperation through various kinds of projects, both administrative and academic.”

Faculty member:

“Acknowledged need for more and more students (due to demographic trend), how to attract foreign students.”

Both Tartu representatives in the Utrecht Network mentioned specific student exchange opportunities gained to selected Australian and US institutions (AEN and MAUI exchanges), but added that it could not be seen as a real benefit, as the proportion of the students who have taken advantage of those mobility schemes was very small and there were other much more attractive opportunities outside of the network realm for student exchange. On the other hand, it was recognized that the network provides a bridge to enter into such regional institutional partnerships with regions outside of Europe.

“There are certainly more concrete examples but other than having an opportunity to send our students to a specific Australian and American institutions (these opportunities are used very little, as there are more advantageous scholarships available), I cannot name anything else.”

“One of the initial goals of the Utrecht Network was to support and widen student mobility within the network. At the time when we joined the network, the student mobility was taking place through the Erasmus program and participating in the network did not give any additional push to that. The benefit factor for also the University of Tartu is the network’s cooperation with networks outside the European region (AEN and MAUI), because establishing such a cooperation ties in those regions as a single institution is not possible. Short membership time has not brought any tangible benefits, as this time has been mostly a period for searching.”

The theme of cooperating to boost internationalization activities as a goal of itself was indicated by one respondent in both of Tartu groups:

Administrator:

“to improve our internationalization level through joint activities, to stimulate activities that are connected with the internationalization.”
Faculty member:

“Internationalization for inclusion to Western international structures.”

The University of Tartu faculty members were more likely to comment on the issue of participating in European higher education policy discussions. This aspect was stated once as a motive by a representative of the administrators group.

Administrator:

“[…] and discussions on higher education policy in various fields.”

Faculty members:

*“Being in touch with developments in higher education in Europe.”

*“In turn, if the Group [the Coimbra Group] itself decides to undertake some action at the European level, Tartu will know about it and perhaps be a direct part of it.”

The network representatives put a lot of stress on the possibility to participate in the European higher education policy design. The network representatives mentioned various aspects of the European higher education scene. The Coimbra Group respondent observed that influencing the EU higher education policy could be considered as a noteworthy motive for network participation. Members of the Utrecht Network stated the importance of being aware of the changes taken place in the field of European higher education arena:

“getting a broad picture of the latest development and trends in the European higher education space.”

“The Utrecht Network also offers (another) platform for discussions and lobby in the field of European HE.”
One Tartu faculty member saw a motive for joining the networks in accessing European funding, which was not mentioned by anybody from the Tartu administrators’ group:

*“To access and/or gain eligibility for regional funding.”*

The opinion that the tangible benefits are difficult to measure and the need to constantly evaluate the concrete benefits was expressed by a couple of the University of Tartu administrators, too:

“[the benefits are] very difficult to evaluate”

“There is always the need to evaluate the benefit-factor of participating in those various networks.”

The fact that the University of Tartu was the most recent member of the Utrecht Network and the opportunities available through the network were not yet fully exploited was recognized:

*“Thus far, the UN has primarily been useful for creating new mobility opportunities for students. The benefits must be extended beyond this, as this is clearly an underexploited opportunity for partnerships and joint activities. We plan to join more of the interest groups/ task forces in the near future to make more use of the UN.”*

In conclusion, it was evident that the theme of reputation and prestige was present in all four groups, followed by the theme of fostering knowledge production through networking. The motive to increase mobility opportunities was also mentioned by all groups. The issue of aiming to be involved in the EU higher education policy discussions was stressed more often as a goal than a motive by all groups. While the Coimbra and the Utrecht network representatives noted the importance of the link to the European Union policy design and receiving information through networking, the University of Tartu respondents did not make any comments on that theme. Only the possibility of gaining EU funding was mentioned once by a Tartu faculty member. The motive of networking in order to foster faculty collaboration was stressed by the
Coimbra representative and one Tartu administrator. The general themes of benefits included student exchanges, knowledge transfer, new contacts and gaining wider prestige in all groups. However, very few concrete examples were presented by members of all four groups.

The following section invites participants to name the most successful cooperation activities and give their opinion on success factors.

5.2. Successful Cooperation Activities

In this part of the questionnaire the informants in the Tartu administrative group were asked to give examples of the most successful network cooperation activities which the University of Tartu has participated in and/or benefited from. The respondents were also asked to explain why they felt those activities were successful for the University of Tartu. The Coimbra Group and the Utrecht Network representatives were asked to list the most successful cooperation activities of their respective networks and explain their opinion. The faculty representatives’ questionnaire did not include this particular question, because the network activities are coordinated through the Tartu administration and the answers of the administrator group would reflect best what is perceived to be the most valued events from the institutional perspectives.

Several key activities were mentioned. The University of Tartu administrators agreed on the fact that the Coimbra Group General Assembly, held in Tartu in May 2006, was the most significant event for enhancing visibility and international profile for the institution. The following responses represent their opinion:

“General Assembly in Tartu (2006). The CG Universities were truly surprised at the calibre of our university and directions.”
“The University of Tartu organized very successfully a big Coimbra conference – we were able to introduce ourselves better and also our country.”

“The fact that Tartu organized a general assembly in 2006 was definitely significant.”

Several Tartu administrators pointed out the importance of participating in the Task Force activities, noting that the enhanced cooperation between partners takes place primarily through various projects within specific task forces.

“Successful cooperation in the CG operates mostly through the mechanisms of the task forces. UT representation in the task forces is quite good, as we have members in 5 of 8 task forces, which have become much stronger in actually producing added value in recent years. Just a few examples of successful cooperation would be the “VM BASE” project (http://vm-base.europace.org/) as well as hospitality schemes offered by the Eastern Neighbouring Countries task force.”

“As we participate in this Task Force for the first time, we do not have a big success yet, but in the planning of future projects and generating ideas, we have actively been participating. We were also important partners in developing the Mission Statement and Vision of this Task Force.”

“The joint publication of the Task Force in Humanities.”

The specific reasons why those activities were seen as especially successful were not mentioned.

One administrator commented on a hospitality project in which Tartu did host a research fellow, but with unknown benefits.

Another key activity cited by a few Tartu administrators was participating in joint projects. The global marketing events organized by the Utrecht Network were emphasized. According to the informant, the activity of the Utrecht Network marketing series demonstrated clearly the benefit in advertising the programs under the brand of the Utrecht Network. The fact that due to a short membership period the cooperation has been less successful compared to the Coimbra Group was mentioned.
"UT [the University of Tartu] has been a member of the Utrecht Network for less time and has been less successful in joining task forces and developing successful cooperation. UT participated, however, in a joint marketing series, through which UN universities exhibited together at education fairs outside Europe. This would be one example of cooperation – as these were one-off events, it is not clear how much lasting benefit these instances of fair attendance gave the individual universities, but in any case it gave experience with the fairs and some additional visibility."

“The network’s marketing campaign for the Masters level programs, where the Masters programs offered by the network member institutions were promoted as European quality programs, including Erasmus Mundus joint programs. Participating in such a marketing campaign presented the advantage that joint activities have. Taking part in an education fair in Thailand, it was obvious that under the banner of Utrecht it was easier to attract potential people who might have been interested than under the slogan of Estonian universities, “Study in Estonia”.

One respondent mentioned a mobility activity that offers an opportunity for staff members to learn from each other’s experience by visiting the institutions. The answer did not reveal whether any of the University of Tartu members had participated in this.

“Initiating the CG Staff Mobility Scheme – intended for mutual visits of non-academic staff members, in order to share best practices, experiences and plan joint developments.”

In most of the cases, the reasons why those activities were seen as successful to the institution were not mentioned except for the Coimbra General Assembly and the Utrecht marketing series, both of which were seen as an opportunity to increase institutional visibility. The Utrecht joint marketing campaign was said to be much more effective and made the University of Tartu more visible in the Asian market.

The responses from the Coimbra Group representatives referred also to the activities of the Task Forces. Those were said to carry educational purposes in synthesising common knowledge, fostering contacts among the members or partner-organizations and bringing visibility to participating institutions. Those opinions were expressed as follows:
“Task Force activities – they have enhanced our understanding of a wide range of topics, brought us into close contact with experts either from within the Coimbra Group or from other networks and organisations such as EUA and the European Commission, and given much greater visibility to our own university throughout Europe as a result.”

“TF Workshops, also in collaboration between TFs, set up as networking activities to share and create new common knowledge (e.g. the workshops on ICT and Student Mobility, on How virtual mobility can support physical mobility, etc.).”

The theme of joint projects was mentioned here as well. The direct benefit of collaborating together was seen in joint publications that have had a long-lasting impact for the members.

“Common projects, like HECTIC, cEVU, VICTORIOUS, VM-BASE,... with outcomes (publications) that are still reference material for many.”

One respondent noted “position papers” that usually contain the members’ viewpoints on various higher education policy issues, but did not elaborate any further. “Quality enhancement” was also referred to as an example of the Coimbra Group successful activities but no further explanation was provided.

The answers of the Utrecht Network representatives could be grouped into four themes: the joint projects (with EU funding), summer schools, student exchanges (between member institutions and partner regional networks such as MAUI and AEN) and joint presentations at international educational conferences. All those activities are said to build stronger links among the members and must be based on mutual understanding. As some respondents viewed it:

“All is based on mutual trust and understanding of institutional positions and personal relations. The Utrecht Network is capable of mobilizing forces to take action and put things together.”

“Aided (though only in some cases actually created) by the close personal links among UN member representatives.”
“In the case of the human rights summer school, this has also led to research cooperation and the publication of a book.”

Overall, the three groups presented quite similar themes that were, according to their opinion, especially relevant and successful. The common theme that was repeatedly brought up by all groups was initiating and participating in the joint projects (often supported by the European Commission). The importance of the Task Force activities (in the case of the Utrecht Network it was the summer schools) was also commonly mentioned by all groups. Tartu respondents stressed the importance of the Coimbra Group General Assembly to the university’s institutional visibility. The explanation of why some events were seen beneficial to the institutions was more likely to be commented on by the network members than by Tartu representatives, so that the overall impact of those activities on the institution was often not clear.

5.3. Resources Contributing to the Network Activities

The resource-based view of university cooperation suggests that international institutional networks accept those members who might have valuable resources that are beneficial for the network. Tartu administrators and faculty members were asked to express their opinion on what important resources have been contributed by the University of Tartu to the network activities. Network representatives were asked to describe what important resources institutions could contribute to the network, to see whether there is a match between the opinions.

The one common theme that was most frequently mentioned by all four groups was the diversity of knowledge and expertise that is expected from members to contribute to the network. Several interesting topics were articulated by the University of Tartu groups as
resources that can be valuable to other members of the network. Often the unique geographical location or national heritage was suggested as a contribution to new perspectives for the network.

Tartu administrators:

*“People and their knowledge.”

“contribution by providing a new perspective to some problems, such as bordering a powerful country, a language spoken by very few. And certainly there are things where we have accomplished more than others, so the know-how/knowledge.”

“Estonians as Finno-Ugrics, that means unique Europeans.”

Tartu faculty members:

“experience and expertise of staff”

*“Inside knowledge of the Soviet era; understanding of the problems in Eastern and Central Europe; some very highly regarded disciplines (biosemiotics, etc) or specialists.”

“Tartu’s contribution to the network is knowledge and generalizations about how an academic institution adapts through different political eras and becomes stronger by this. The University of Tartu contributes also by the experience of a national university situated in a small country.”

Both of the network members mentioned the same theme and the institutional unique ideas were mentioned as especially welcome contributions.

Coimbra representatives:

“commitment, and expertise is brought into the network, to the benefit of all member institutions. “

“expertise, knowledge and skill, willingness to set up and/or participate in projects.”

Utrecht representatives:

“institutional experience and expertise”

“models for the development of programmes.”
Knowledge advancement can only take place via participation of various people whether they are administrative staff or faculty members, active in their respective disciplines or network Task Forces. All groups pointed out the significance of human resources:

Tartu administrators:

“Task Forces activities demand much more from the university than a membership fee. In most of the Task Forces the university has its representative.”

“faculty members and staff.”

Faculty members tended to stress the importance of the academic staff:

“human; […] administrative resources; young academics.”

“Own academic staff.”

Coimbra representative:

“active participation in task forces by representatives.”

Utrecht representative:

“People”

The fact that the network activities are included in the other work responsibilities of everyone who is involved in them and are often a voluntary effort that demands optimism, was mentioned by the network representatives on several occasions,

Coimbra representative:

“the institution is paying a lot in kind: all activities in which its teachers and students are involved are voluntary based. So, a lot of enthusiasm, ... is brought into the network, to the benefit of all member institutions.”

“The staff has been actively involved in the CG network.”
Utrecht representative:

“hard working optimism”

Significant financial resources that institutions are annually expected to contribute were also mentioned primarily by the Tartu administrative interviewees but in one case by the Coimbra member as well,

Tartu administrators:

“CG [the Coimbra Group] fee and Task Force activities. Task Forces activities demand much more from the university than a membership fee. In most of the Task Forces the university has its representative. The Task Force activities take place usually 2-4 times per year.”

*I’m not sure I understand this question – is it what resources do we spend on these? In that case, the answer would be the annual membership fee, plus attendance at 5 task force meetings a year plus each of these representatives attending one annual meeting (with task force meetings) somewhere in Europe. UT [the University of Tartu] also has a member on the executive board, which is an additional resource we have expended on the CG. The expenditure [in the Utrecht Network] is far less, as the annual membership fee is smaller and one person’s attendance at the annual meeting is covered by the membership fee. Administrative costs primarily involve putting together various reports and figures the UN asks for, which takes place primarily in the International Student Service, and then one person’s attendance at the annual meeting.”

Coimbra representative:

“Next to the annual subscription fee, the institution is paying a lot in kind.”

One respondent from the University of Tartu administrators raised the possibility that the University of Tartu is not seen as an equal partner among the other members, but in the end of the statement expressed confidence that Tartu can contribute as much as others:

“The University of Tartu has rather the status of a little brother in this particular cooperation, we show initiative and wish to prove ourselves – the people are trying more than usual. ... And certainly there are things where we have accomplished more than
others, ... In conclusion, I think we are quite equal partners and contribute as much as others depending on the topic and possibilities.”

There was concordance in the opinions of the Tartu administration group and the network respondent in terms of the resources that an institution can contribute and that is in turn expected to receive from the network. The University of Tartu member mentioned gaining **access to those institutions** that the network might not access otherwise:

“the access to our networks”

Utrecht representative:

“Links with additional partners for specific projects.”

In conclusion, the most valuable resource that the institutions are expected to contribute is the unique knowledge and ideas of the participating people. The University of Tartu members see its own institutional value in the unique national cultural and historical heritage, geographical location and some especially strong disciplines. The financial resources are not seen as a key element in networking, although the institutions are contributing significantly through Task Force activities and other meetings.

5.4. Factors that Help Institutional Participation in Regional University Networks

In this section of the study the respondents were asked about their views on specific factors that in their opinion have helped or can significantly help institutional participation in the regional university networks. The respondents were given an opportunity to describe the factors that might influence the work of the networks on an institutional, national and regional level.

Detailed answers were provided for the institutional level factors by all groups. However, Tartu faculty members offered fewer comments on this question compared to other groups.
Respondents from all groups stressed most frequently the importance of the management factor through **the support and commitment from the university leadership:**

Tartu administrators:

“support from the leadership”

*“Strong support from the rector’s office has helped immensely, from the time of joining the networks to the question of participating in them. The Coimbra Group annual meeting took place in Tartu in 2006, which was very beneficial for UT’s visibility in the group and for the visibility and awareness of CG among students and staff at Tartu. This could not have taken place without the clear and strong will of the top management.”

“The wish and readiness from the management to contribute.”

Faculty members:

“institutional administrative support”

“Clear interest of administration towards enhancing cooperation.”

Coimbra representatives:

“Commitment from the top.”

“Membership strongly supported by the Rector/Administration in general.”

Utrecht representatives:

“commitment (especially financial) from the university leadership.”

“Organizational support e.g. a central international office.”

Support from the university leadership is directly connected to financial matters – without approval of expenditures for network activities, cooperation cannot take place. This issue was directly verbalized by the Coimbra network representatives:

“payment of the fee (:-).”

“A willingness to spend money on travel, subsistence.”
Another theme that was presented as significant factor at the institutional level by all groups was the involvement of dedicated people who are truly interested in network activities and have the willingness to contribute their time to those activities. A Tartu representative commented on having a special Coimbra Group coordinator among the staff who is responsible for information dissemination.

Tartu representatives:

“Person in the International Relations Office who serves basically as a coordinator in disseminating the information (the University – CG Office).”

“Interest and readiness of a specific people to cooperate institutionally.”

“dedicated staff.”

Another Tartu faculty member noted the importance of having a charismatic leader, a former Rector of the University of Tartu, to represent the institution at various network gatherings.

Faculty members:

“People who are knowledgeable and interested are probably the most important.”

“In Tartu’s case, it is probably most of all people: having a strong person to stand out in the group. In this case, Jaak Aaviksoo was definitely an asset.”

Additionally, the Coimbra Group representatives commented on one of the most valuable roles of the network representatives— to share information obtained at network meetings within institutions.

“Colleagues with similar and shared interests.”

“internal dissemination, participation in projects (staff time).”

“representative must give feedback on activities to relevant bodies.”
The Utrecht representative commented on the importance of having some extra time within the coordinating office within the institution, indicating that the workload is heavy and finding time for network activities might be problematic:

“a strong central international office, enough free capacity within the international office to be able to take part in initiatives, a genuine interest in internationalization on the part of the academic staff.”

Having general **awareness** about the network activities and institutional **common goals** help in the work of network cooperation, according to the Tartu administrative people.

“Awareness about activities that take place – projects ... common (mutual) goals.”

“Awareness that such a cooperation helps us to accomplish our goals.”

“the goals set in the University of Tartu Strategic Plan.”

This view was supported by a comment provided by the Coimbra representative:

“Vision on internationalisation.”

Remarks on national level helping factors were mostly provided by the University of Tartu administrators. Faculty members did not offer any comments specifically on national level factors. Several network representatives indicated that the national level factors are not notably important in the work of networks providing “not relevant” or “not applicable” types of remarks. Tartu administrators noted that the national level understanding of the importance of internationalization activities would help in their daily work. The following quote illustrates this opinion:

“Appreciation of international cooperation.”
On several occasions Tartu administrators pointed out the legislative support that the Ministry of Education has offered to universities by adopting several higher education level acts in support of internationalization activities in Estonia:

“There has been adopted the internationalization strategy of higher education in Estonia. That motivates universities to participate in such networks.”

“Changes in the legislation system that allows establishing borderless joint programs (one value added of the network, to develop joint curricula), national strategy of internationalization.”

Another administrator mentioned the recent history of the institution and felt that the historical heritage of Estonian people is a factor that drives people more eagerly to search for ways to belong to Europe:

“Historically developed inferiority complex and therefore having a wish to belong to Europe.”

A similar opinion, more positively phrased, was given by one of the faculty members who mentioned the skill of adaptability to changes as an important factor for cooperation:

“Ability to adapt in different eras, people, systems and schools.”

The Coimbra Group representatives did not provide any specific comments on national level factors except for the fact that collaboration between universities adds additional visibility on the national level:

“Closer collaboration nationally with other CG universities, realising that CG activities are recognised by our partners.”

One of the Utrecht network members indicated the importance of the impact that the national Ministries of Education have on international cooperation in terms of funding available and the implementation of national level Bologna reforms:
“the degree to which the Ministry of Education promotes internationalization (particularly in the form of funding) and the degree to which the Bologna Process has been implemented.”

Another Utrecht network member saw the help in networking in the factor that every member-institution brings its own institutional connections to the network and through that the overall access to new knowledge or partner-institutions is wider than usual. This helps in making joining the network more attractive.

“Via us connections to other members can be build up, expertise when looking for good practice.”

The view supports the observations of the University of Tartu administrator who indicated earlier the importance of bringing additional connections to the network.

When articulating the regional level factors, confusion about how to define a “region” was detected. Several respondents described their views based on their respective sub-regions instead of Europe. The following sub-regions were mentioned: “the Baltic countries”, “Scandinavia”, “Nordic level”.

In several cases the help of other universities, already members in the networks, was mentioned by Tartu administrators:

“In the CG network for the University of Tartu there are Turu and Abo from Finland.”

“Other strong universities of the region that are already in the network (Vilnius before the university of Tartu).”

One administrator from the University of Tartu mentioned the additional value that the European level funding opportunities have on the attractiveness of joining a network:

*I am not sure how the regional level is defined. European funds are available for various initiatives of the networks, which makes cooperation more feasible and provides
good motivation to increase cooperation among network partners. Various network-based projects have been funded by the EU. Any smaller region than Europe is not particularly relevant for participation in these networks, from my perspective.

Setting regional **common directions** and goals were seen as important by another Tartu administrator:

"If Europe is meant as a region, then setting clear common directions."

The view of the Baltic countries being attractive and **inspiring students** towards deciding to study in Estonia was mentioned as an important regional level factor by the Tartu administrator, who serves as representative in the Utrecht Network:

"The increasing interest of European students towards studying in the Baltic countries (the numbers of the University of Tartu show that, hopefully the numbers of other universities too)."

A Tartu faculty member expressed an opinion that the regional level contacts are not very important:

"I suspect, regional contacts (if the region means the Baltics) are relatively weak. If region means Scandinavia, the situation is better (from my viewpoint, others may have different experience)."

The network representatives were not likely to provide comments on regional level factors noting usually that those were not relevant. Only one Utrecht network representative mentioned "financial support" that was seen as a valuable factor at the regional level.

In conclusion, institutional level factors were seen as most influential towards network activities. All groups agreed that commitment and support from the university leadership is vital in order to operate successfully as part of a network. Having dedicated people who are truly interested in network activities was another common theme articulated by all groups. National level factors were mostly commented on by the Tartu administrators group, who stressed the
legislative support provided by the Ministry of Education. The same viewpoint was expressed by the Utrecht Network member. Regional level factors received very few comments. University of Tartu administrators mentioned having other universities in the same sub-region would help an institution in becoming a member. The opportunity for accessing European funding was also mentioned by the same group members.

The next question invited respondents to list the factors that might hinder the cooperation of a network.

5.5. Factors that Hinder Institutional Participation in Regional University Networks

This section of the study focused on the factors that might hinder institutional participation in regional university networks, according to the respondents’ views. They were asked to provide comments differentiating institutional, national and regional level factors.

The spectrum of those opinions was very diverse and few common themes were detectable between the responses and between the groups. Institutional level factors were mentioned most frequently.

Several University of Tartu administrators remarked on the lack of interest towards network activities. Causes for that might be several, but reference was made to busy schedules and various other responsibilities, other forms of cooperation by administrators and faculty members:

“lack of time”

“everyday problems take all of your energy”

“There is always the question of sufficient resources, both human and financial, for participating in cooperative projects as well as in task forces.
The issue of lack of participation of academics in network activities was mentioned by the University of Tartu administration group:

“academics being busy and therefore not being available for inclusion in various network activities, as they are already involved with other activities.

Another administrator mentioned a similar issue that there are “lots of other forms of cooperation” and therefore the presence of a strategic and reasoned approach is needed and the opposite attitude might be of a hindrance to the network operations:

“random way of doing things, when the organization is not aware of the goals of networking, when there is a lack of cooperation.”

The network members expressed the same concerns as Tartu administrators and referred to lack of time as a common hindrance factor in networking:

Coimbra representatives:

“The general workload”

“Lack of willingness to invest in full participation in CG activities, ... staff time for projects development.”

“There are other “memberships” as well ... priorities must be checked!!”

“Sometimes conflicting visions on internationalisation, especially with regard to which networks to join or which partners to choose for which kind of activities.”

Utrecht representative:

“not enough free capacity within the international office to be able to take part in initiatives.”

“a lack interest in internationalization on the part of the academic staff”

Tartu faculty members also recognized the lack of time and added the issue of motivation. As time is valued, only those activities that are seen to be the most beneficial for the faculty (often discipline-based networks instead of institutional networks) are included in their schedules.
Faculty members’ comments included:

“Lack of motivation on behalf of individuals / lack of time.”

“Everybody is overloaded with various tasks, with little time for the networks, unless these are about their own (sub-) discipline.”

“unattractive network goals/themes.”

Some faculty members mentioned that there is **not enough awareness** about different opportunities that networks can offer to the department. One admitted that this might also be due to careless reading of emails:

“probably not enough information about the opportunities, regarding these networks (lack of information may also be related to careless attention to the emails).”

“Little inclusion of university departments into cooperation.”

“lack of information”

Problems in information dissemination that can become a hindering factor of network cooperation were mentioned by one of the Tartu administrators:

“lack of information between institutional units”

The issue of having to demonstrate **measurable results** of networking was seen as another institutional level hindering factor according to the following Tartu administrator’s opinion:

“lack of clarity about the value added of networks (in the situation where the support for mobility cannot be the main goal of the Utrecht Network, there are other mechanisms for that) and doubts that the benefits and results of participation could be clearly measured (that means concrete indicators) is not easy to confute.”

“Different situations of institutions bring out the question about worthiness of network participation.”

This opinion overlapped with the Utrecht Network representative’s view that not everything can be measured and counted, especially those intangible results of networking:
“Ignoring the added value, looking for countable indicators.”

One of the University of Tartu administrator noted that if there are other educational changes taking place at one’s home institution, this can be another factor of hindrance for networking:

“big reforms at home (on other topics).”

**Lack of financial resources** as an obstacle for networking was commonly mentioned by a couple of respondents in all groups,

Tartu administrator:

“There is always the question of sufficient resources, both human and financial.”

Faculty member:

“economical factors”

Coimbra representatives:

“Lack of willingness to invest in full participation in CG activities (travel, subsistence).”

“sometimes finding time /funding to all good activities is difficult.”

Utrecht representatives:

“lack of support (especially financial) from the university leadership.”

One of the Tartu faculty members indicated the importance of having a charismatic leader to represent the institution and that the absence of such a figure can be a disadvantage to the university:

“If one is a small, less well-known university, it is tough to have effective participation or gain anything out of the organization unless you have a strong person to take the lead.”

A Coimbra Group representative pointed out an interesting human resource issue that can be a hindrance to the whole network:
“International cooperation sometimes is non committant; it sometimes attracts people with too much time on their hands.”

A member of the Utrecht Network expressed a concern in terms of choice of network representatives within an institution. He felt that there is a difference between the representatives, their position within an institution and their influence over decision-making process at the leadership level:

“Different level of representation in the network. Institutional mandate of representatives is different. Different motives and expectations of member organisations or the representatives.”

Another Coimbra Group representative indicated that lack of visibility of the group can be another disadvantage. Similar to previously reported answers, prestige and reputation have been among the most frequently mentioned themes among all group members. The same respondent cautioned about giving too much attention to other regions compared to Europe:

“Alllack of awareness of the group can be a hindrance, also strong focus on other regions (USA and Far East for instance) can sometimes deviate attention away from Europe.”

At the national level, factors were not listed as often as at the institutional level. A respondent from the Utrecht Network provided an additional explanation for that:

“Since HE [higher education] is becoming much more a European issue I think there will be less obstacles at the national level. When it comes to mobility universities will, or should, be bound to European processes and procedures.”

One respondent from the University of Tartu administration group mentioned the debate about jeopardizing the use of the Estonian language for graduate courses since English is used at graduate level as a general rule in the member universities. The respondent does not agree with this threat himself:
“There are some opponents in terms of the language of teaching, as there is a principle among the CG [Coimbra Group] universities, that at the undergraduate level the language of teaching is national language, at the level of master’s and doctorate it would be English.”

Another member of this group raised the issue of universities existing in different national circumstances and therefore having a very different spectrum of issues that are relevant to each partner. These issues might not necessarily overlap with the interests of other network members:

“Very different situations of countries. There are universities in the CG that represent big and small countries and partially their problems are very different.”

A couple of Tartu faculty members expressed the opinion that there is little knowledge about the activities of networks on a national level:

*”I think there is very little or no awareness of these networks on national level but also most of the Estonian universities do not qualify as members of the Coimbra group.”

The isolation and separation of Estonian scientists from their Western colleagues during the Soviet occupation was also mentioned as a hindrance factor by a faculty member:

“Long time isolation in international researchers exchange during the soviet time.”

The Coimbra Group representatives did not offer any comments on national or regional level hindrance factors stating their answers as “not relevant”, “nothing specific” or “not sure”.

The Utrecht member noted that “different national regulations and legislation” might affect the networking at a national level and another member from the network commented that it might be a hindrance factor if the Bologna reforms have not been adopted in a member country:

“the degree to which the Bologna Process has been implemented.”
At the regional level, the comments offered by respondents were very few. One University of Tartu member offered a viewpoint that the transparency of becoming a member of the Task Forces within the Utrecht Network was an issue, especially for a newcomer:

“The opacity of the Utrecht Network’s task forces has been a slight hindrance to UT’s [University of Tartu] participation in them. Because they fund participation in the task forces, they also limit the extent of participation in them, which means that it is difficult for new members to join already existing structures, and hence it can be difficult to find the added value of the network. This will hopefully be better resolved in the coming year.”

A University of Tartu faculty member saw the regional level problem (at the sub-region of the Baltic countries) in availability of funding. The view was similar to the opinion offered by the Utrecht Network member,

Faculty member:

“Probably economical factors”

Utrecht representative:

“Lack of Financial support”

One respondent from the Utrecht Network commented that the opportunity to cooperate in a variety of different projects with partners outside of the network can become a hindrance factor to the network:

“Urge to participate in other projects and cooperation due to political and historical ties other than the network’s.”

Overall, the variety of opinions about the factors that might create obstacles for institutional networking was diverse. At the institutional level, all groups agreed that the main hindrance factors appear to be the workload of administrators and academics and therefore time for network activities is difficult to find. The finances for investing into network operations at the
institutional level were also seen as a factor by all groups. Lack of interest from the academics was mentioned by the Tartu administrators, whereas Tartu academics pointed towards little awareness about opportunities that networks can provide. The issue of parallel educational reforms at home was mentioned by Tartu administrators. The challenges of different levels of network representation in terms of position at home institution can be a factor, revealed the Utrecht Network representative.

At the national level the fact that various countries have different problems was mentioned by the Tartu administrator. The issue of what language should be the language of teaching in the national university was mentioned by a Tartu administrator. The Utrecht Network members expressed concern of universities being at different stages in the Bologna reforms implementation, thus creating a problem for student mobility.

At the regional level, the temptation of joining other projects outside of a network was mentioned by the Utrecht Network representative.

The next question concentrated on the possible risks that network membership might create for its participants and beyond.

5.6. Possible Risks of Participating in University Networks

Internationalization, including participating in university networks, might contribute towards unintended negative outcomes for the institution. The participants were invited to think about and express their opinions about any inherent risks that might result from active membership in such networks. Tartu respondents were asked to list any potential risks at an institutional and national level. The network representatives were asked to state any potential risks that institutions must consider prior to joining the networks at the institutional and national
level. The Tartu groups addressed larger institutional internationalization issues while network members suggested advice about what to consider when joining a network.

The dominant opinion among all groups was that there were no real risks involved in participating in the university networks. Typical answers consisted of such replies as “don’t see any”, “cannot say”, “currently we cannot see those”. Some of the answers of the Tartu faculty members had a positive approach and suggested benefiting from those developments instead of avoiding them:

“I doubt it, no harm is done. English language and international cooperation penetrates the university anyway, so you must try to benefit from it instead of blocking it.

“Don’t see much of risks. Various academic networks help in generating new ideas.”

The University of Tartu administrators were most concerned about the difficulty of justifying participation in network activities because the potential benefits are difficult to measure. The need for continuously assessing the outcomes was also mentioned.

*“The only risk I can see is that money and time is spent on something intangible – and critics may see this as wasteful. Indeed, it can be wasteful if not purposefully developed to bring results and benefits to the university. Image-building is an abstract concept, and these networks always run the risk of resting on their laurels. Currently the CG [the Coimbra Group] has taken a very proactive role in ensuring that the task forces function to bring added value to the group and the universities, and hence UT’s [the University of Tartu] participation is seen to be beneficial. The UN [the Utrecht Network] is more prone to criticism within UT [the University of Tartu] at the moment, as membership has increased mobility opportunities but is not seen to have brought many more tangible benefits beyond the effects on visibility and reputation.”

“If joining a network is not well thought out and selected activity, then there is a danger that staff of institution is busy with activities who provide little value added. The results of network participation should be evaluated after specific time period, support well-functioning networks and decide about quitting networks with zero value.”

Another theme mentioned by the Tartu representatives was the risk of networking for the network’s sake, so that the institutional goals and anticipated results are not focussed on,
Tartu administrator:

“Lots of attention to international travel and developing something that maybe is not currently necessary at home. Cooperation might turn into a thing of itself.”

Faculty member:

*“losing purpose = network for network only”

At the institutional level, an overall concern of the Tartu faculty members was the risk of creating favourable circumstances for potential faculty brain drain:

“Potential danger that cooperation partner can attract away some of the most capable faculty members.”

“brain drain”

“International university networking” as such, probably no. The only danger for a small university is simply having one of the network’s partners potentially lure away an Estonian colleague, since that person decides to go to a larger or more prestigious university.”

The network members expressed the concern of not finding the right partner for various activities within a network, so that the institutional expectations or goals would not be fulfilled:

Coimbra representative:

“Maybe not finding the right partner institutions in the network? Maybe not finding the right colleagues for activities of the different Task Forces?”

Utrecht representative:

“composition of the network, e.g. are all members relevant partners for an institution.”

“that the leadership/academic staff will not feel that the benefits of membership for the institution as a whole / themselves are sufficient to warrant membership.”

Another risk, according to the network members, that an institution must consider is deciding whether they will have enough manpower and time to dedicate to the network activities:

Coimbra representative:
“the membership gives full value only if the university has interest (and the manpower) to be active. At the moment there are some inactive CG member.”

Utrecht representative:

“a lot of additional work, if not willing to do that – don’t apply”

“ Commitment to the network and participation in activities is important”

The financial issues were mentioned by both of the network representatives as important matters to discuss before joining a network:

Coimbra representative:

“on institutional level cost-benefit (membership costs and other costs of travel subsistence and project activities / staff time involved).”

Utrecht representative:

“that the institution will not be able to commit sufficient financial means to support UN activities properly.”

The concern about not being able to fully commit to the network functions due to other reforms happening at home was expressed by one of the Utrecht members:

“- that a major imminent organizational restructuring at the institution would make it very difficult to participate fully in the UN activities.”

Another Utrecht member pointed to the risk of not spreading the information gained at network gatherings among other colleagues within the institution and therefore creating lost opportunities for the institution and network:

“Not disseminating information about the network and its activities in the institution.”
Those opinions related to potential risks provided at the institutional level, but at the national level nobody among these four groups listed any. One respondent from the Utrecht Network indicated that the national level does not play a very significant role in university networks compared to the regional level, as:

“He [higher education] is becoming very much a European issue.”

A Tartu faculty respondent mentioned that there is no national level risks to Estonia. However, problems can occur (at national level) for those who decide come to Estonia for studying purposes:

“I don’t see any risk for Estonia as such - although there may be risks for the international students/faculty members who come to Estonia (relatively xenophobic or indifferent environment); small library (perhaps balanced by much better internet connectivity than in most other countries).”

Overall, the risk of network activities creating negative consequence for potential risks to the institution was seen as marginal by the respondents of all groups. Primarily institutional level risks were mentioned. Tartu groups listed the difficulties of providing measurable evidence of network outcomes, faculty brain drain and the risk of networking for the sake of networking. Network representatives were most concerned about not finding desired collaboration partners, lack of time and lack of financial resources. The possibility of not spreading the information within the institution was also mentioned.

The following section concentrates on how Tartu respondents see information being disseminated among different groups within the institution.

5.7. Knowledge dissemination within the University of Tartu

The importance of knowledge dissemination was often mentioned by the members of all groups, indicating the necessity of including different university sub-groups into network
activities. It should be also noted that even if the networks are based on institutional cooperation, not all activities are designed for every institutional member and some opportunities are available only for specific groups (for example some exchange opportunities are offered for students only). This choice is made by the administrators. As commented by one of the Tartu administrators:

“However, if someone finds a good opportunity, then a student thinks of it as a concrete offer, not about the fact that it is one activity of the Utrecht Network. There is no reason to disseminate other activities within the Utrecht Network to students.”

The question of how the knowledge is disseminated to the university students, academics and administrators was presented to the University of Tartu administrators and faculty members as being the main focus of this study. Tartu administrators mentioned the possibility of using various web-based, paper-based and in-person channels for information distribution. However, the responses from the faculty members indicated that often the information does not reach them.

Most of the Tartu administrators indicated the possibility of accessing the information through the networks’ websites.

Tartu administrators:

“Knowledge is available through the website.”

“Both the CG and the UN have websites to provide information on what they do and how they operate.”

One University of Tartu administrator mentioned having the network’s logos on the university of Tartu website.

“All the CG member universities have an active link in the format of CG logo (www.coimbra-group.eu) at the opening page of the website.”
One administrator indicated more direct way of making the information available by having relevant announcements posted on the university **intra-net training site** so that interested academics or administrators can access the information when it is timely:

“Training opportunities that are offered to the University of Tartu staff members have been disseminated through the University of Tartu training website.”

An opportunity to use **listserves** for distributing relevant information about upcoming events was also referred by the University of Tartu administrators:

“In case there is an event of CG, the knowledge is disseminated through listserves to be able to participate (if there is a possibility or need for it).”

“Finally, UT sends out information about specific opportunities within the networks through internal mailing lists as various opportunities arise, such as the Arenburg Prize (CG), mobility opportunities (both UN and CG), hospitality schemes (CG), etc..”

The following paper-based tools such as **brochures, university newspaper, flyers** have been used or published to raise awareness within the information about options available through the networks:

*“The International Relations Office produced brochures with information on UT’s [the University of Tartu] participation in the CG during the time of the meeting [the Coimbra Group Annual meeting, held in Tartu], in order to raise awareness among students and staff. Both the CG and the UN have also produced brochures ... to provide information on what they do and how they operate.”

“Through the university newspaper.”

“Network summer-school opportunities are also disseminated through flyers sent to departments.”

The significance of in-person contacts was frequently mentioned in the format of **seminars, information days, presentations:**

“Through university ... seminars, direct contacts”
“The opportunities for student mobility through the networks (AEN and MAUI) as well as general opportunities are forwarded through different channels within the University of Tartu: Information days....”

“In addition, people who are directly involved are aware of the developments through seminars, presentations and other forms of dissemination.”

One administrator indicated that the Coimbra Group has started targeting this goal of faculty involvement in a more strategic way through putting together specific programs for academics only:

*“Currently the CG has developed some activities specifically designed to raise awareness of the network and its opportunities among academic staff, such as organising meetings of deans of faculties in order to further cooperation among network universities on the academic side. “

Apparently a few faculty members from the University of Tartu have participated in those workshops as indicated by the response from one of the faculty members.

A couple of administrators expressed their concern with respect to information dissemination as being a problematic issue, one that is not approached systematically:

“This is definitely a problem. We are trying hard, but considering the amount of various partnerships and networks, it is difficult.”

„I guess it’s random and not coordinated. “

The responses from the faculty members were mostly very short and indicated lack of awareness about the opportunities. The following quotations are examples:

“The dissemination if it has occurred, has not been noticeable and has not attracted attention.”

“Apparently I have been lazy myself and therefore know the goals of those networks only in general terms. As mentioned before, the most important network for the department has been the Erasmus network and Nordic cooperation through the Nordplus program. “

“By email most likely.”
One of the faculty members pointed out that the activities through networks are not noticed and that the information gained through bilateral communication reaches targets better:

“In reality, however, this network [the Coimbra Group] is not very strong, and information probably flows much more on a bilateral level between Estonian and foreign colleagues.”

The role of the **International Relations Office** at the University of Tartu in information dissemination was mentioned by faculty members a couple of times:

“The International Relations Office sends information materials.”

“I was personally approached by the Head of the International Relations Office.”

“Primarily through the International Relations Department and its network on contact persons in the individual faculties.”

Overall, the University of Tartu administrators mentioned a variety of channels that could be used to inform colleagues or students about the opportunities. The choice about which method to use and when the information should be disseminated has been left to the administrators.

Faculty members, however, are lacking awareness of the networks’ opportunities. In order to find out whether a more systematic approach would be welcomed by the faculty was presented as a separate question in the questionnaire sent to the faculty representatives.

5.8. The Need of Faculty Members to be involved in the Networks

This section of the study asked the faculty members to express their views on the necessity and their interest to participate in the activities of the institutional networks. As the overall awareness of the networks’ goals and opportunities offered through these networks was low, the opinions of the faculty members were also quite limited. However, a positive attitude towards network participation was observed in their answers.
“As I haven’t heard from either of the networks, it is difficult to say.”

“.. I cannot say. It has been more of the administration and the university leadership activity. Probably, the opportunities should be used more.”

“I imagine that if such groups or networks already exist, the university participation in them is needed in order to be better aware of the European higher education developments.”

Some faculty members noted that according to their opinion, the main purpose of these networks served mainly the university management where various administration issues are discussed. There is not really a need for the faculty members to be involved. The main research contacts are obtained through the participation in the events of the disciplinary networks.

*“Again, I may have a false impression of the CG [the Coimbra Group], but I would only see the need for academics to get involved if they really wanted to learn more about European-level university management and strategic development. I don’t see the CG as a network to find research contacts within one’s own discipline. This kind of thing happens at specific, disciplinary venues like annual meetings or workshops. “

*“In principle involvement in professional networks is very useful and much needed and all people in our faculty are involved in at least one disciplinary society or network, many (including myself) in more than one. However, as far as I know these have no direct connection either with the Coimbra or the Utrecht Network.”

“As noted before, the content based cooperation takes place through the research based joint activities.”

One of the faculty members mentioned that if faculty are to be involved, an improvement of academic contacts is expected:

“The positive impact of network participation should appear primarily through the improvement of academic contacts”
The overall attitude of faculty members towards network participation is welcoming, confusion is caused by the lack of awareness about the network goals and lack of awareness towards the various opportunities available to the departments.

The following section provides the opinions of the Tartu faculty members on what way participation in the networks could enhance their everyday work in the university.

5.9. Networks’ Possibilities to Enhance the Work of Academics

The University of Tartu faculty members were invited to comment on specific ways in which on how on their view networks could enhance the work of academics. The answers provided some examples of what is expected by academics in order to be interested in participation of the work of institutional networks. The faculty members were primarily interested in meeting people from other universities for possible research cooperation:

“The network can offer new potential cooperation partners.”

“E.g. facilitate new contacts, co-operation and learning from others.”

Quite a few answers were similar to the comments offered to the previous question about the need to be involved. The lack of awareness about the opportunities was illustrated by the following answers:

“As I haven’t heard from either of the networks, it is difficult to say.”

“Cannot think of any.”

“Probably the enhancement would not be that wide as the content based cooperation takes place through the international research projects.”

*“Since my impression has been that the CG is more a network for top university managers, I don’t see it has having much of a role.”
The possible ways to support academics in taking more active part in the network activities was addressed by a separate question presented to all four study groups. Their responses are provided in the following section.

5.10. Institutional Support for the Involvement of Academics

Institutional support is crucial in order to involve academics in institutional cooperation through networks. This section of the study invited participants to comment on various supporting tools which in their opinion institutions can and should offer in order to motivate faculty members to find that extra time and energy to contribute towards network activities.

University of Tartu administrators reported that they were not familiar with how their university has helped or motivated faculty members to participate. One pointed out that this is not really her expertise, others indicated that faculty involvement is not always necessary, because the cooperation is more on the administrative level and as far as the Utrecht Network activities are concerned, the cooperation is mainly about student exchanges:

"Cannot say, as this issue is not my topic and I have not researched this myself."

"Haven’t noticed anything."

“The goal for the Utrecht Network is not so much about cooperation between faculty members. The cooperation between faculty should take place through some supported activities such as summer schools, joint programs. It is different for other networks."

„Faculty members are part of the Task Forces, but still the cooperation tends to be more at the level and between the top leaders/non-academic staff and in the area student exchanges.”
A couple of administrators recognized the need to offer support for academics through **central services**, so that the faculty members would be well-informed about various opportunities when they appear:

„The main support is offered through the central services.”

“The answer in both cases is primarily through dissemination of information. UT administers student exchange schemes centrally, particularly with regard to the UN [the Utrecht Network].”

The availability of centrally offered **financial support** for faculty members was also mentioned by a few Tartu administrators:

“In addition, the support offered through the Estonian state and the EU funds to enhance international exchange.”

“Some funds have been made available for bringing in scholars through the networks ... In some cases, we have centrally funded participation of academics in relevant network seminars, as in the case of a seminar on Research evaluation and metrics in the Humanities, where participation fees of two academics representing the humanities in Tartu were paid for centrally.”

One administrator commented on a couple of general factors that are not directly connected to the network operations but involve general support to academics such as offering **intellectual property protection** and **sabbaticals**:

“University faculty members have a free semester in every fifth year, which has been used more frequently.... The protection of intellectual property.”

Most Tartu faculty member respondents chose **not to answer** that question. Some commented on not remembering any examples of institutional support:

*“I don’t know really (perhaps there is something even at our home-page – but I suppose that the idea of this questionnaire is not exactly to make me look for information (although I might even do it later).”

“Cannot remember any examples at the moment, but maybe I don’t know any.”
“My experience has been that it doesn’t, except when there was a meeting of the CG and faculties were asked to prepare presentations for the visitors. But no specific cooperation options or other contacts were established.”

One faculty member mentioned financial help in order to attend the Coimbra Group workshop:

“International Relations Office funded partially my travel expenses to the workshop.”

Another indicated the need to offer administrative support and to distribute timely information:

“In general – effective / targeted dissemination of the information; administrative support.”

Network representatives provided examples of various ways on how to support and motivate faculty members to be more involved in the networks’ activities. Smooth and timely information dissemination was mentioned most frequently:

Coimbra representatives:

“Informing about network possibilities and realisations.”

“Ensuring adequate dissemination of all CG activities throughout the institution, to raise the general awareness of the network.”

Utrecht representatives:

“Publicizing the network within the university, so that the maximum number of academics are aware of the opportunities offered.”

“Dissemination of information on network activities”

Covering the various costs for the faculty members when involved in network activities was seen as a useful tool.

Coimbra representatives:

“Paying the costs related to participating in CG [the Coimbra Group] activities.”

“Providing financial support.”
“We have given priority to all activities which include one or several CG universities, travel funding/scholarships for staff and students.”

Utrecht representatives:

“Financial support for participation in network activities and for development of joint activities.”

“by contributing to travel and other costs for the activities of the various task forces and work groups.”

“Financial support.”

A couple of network representatives mentioned the significance of recognizing institutionally the international work of faculty members through their career development:

Coimbra representative:

“Including network activities as part of the professional assessment procedures for career development.”

Utrecht representative:

“Recognition of their international activities.”

Various help offered through the institutional central support services was mentioned by both of the network representatives.

Coimbra representative:

“Help them with EU applications etc.”

Utrecht representatives:

“by ensuring that within the international office there is a specific contact person for the network, with a certain part of her/his workload devoted to administrative work linked to network activities.”

“Logistics, ... support in service.”
The Coimbra Group representatives saw that the institutions should have a role in promoting and fostering academic cooperation through networks:

“Fostering collaboration with colleagues.”

“Facilitate participation in meetings etc.”

“Actively promoting participation in CG activities and task forces.”

One Coimbra Group representative mentioned using the knowledge of faculty members in designing university strategies and through such activities, raise awareness and foster more active involvement of academics in various network activities too:

“Use their knowledge in institutional policy formulation.”

In conclusion, the administrators from the two networks listed numerous ways to get academics more involved with network activities. The University of Tartu administrators commented less on the topic. Some indicated that they were not aware of what the institution can provide to their faculty members. The central funding opportunities and support through administrative services were mentioned most frequently. Tartu faculty members did not offer any substantial comments on how the institution has supported their involvement.

The following section focuses on network representatives’ views on institutional characteristics that would help the university to become an active member of a network.

5.11. The Institutional Characteristics that Enhance the Participation in Networks

The network representatives were asked to comment on institutional characteristics that they see as beneficial to have. These characteristics would also serve as prerequisites of an institution which is considering membership.
The institution’s **overall reputation and commitment towards innovation** was seen as an important characteristic by the Coimbra Group respondents:

“Being a traditional university with a strong vision on innovation and future challenges.”

“Clear ambitions to be a top level world university, or at least a visible player on the European scene.”

Both network respondents agreed that **commitment towards internationalization** and specifically network activities are crucial.

Coimbra respondents:

“Willing and open towards internationalisation (especially in education).”

“Likeminded institutions, willingness in partner institutions to participate in activities.”

Utrecht respondents:

“strong commitment to internationalization of the institution as a whole.”

“Priority to typical network activities.”

The importance of having **dedicated staff** who have the capacity, interest, and leadership support to coordinate network’s activities, was listed as an important characteristic by both groups:

Coimbra representative:

“membership is valued → Staff and students get interested in projects/exchange programmes run by CG universities/the network.”

Utrecht representatives:

“strong backing of the leadership (especially the respective Vice-Rector) for membership in the network and international activities generally”

“continuity of personnel in the international office”
“sufficient numbers of people in the international office to benefit from membership (with small international offices, there are not enough people to be active in the various task forces and initiatives).”

Both networks’ members mentioned the same characteristics that were seen as important to have as an institution. The overall essence of the university (being traditional but focused on innovation, ambitions of becoming one of the best in the world) was described, as well as the significance of human resources. Without committed staff members operating as a network contacts, the work within a network would be impossible.

The following section reports comments provided by the networks’ representatives towards their opinion on the University of Tartu as a partner.

5.12. Networks Representatives Comments to the University of Tartu

The University of Tartu is one of the most recent network members in both networks. Membership time has been limited especially in terms of the Utrecht Network and therefore it is likely that not every network respondent who participated in the study had an experience with participants from the University of Tartu. The majority of the comments were provided by the Coimbra Group administrators.

The most comprehensive and enthusiastic comment, mentioning a specific cooperation project, was provided by a member of the Coimbra Group ELearning Task Force:

“Estonia is one of the newcomers in the EC, with which it is very pleasant working together. In particular in the framework of the TF eLearning we already collaborated with the University of Tartu in e.g. the VM-BASE project (one project meeting was organised by them). Tastes for more!”

Other comments were more general in style, all mentioning the positive experience of cooperating with the University of Tartu representatives:
“Nothing in particular – they have been very active in several task forces since joining the Coimbra Group.”

“I hope to continue the good cooperation we have.”

“Long-term and active cooperation at all levels and in most fields.”

The comment provided by the Utrecht network representative was also most positive:

“brilliant partner, very active.”

The last section of this chapter describes the University of Tartu administrator’s views on the advantages of the multilateral cooperation (such as the institutional networks) compared to bilateral forms of cooperation.

5.13. The Advantages of Multilateral Network Cooperation

The University of Tartu administrators were asked to provide their views on how multilateral forms of cooperation differ from bilateral university cooperation and what are the specific advantages. Most agreed that working together with a number of partners has the advantage of generating a broad range of ideas and opportunities:

"Plenty of opportunities, ideas and opinions.”

“Multilateral network cooperation provides better opportunities for achieving outcomes by finding partners with similar interests and needs.”

“The broadness of the view, plenty of contacts is a plus.”

“Cooperation between the networks creates broad base for cooperation, which cannot be offered through bilateral form of cooperation.”

An opinion that the multilateral form of cooperation has its positive and negative sides was also expressed. Both sides were described as illustrated by the following quotation:
“It has its pluses and minuses. Fading attention is a minus. Cooperation with the strategic partners can be more effective. The broadness of the view, plenty of contacts is a plus.”

One administrator pointed towards the advantage of operating through **specific Task Forces** that are aimed to fulfill specific goals. This is missing in bilateral forms of cooperation:

“The activities of the Task Force are the most important. Those are often not present at other networks. Bilateral agreements are usually too broad or on contrary too narrow (in very specific areas).”

Another administrator indicated that the Task Forces offer an opportunity to **spread responsibilities** among partners:

“Multilateral network cooperation provides spread responsibility for specific tasks among various partners involved.”

The view that EU funded projects often require inclusion of several institutional cooperation partners was pointed out. Networks offer an ideal tool to put together a group of universities that have the same interest in such projects:

“Many European projects require various partners, sometimes with geographical diversity, and these networks are ideal places to look for partners and to use as a base for building longer-lasting and broader partnership activities.”

The view that multilateral cooperation creates a possibility to lay a foundation to a bilateral cooperation was expressed together with the opinion that it also fosters cross-border activities:

“It supports a bilateral form of cooperation and enhances global joint activities.”

Initiating joint activities with many partners and having larger financial opportunities was stressed in the following opinion:
“An opportunity to create joint activities, having broader financial opportunities (by contributing membership fees) allows the financing of various projects.”

The issue of maintaining efficiency and quality in cooperation with many universities was seen as an advantage by one of the administrators.

“Quality is a clear advantage – one institution cannot create ties with so many different partners and it wouldn’t be as effective.”

The same administrator underlined the importance of knowledge and expertise within the network. According to her opinion, bilateral cooperation does not offer such an experience:

“The knowledge within the network, experiences and expertise is a very good source to enhance an institution. Having only bilateral cooperation might not offer such an experience.”

There were several arguments raised by the University of Tartu administrators with respect to the advantage of the multilateral form of cooperation: broad range of ideas, impressive pool of experience and expertise at once, targeting specific goals by operating through Task Forces, opportunity to get funding through joint projects, maintaining quality with cooperating simultaneously with several partners.

This chapter reported the specific responses that were received by the e-mail questionnaires of the four study groups. The following section provides an overview of the main themes that were detected in the reporting of the findings.

**Identification of Cross-cutting Themes**

The responses received from the informants resulted in rich data about institutional networks. In order to provide a structured framework for the analysis in Chapter 6, cross-cutting
themes have been created. These ten themes represent the issues that were mentioned most frequently and have the greatest importance to the mutually beneficial features of European university networks, as suggested by the initial research question, and indentified in the literature. These themes are not listed in order of importance as these themes may have different level of importance according to the group within the university or networks.

The Drive for Knowledge Production and Dissemination

The drive for knowledge production characterizes the participating member universities, as this theme was the most frequently mentioned by all respondents. This aspect of networking was mentioned as a motive, goal, received benefit, a factor that might enhance faculty involvement and was seen as an advantage of multilateral forms of cooperation. The failure to produce knowledge was cited as a risk to ongoing network cooperation. Two different subgroups of knowledge production can be specified from the answers:

1) Knowledge production gained through academic contacts and research cooperation;
2) Knowledge production gained through administrative expertise and exchange of experiences.

Institutional visibility and reputation

Significant importance was placed on visibility and reputation as a theme by all respondent groups. It was referenced as a motive, goal, received benefit and an institutional enhancing factor of networks. The failure to enhance reputation was seen as a factor that hinders participation in the networks. The University of Tartu administrators and faculty members were very specific about their needs for institutional visibility. They described historical (institutional background), political (political safety), national (Estonian internal competition in the field of higher education
between institutions) and international level reasons (rankings) to gain higher institutional profile through networks.

**Mobility opportunities**

Providing mobility opportunities to its members is one of the founding goals of both networks. Even as the mobility focus is shifting from student exchanges to the mobility of faculty and staff, mobility as a benefit remains valuable to the institutions as was expressed by the participants of this study. Mobility opportunities were mentioned under institutional motives, goals, received benefits, successful initiatives and was presented as a regional level enhancing factor.

**Influence on European higher education policy issues**

The rapid changes in higher education in Europe have created an urgent need to be knowledgeable about recent developments and trends in the field among the universities. This issue was often mentioned by the respondents as an important reason for participating in the networks. This was mentioned as a motive, goal and successful activity (e.g. position papers of the Coimbra Group) by all respondents groups.

**Dedication and innovative expertise as expected contributions**

The resources most valuable to the networks as described by the informants, were not financial, at least not directly. Instead, respondents emphasized the commitment and dedication of staff when coordinating network activities. This was given as an answer to questions about institutional resources, factors that help or hinder network activities, and was cited as a valuable institutional characteristic. As administrators form a buffer between the network and the institution, the dedication of a coordinator affects directly how often and what kind of information about network activities will be distributed to various groups within the university.
Innovative expertise (administrative and academic) was seen as significant tool that institutions can contribute for network advancement. This was repeatedly mentioned throughout the answers.

Faculty involvement

The short and non-specific answers provided by the University of Tartu faculty members suggested a lack of general awareness of the faculty about the networks. Only two had been personally involved in activities organized by the Coimbra Group. Others recognized their lack of awareness and expressed an interest towards gaining new research contacts or forms of cooperation through network activities. The need for faculty involvement was repeatedly stressed by the network members. Driving for increased knowledge production through academic contacts makes faculty involvement essential.

Commitment towards internationalization

Having common goals of internationalization and a mutual understanding of the necessity of various internationalization activities was seen as a factor that enhances participation in institutional networks. Having this strategic developmental approach supported by the institutional and national level legislative agreements and other policy documents significantly helps to raise general awareness about why these institutional networks are important to the university.

Support from the university leadership

Network participation cannot happen without institutional support. This was commonly mentioned as a factor that enhances institutional participation in networks and as a tool for increased faculty involvement. The administrative time dedicated to coordination of those activities can be offered only if supported and valued by the university leadership. Various
institutional means to recognize involvement of academics in network activities including financial support of various kinds, can happen only if leadership has provided the tools to motivate faculty members to be involved in such cooperation.

Availability of financial resources

Lack of financial resources can be a serious hindrance to network participation. The University of Tartu administrators as well as the network representatives enumerated the significant financial contributions involved. The annual membership fees and participation of institutional representatives in various conferences and seminars can be a significant expense to an institution. Without institutional financial contribution, participation in networks is not possible. Additional financial resources were seen necessary when aiming for larger faculty involvement.

Benefits are often difficult to measure

It was commonly stressed that the benefits of networks are not easily measured. The outcomes of networking can be seen indirectly and therefore expenses for the activities can be at times difficult to justify to the people not having much awareness about those issues. This threat was commented as a risk of networking and as a factor that can hinder the activities of networks.

These ten cross-cutting themes, compiled from the responses of the study participants, form the main aspects for developing mutually beneficial participation in European university networks. The author provides thoughts and reflections on each theme in Chapter 6. The analysis of these ten domains of network participation is related to the earlier research in the field. In addition, the author highlights the unique knowledge derived from this particular research.
Chapter 6: Analysis of the Emergent Cross-Cutting Themes of the Study

The following chapter reviews the cross-cutting themes of institutional networking that were common for the four respondent groups: the University of Tartu administrators, the University of Tartu faculty members, the Coimbra Group representatives and the Utrecht Network representatives. The data collected was rich. The author has concentrated the analysis only on those themes that were frequently mentioned by all groups and contributed to an understanding of the initial research question, – How does the University of Tartu develop mutually beneficial participation in European university networks.

Drive for knowledge production and dissemination

The literature review suggested that institutional networks offer a means to achieve academic, scientific, economic, technological or cultural objectives (de Wit 2002, Knight 2004). This study reveals that networks seem to provide valuable means for enhancing knowledge production and innovation through administrator- and faculty-based expertise. This overall theme was stated as a motive, a goal and a received benefit of institutional networks. The diversity of knowledge and expertise was also cited as a significant resource that has been and should be contributed to by all network members. The University of Tartu administrators agreed that multilateral cooperation has the advantage of generating a broad range of ideas and opportunities to benefit participating universities. In addition, Tartu administrators saw networking as an opportunity to benchmark its activities and become knowledgeable about issues important to other European universities. An opportunity to find “different models for innovation and change” and “pool ideas” was important for the Utrecht Network respondents. “Expertise”
and “knowledge and skills” that would initiate joint activities or publications were mentioned by the Coimbra Group representatives.

Knowledge production through networks can be best done by connecting with international partners who have relatively the same cultural background and similar views on higher education development, but at the same time have the capacity for innovation and unique perspectives to contribute to the network. Those results confirm the argument stated by Beerkens and der Wende (2007) who suggested that higher education consortia are formed on the basis of compatibility and complementarity of all members (Beerkens and der Wende 2007). The partnership criteria and the selection process of new members were frequently mentioned in the responses. The overall aim to connect with new cooperation partners who are reliable and trustworthy (secured by the reputation and prestige factor of belonging to those networks) was repeatedly mentioned by the members of each group as a motive and a goal. A few specific institutional characteristics were listed which included trust, tradition and a focus on innovation. Finding trustworthy partners was commonly stated as both a motive and a goal by the network respondents. The importance of the trust factor in the enhancement of inter-organizational cooperative arrangements was stated in strategic-management theory (Geringer 1991, Sprenger 2001) and was confirmed by these results. Both of the networks’ representatives expressed the concern of not finding the right partner for their interests. They viewed it as a possible risk factor. The University of Tartu administrators stressed gaining access to those institutions that Tartu might not access otherwise. For the University of Tartu, living for decades in a closed society has been a definite obstacle for establishing contacts with the premier European institutions. Belonging to a respected network can provide a bridge to those universities.
Institutional visibility and reputation

Another dominant motive for network participation for the University of Tartu, as well as other members of the networks, is gaining international reputation and visibility. This issue appears to play a more important role than was initially expected by the researcher. The theme of visibility and prestige was repeatedly mentioned as a motive, goal and benefit by members of all four study groups. This finding supports Knight’s recent (2008) statement where she describes a study which confirms the same – the European higher education institutions see creating international profile and reputation as their number one priority. The phenomenon of universities being most interested in global visibility was stated also by Clark (2004) and Stromquist (2007).

The University of Tartu informants provided various explanations for why visibility is an institutional issue in need of special attention. The historical context related to the University of Tartu having a heritage of being a significant European university until fifty years of Soviet occupation significantly lessened the European profile of the university. In the era of renewed independence, the University feels that it is desirable to identify itself again with Europe and to be accepted among the established European research institutions as an equal partner. The turbulent times in the recent history of Estonia have also influenced opinions about the importance of belonging to the European networks.

National issues appear to play an important role in inter-organizational network cooperation for Estonia. The competition at the national level among universities has been a driving force for the University of Tartu to join these networks. It is interesting to follow the timeline for the new network memberships in the University of Tartu in parallel with the political developments related to the creation of the new Tallinn University. As the debates about
establishing a new research-based Tallinn University became more intense in 2000 and 2001, the University of Tartu joined the Coimbra Group (in 2003) and a few years later the Utrecht Network (in 2006). The competitive situation in Estonia seems to be a major stimulus for the University of Tartu to seek more international visibility and international allies through those memberships. The following quotation highlights this perception:

“Joining the Coimbra Group was an opportunity for the university to differentiate itself from other universities (in Estonia).”

Clearly, two institutions from the same country would not have had the chance to belong to the same circle of Europe’s most prominent research institutions. The rivalry is illustrated by the following response from a Tartu respondent:

“It is important to note that not everybody is accepted to the Coimbra Group unlike EUA [European University Association] where every institution is accepted. Cooperation with the best makes one stronger, too”.

The Coimbra Group annual conference was held in Tartu in 2006. It was seen as a successful event by most of the Tartu respondents. It gave a unique opportunity for the University of Tartu to raise its European visibility and create high profile among other network members:

“General Assembly in Tartu (2006). The CG Universities were truly surprised at the calibre of our university.”

Another reason stated for striving for visibility was the Tartu institutional position in various international rankings. Rankings are gaining popularity among governments and funding authorities who would like to be able to differentiate institutions. Currently, the University of Tartu has not been listed in any of the academic rankings of world universities.
This has created a lively public debate among educators and university Rectors in the local Estonian newspapers. The debaters suggest that this is a result of the lack of visibility of the institution and not the quality of research. There are concerns regarding the methodology of the rankings. For example, The Times Higher Education ranking takes into account the peer review score given to an institution (40% of the total weight) by the top researchers in various universities around the world. Estonian scholars, given the size of the community, have a very slim chance of being known in every scholarly community and consequently of being ranked among the world’s best. Belonging to the networks is seen as one way to raise visibility and reputation among already existing partners and an opportunity to gain new contacts through joint projects. Working closely with the top scholars in their respective disciplines would help to raise awareness of the quality of research at the University of Tartu.

It is interesting to note, that in the e-mail conversation with one of the University of Tartu senior administrators, the author asked about the possibility of the university quitting any memberships in the networks that are not seen as beneficial to the institution (because of the current turbulent economic times in Estonia). The Tartu administrator replied that quitting a network membership would damage institutional international reputation severely and would project a negative image of the institution internationally. The administrator stated that risk would not be taken.

The literature suggests that each institution has different motives for choosing to participate in formal institutional networks, considering its own environment. This study presents a unique example of an institution for which creating international reputation is crucial, especially due to the political circumstances of the country. The Soviet occupation had severely
lessened the visibility of the University of Tartu internationally. At the same time, national tensions in the field of higher education have created a situation where the university has to look for international cooperation partners. Networks present an opportunity for cooperating with a large pool of trustworthy European partners gaining access to the assets each brings to the network.

Interest towards mobility opportunities

Both of the networks have been offering various mobility opportunities for their member institutions. Interestingly, the Coimbra Group representatives did not stress the opportunity for additional student exchange opportunities in their responses, as was their initial aim when the Group was established. Apparently, the importance to the Coimbra Group of student mobility opportunities has gradually lessened. Over time, their focus has changed to other forms of joint activities such as projects by the Task Forces for applying for EU funding, influencing policy and focusing more on graduate and research cooperation with different regions around the world (Latin America, Africa etc). The Utrecht Network still has student mobility as one of its primary goals. Through established links with the US institutional network MAUI and Australian university network AEN, the Utrecht Network’s opportunities for student exchanges cover three continents.

These inter-continental cooperation initiatives have remained of great interest for the network members. Unfortunately, the University of Tartu administrators did not mention any specific institutional benefits received from those links. A single opportunity to host a foreign researcher was remembered by Tartu administrators but nobody could provide any further details on that program. It seems that currently the graduate and research mobility opportunities offered
by the networks are an unused opportunity for the University of Tartu. The student mobility
opportunities for undergraduate students offered by both of the networks were mentioned to be
unpopular among the students as there exist several other exchange opportunities that are
financially more attractive.

Apparently the networks are moving away from student mobility toward more content-
based forms of cooperation, especially through focused Task Force activities. The structure of
the Task Forces presents an important mechanism for knowledge production within the Coimbra
Group. (In the Utrecht Network the Task Forces do not have the same fixed nature – they are
more flexible, evolve out of Interest Groups based on the members’ needs and can be closed
whenever its goal has been accomplished). The Coimbra Group Task Force activities such as
seminars, workshops and joint publications have brought the network’s members closer to
experts, organizations and other networks. For example, the University of Tartu faculty members
did participate in the seminar organized by the Coimbra Group Culture, Arts and Humanities
Task Force. Therefore it is essential to have an institutional representative on the Task Forces.
The importance of having representatives on the Coimbra Group Task Forces was indicated
repeatedly throughout the questionnaire by the University of Tartu administrators, but only one
administrator mentioned actual contributions and benefits received from participation in the
Coimbra Task Force. Several projects organized by the Coimbra Group Task Forces were listed
by the University of Tartu administrators as successful activities (VM-Base project, Hospitality
Scheme, publications) but any indications why those were seen as successful were not offered.
These answers indicate that the outcomes of the Task Forces for the University of Tartu are
serendipitous and accidental and that there could be a more targeted approach implemented to be
able to fulfill institutional goals through initiating and/or participating in the activities of the Task Forces.

Influence on European higher education policy issues

Networks present an opportunity to participate more actively in European higher education policy issues and have become full partners in policy creation, as noted by der Wende (2007) and Beerkens (2008). A single university cannot influence supra-regional policy design as much as a group of European research-based top higher education universities. This was confirmed by the results of the current study. The Coimbra Group has been especially active in authoring policy papers, statements and reflections on various policy issues that have been sent to the European Commission. This activity was mentioned by the Coimbra Group representatives as a good motive for joining a network. The Utrecht Network representatives stressed the opportunity to follow the latest trends and developments in the European higher education area, while the Coimbra Group members had a more hands-on attitude. As noted by Pennings (1981), strategic networking takes place to reduce environmental uncertainty. And as indicated in the responses by the Utrecht Network, the rapid changes and development in the field of European higher education have created a need to cooperate as networks in order to stay informed about those changes and take timely action if needed. The University of Tartu faculty members were more likely to comment on participating in European higher education policy discussions than the Tartu administrator group members, because the Rector usually represents the university in such policy matters. The administrators do not have the same mandate.
Dedication and innovative expertise as expected contributions

According to strategic management theory, organizations cooperate to combine competencies and achieve competitive advantage (Faulkner 2003). The resource-based perspective argues that inter-organizational arrangements emerge when there is a need to gain access to valuable resources. Beerkens and der Wende (2007) state that organizations (universities) search for partners who can bring some sort of fit or synergy between their resources. As supported by this study, the main strategic resource that institutional networks are searching for is the human resource, through which the desired generation of new ideas and knowledge production can occur. Different models for innovations and experiences were mentioned to be most valuable by network representatives. Members of the Tartu faculty commented that the University of Tartu, with its unique geographical and historical background, can contribute valuable ideas about adaptation in turbulent times. The institution has the experience of bordering a powerful country and of conducting academic activities in a language spoken by very few. These experiences can be valuable to share with other network members. Tartu administration representatives noted that their experience in participating in various projects has been already useful in the networks’ activities as well. It seems that there is a match between what network representatives are seeking in their members and what the University of Tartu can offer to the network if the ideas are presented thoughtfully.

The issue of dedication and lack of time was mentioned as the most threatening risk to coordinating the network’s activities. The Coimbra Group and the Utrecht Network members were also concerned about having too many other forms of cooperation which would compete with the time and effort of leaders and faculty. As the people administering the institutional
international partnerships are often overloaded with work, finding enough time and energy for networks can be an issue. The University of Tartu administrators as well as other network representatives referred to this issue. It is important for the university leadership to set clear priorities for institutional development. If internationalization is desired, then administrative time and effort spent on a network’s activities should be recognized. Currently, participation in networks seems important for the leadership of the institution but there is a lack of cohesive planning for engaging in activities and with expectations of clearly defined results from those activities.

Faculty involvement

The goal of knowledge production by innovative expertise cannot be accomplished by contributing only administrative skills. Faculty involvement is essential as stated also by Beerkens (2004). Surprisingly, the Tartu networks’ representatives did not mention this as a factor that would help network operations. (Lack of interest from the academics was mentioned as a hindrance factor by the Utrecht Network representative alone.) The responses revealed that the institutional networks operate primarily at the level of university administrators. The administrators are in charge of how much involvement from the faculty is taking place. The answers to the study questions provided by the three administrators’ groups were detailed, illustrated often by concrete examples, whereas the responses by the University of Tartu faculty members were generally short, generic and acknowledged their lack of individual awareness about the networks. As the faculty are not involved in the network’s activities, their knowledge in answering those questions was limited, based mostly on what they have heard, instead of any personal experiences. There were a few cases where faculty involvement has been encouraged
within the University of Tartu (a specific Coimbra Group seminar for the faculty members and allocation of some funds to cover the expenses of faculty members’ participation in such seminars), but overall no systematic approach has been implemented at the University of Tartu. This suggests that the main goal of institutional networks for the University of Tartu is not in fostering academic contacts or research cooperation. The University of Tartu faculty members reported that they were not familiar with whether their university has motivated faculty members to be involved in network activities. In the question about information dissemination within the university, no direct faculty-targeted information distribution strategies were mentioned. Faculty reported recalling only general mailing lists or websites. According to the Utrecht Network representatives, the distribution of knowledge gained at network conferences or workshops is essential and failure to distribute could create lost opportunities for an institution. The Coimbra Group administrators underlined the importance of the institutional role in fostering academic contacts through facilitating faculty participation in Coimbra Group activities. The responses of the Tartu faculty members revealed that they are hoping to initiate or strengthen the individual-based contacts for academic collaboration with support from the university for network activities. The need to “strengthen scientific collaboration”, “promote research-based training”, “empowering young academics” and “widen infrastructural basis” were mentioned by several respondents in these groups. This indicates that there is an interest among faculty members to utilize a wider circle of research partners and to train scholars in those top research institutions, facilitated by University of Tartu membership in the networks. Unfortunately, no specific examples of establishing such successful contacts were provided by Tartu faculty members.
Support from the university leadership

The answers suggested that among the institutional, national and regional level factors, the specific institutional level matters are the most significant in enhancing or hindering the networks’ activities. The presence or lack of institutional level leadership support which consequently influences how much time, human resources and money could be devoted to various network’s activities was most commonly mentioned. Therefore it is of utmost importance to set clearly articulated institutional goals for international cooperation activities.

It is only with the help of dedicated leadership and support from the top management that could bring additional benefits such as visibility and attention to the university. In the case of University of Tartu, the initiative from the leadership drove the University to host the Coimbra Group General Assembly in Tartu. These types of activities bring the existence of networks to the attention of the whole university, including faculty members and students which consequently can have a long-term effect on the University’s institutional goals. Such support projects a clear message for university staff as well as network members how important the membership is for the institution.

The Coimbra Group and the Utrecht Network members mentioned that having too many network members can result in very different interests among the members. This can make finding the appropriate partners more difficult. This critical issue of network size and having too diverse a group can lead to different expectations, as was mentioned by Beerkens (2003) and deWit (2004). Therefore the institution should consider seriously what partnerships to join, so that concentrated efforts are made on the most beneficial cooperation agreements.
Availability of finances and economics as a rationale

Network activities can create quite a significant expenditure for the institution, especially when there are several networks involved. The travel costs to participate in various conferences and seminars, annual membership fees, institutional contribution to projects are all investments that must be made. As the literature suggests, the operating funds are usually easily allocated as institutional networks are strategically important and leadership driven. However, this study implies that it is important to have an understanding of those annual investments and those are agreed upon before applying for a membership in the networks. In order to provide a common awareness and better general understanding of why those investments are important, it is necessary to provide leadership level information dissemination and a clear strategic development plan to the departments which helps to guarantee the faculty support in the process and allows the institution to assess its long term developmental goals and hoped for benefits.

Several authors have expressed the opinion that economic rationales are becoming more dominant for the universities in this world of globalization (Knight 2004, Denman 2002, Altbach 2002). The results of this study, however, indicate that for the University of Tartu, participation in institutional networks is not predominantly related to receiving direct monetary profit. However, advanced knowledge production and striving for wider visibility allows the universities to maintain control over various market factors which consequently affects its finances too. Therefore, it would be justified to claim that the institutional networks can be seen as a tool for enhancing the institutional economic position.

This drive for wider international reputation and visibility can provide opportunities for accomplishing institutional financial objectives. Examples could include increased student
mobility (attracting international graduate students) and participation in joint research projects (thus gaining funding from European sources). In addition, more reputable universities are likely to attract higher quality teachers and provide excellent support services. They also strive for internationally recognized quality standards. In the answers of the respondents, the economic motives (either as a motive, goal or benefit) were not directly articulated. Only one of the University of Tartu faculty members mentioned accessing European level funding as a possible motive for joining the networks, while one Tartu administrator suggested that accessing additional funding can be a factor to enhance institutional networking. Financial resources (such as membership fees and travel expenses of participants) were mentioned as examples of contributed resources by the University of Tartu administrators. The Coimbra Group representatives mentioned financial contributions as a factor that helps institutional networks to operate. The lack of finances was viewed as a hindrance to networks by all group members.

Benefits are often difficult to measure

The money spent on annual network membership fees and expenses for various conferences may be quite significant, especially for a relatively small institution from a country which is trying to build up its economy while at same time being a member of several institutional networks. The benefits received from the memberships should be worth the investment. As indicated in the answers of the University of Tartu administrators, currently the real benefits are difficult to measure. The reported benefits such as the opportunity to compare activities on a European scale, to raise institutional self esteem, to gain wider international visibility, increased mobility opportunities (currently an opportunity with no actual use), and the opportunity to market an institution and its programs better all are characterized as intangible
benefits. As examples, one faculty member reported benefits gained from the Coimbra conference participation which might be helpful in the future when designing strategic plans for her discipline. There were several administrators (among the University of Tartu and the Utrecht Network) who pointed out that the actual benefits are difficult to measure. This was also mentioned as a hindrance factor. Lyrette (2002) has referred to the same problem by stating that the return on investment on interactions between people is difficult to measure and it takes a longer time for benefits to be seen. However, this study’s data suggests a need to critically analyse the institutional goals, motives and actual benefits in order to seek some tangible results for the money invested. Otherwise, the situation described as one of the risks of networks becomes a threat – “networking for networking’s sake.”

Commitment towards internationalization

The drive for network membership lies in the institutional commitment towards various internationalization activities. This commitment should be expressed through institutional strategic development plans and prioritizing typical network activities. The University of Tartu has established networks’ activities in its Development Plan of the University of Tartu (A2015) and The Internationalization Strategy of the University of Tartu (A2008), both of which provide clarity in internationalization activities important to the institution.

At the national level, legislative support was seen as an enhancing factor by the University of Tartu administrators. If the national higher education policy supports internationalization activities, as is the case in Estonia, it helps institutions to connect easily with partners abroad as well as to raise overall awareness of the necessity of such activities. Lack of clear national level higher education internationalization policy was seen as an institutional,
national and regional level barrier to network activities. The Utrecht Network members also noted that if there are many other national level reforms taking place at an institution’s home country this could be a barrier towards setting goals for wider internationalization activities.

On several occasions, University of Tartu administrators stated that having general awareness about the networks’ goals is a factor that helps in accomplishing institutional internationalization objectives. Lack of information distribution was frequently mentioned as a barrier or risk factor for successful network operations by the Tartu faculty members. Raising awareness to help accomplish institutional goals can be done through constant information dissemination by the network’s representatives and by including various groups in those activities.

Possible Risks

Interestingly, the unintended risks that internationalization can bring to the institution through network memberships were not frequently mentioned. The researcher expected the University of Tartu respondents to comment on the threat to the Estonian language or possible “brain drain” issues. When commenting on the possible risks or unintended negative outcomes that the institutional networks can pose for an institution, mostly institutional level risks were described by respondents. The University of Tartu administrators were mainly concerned that the outcomes and benefits are difficult to measure, which obviously makes the money spent on the activities difficult to justify and could possibly be seen as a form of “conference tourism” by people not knowledgeable about the networks. The possible faculty “brain drain” was mentioned only by one Tartu faculty member. The Coimbra Group and Utrecht Network members were worried about not finding the right partners, lack of financial resources, time and manpower. The
author expected informants to point out the risks of active internationalization, including growing pressure to switch teaching from the Estonian language into English. These issues did not surface. It is possible that network activities at the University of Tartu are currently seen as minor compared to some other more risky forms of internationalization activities, so that the institutional or national level risks caused by network activities were not worthy of mention. It is also possible that the Tartu administrators do not fully realize the consequences of each small step that might set the Estonian language and the unique Estonian culture at risk.

The responses presented in this study provide an institutional perspective on participating in two European institutional networks – the Coimbra Group and the Utrecht Network. Through membership in these networks, various institutional ambitions are anticipated to be accomplished by the cooperative activities of the network partners and mutual effort of the intra-institutional groups (administrators, faculty members, university leadership). The benefits are enhanced when those activities are targeted strategically, by carefully stating and monitoring the process, while being aware of the possible unintentional risks and other institutional, national and regional level factors that can affect the dynamics of these collaborations.
Conclusion

This study has provided an institutional perspective on the factors that enhance participation in European University Networks. According to the literature, institutional networks have become strategic phenomena in Europe which can help increase regional and institutional competitiveness in the higher education market.

For analysing the issue of institutional networks, a resource-based strategic management theory was used as a theoretical framework. This theory is helpful to provide a starting point for explaining the dynamics of networks (the possible motives, rationales and benefits of participating institution). Indeed, the resources that are contributed by each participating university are expected to create a synergy which helps to achieve institutional goals. The argument about universities cooperating in order to reduce environmental uncertainty is also applicable, as the rapidly changing scene of European higher education arena has been affecting each institution. The weakness of the theory is that it assesses benefits primarily in economic terms and does not provide an explanation about rationales and outcomes of networking that are institution-specific and not measured in numbers. The theory also does not evaluate the efficiency of inter-organizational cooperation.

The main objective of this study was to determine the factors that are significant in participating in two European University Networks. Based on the study results, ten cross-cutting themes have been identified that play a role in enhancing the institutional University Networks in Europe. These emerging themes provide answers to the research sub-questions that were stated in the Introduction section.
It was indicated in the literature that economic rationales due to the regional level competition have become dominant for the universities. The results of this study did not fully confirm this argument. From the responses, it was apparent that one of the important factors (goal, rationale and benefit) for university networking is the common drive for the **advancement of knowledge**. Participating university representatives perceive innovation and knowledge production as the most valuable outcome that could be gained through cooperating as a network.

Wider **international visibility** is another issue that is of great interest to participating network members. As all of the networks’ universities have set **internationalization** as one of their top institutional priorities, this goal can be achieved through being visible regionally and internationally. It is important to note that reputation and prestige as well as advancement of knowledge can play an indirect role in providing opportunities for accomplishing institutional economic objectives. Attracting international students, being included in various research projects, and being able to hire quality faculty are all influenced by institutional prestige and international visibility.

Student and staff **mobility** have often been the focus of internationalization activities in the universities. The issue of offering wider mobility opportunities for its members has remained a focus of the networks. However, it seems that the value of mobility opportunities has drifted towards more interest in cross-regional research mobility, as well as staff and graduate level exchanges.

In concurrence with the literature, the study confirmed that universities in Europe have become partners in higher education policy design. Networks present a unique opportunity to
debate and design common platforms in various policy issues in the European higher education arena. This aspect was highly valued by the respondents.

In the literature it was clear that joining institutional networks is a strategic decision for the institution. Currently, there seems to be a lack of a cohesive long term plan for the institution to follow and therefore the participation can be characterized as fragmented and without clear tangible outcomes. The institutional perspective of the study demonstrated that faculty involvement in the networks’ activities is surprisingly low. Although information dissemination takes place through listserves, websites, internet and direct contacts, there seems to be a lack of consistency in involving faculty members in the projects.

**Institutional support** was viewed as a key factor in administering the networks’ activities financially and time-wise. As the administrative staff members are often overloaded with various responsibilities, clearly articulated plans for participating in institutional networks are needed. This would help support the administration in their time management and would make it easier to motivate faculty members to participate in networks projects. Institutional support towards those faculty members who are involved in internationalization activities was mentioned to be crucial. Examples included recognizing internationalization activities in faculty career advancement, supporting them in the project writing process and providing financial means in participating in network activities.

Not enough emphasis was placed on the unintended risks that internationalization, including participation in networks, can bring. The main concern of the respondents was that the benefits are difficult to measure and it makes it complicated to justify the expenses spent on
the network activities. Possible faculty “brain drain” and a threat to Estonian language were mentioned only once.

In the literature review, several authors commented that symbiotic relationships are full of inequality (Galtung 1971, Weiler 2001, Altbach 2004). This study did not specifically focus on the issue of equality in networks. However, a few comments made by the study referenced the role of the University of Tartu as “a little brother”.

It is apparent that even in a relatively small cluster of institutions, forming networks can present the possibility of having “centers” and “peripheries”. Smaller institutions from less established countries in the periphery may have to contribute more than others (in the center) to be valued and respected within the group. Domination by superior countries and their institutions may pose challenges to a smaller country of being heard and understood, and thus causing some serious implications to those smaller nations. The answers received from this study did not indicate much of a concern regarding those risks, but future research involving participants from colonised countries would be warranted to study the matter in more details.

In conclusion, the study showed that European university network operation is characterized by several factors that contribute to mutually beneficial participation in those cooperation arrangements. Participation in European university networks can be stated to be a strategic trend only when an institution-focused and clearly articulated plan has been applied, so that the institutional goals and hoped benefits are achieved by cooperation between the administration, university leadership and faculty members.
Recommendations for further research

The questions left unanswered by this study provide the basis for further research.

This study concentrated only on the perspective of one specific institution in two European networks. It would be problematic to generalize these findings, especially because of the unique language and cultural issues. However, Estonia is not unique among network members in this regard, and future research could seek out participating institutions who also feel similar nationalistic pressures. The possibility of unintended risks between the university networks from different regions could provide richer data about the issue of sensitivity towards unique cultural and linguistic issues. The example studied in this research was based in Europe. Further research in different regions of the world (e.g. Africa, Latin America or Asia) could provide a comparative analysis, specifically studying whether the goals, rationales, benefits and risks are similar to this case study. Ultimately, the true strength and value of a university network, irrespective of geographic location, may be determined by how the views and values of its smaller institutions are respected and managed.

The issue of university networks influencing European higher education policy design is important and worthwhile of conducting concentrated research study. The European higher education scene is changing very rapidly and the supranational top-down policy influence has been referred by various authors. As indicates this study, the universities value the opportunity to express their institutional opinion towards the European higher education policy design very highly. It would be interesting to see how much the voice of the university representatives, expressed through networks common policy statements, are actually being recognized and taken into account by the politicians in the European Commission. This study should be conducted
among all participating network members and the representatives from the European Commission responsible for Education, Training, Culture and Youth should also be interviewed.

There were several institution-specific themes, which were detected by this study but need a more focused approach to get specific answers. One of them was the low faculty involvement in the work of networks in the University of Tartu. It would be interesting to conduct comparative study of several network members focusing on the issue of faculty involvement in network internationalization activities. What is the overall faculty attitude towards participating in network projects and how could it be increased and what are the best practises that have developed into faculty based deeper cooperation projects.

The question of investment and received benefits through network activities is also worthy of further study. How much does an institution invest annually in network activities and what are the measurable outcomes for the institution. Is there a value added for the institution and how much time should be expected to spend before any tangible benefits are going to be seen. Such a study would serve as an example and decision-making bases for any institution considering joining a network.

The methods used in this study could be advanced for a more flexible approach in the further research. In contrast to the rigid format of email based questionnaires, future research would be enriched by more direct interview techniques in order to obtain more detailed data from the respondents. Using in-person interviews would allow the researchers to better explore new themes that are mentioned by the interviewees. In addition, the potential added benefit of a face-to-face meeting and its attendant establishment of a personal relationship may add incalculable value to these interactions.
**Recommendations for study participants**

Institutional networks present a unique opportunity to benefit from cooperation and international expertise if a strategic approach is applied. Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations are suggested:

**The University of Tartu leadership and administration**

The Rector should consider convening a time-limited Task Force to evaluate the early years of the University of Tartu’s participation in the Coimbra Group and the Utrecht Network. This study could provide suitable background reading for the Task Force and the evaluation could follow the broad outlines of this research, at least as a starting point. This qualitative research could be supplemented by quantitative surveys of both faculty and administrators to further test and validate the thematic analyses presented herein. The terms of reference for the Task Force would include a careful assessment of current network participation by Tartu faculty and administrators. This can be derived, in part, from documentary evidence from both internal as well as network sources. To the extent that goals, outcomes and benefits were articulated in the past, evidence of achievement of those should be sought systematically. The Task Force should also be mandated to seek possible risks of network participation, at least to the current date.

The purposed Task Force could potentially then author a strategic, thoughtfully designed long-term development plan for the university’s continued participation in each network, stating clearly the institutional motives, goals, targeted benefits and resources available. The decision about strategic involvement in specific network Task Forces could then be discussed including the possibility of adding or giving up those that do not support Tartu’s institutional goals.
The Task Force should consider making recommendations regarding the hiring of a Coordinator of Network Relationships. The Coordinator would report directly to the Vice-Rector of the University of Tartu (responsible for International Relations), would be responsible for fulfilling the institutional networks development goals, raising awareness of the opportunities provided by networks and facilitating information flows between different groups within the University of Tartu (but especially among faculty members).

The Task Force could devote special attention to the roles and responsibilities of faculty and also the resources and rewards available to those faculty members who participate in network collaborative activities. In addition to direct financial support for participating in network activities (e.g. travel), some consideration could be given to providing indirect support via academic protected time, for faculty who are significantly involved as Tartu representatives to the networks. Such activity could potentially be recognized when those faculty members are applying for career advancement opportunities, including academic promotion.

It would be reasonable for the Task Force to include recommendations regarding optimal ways to engage the University of Tartu faculty in Network activities. The issuance of its report to the Vice-Rector could be accompanied by a well-advertised faculty forum, in which the strategic directions of the University of Tartu in its networking collaborations could be publically announced. This would provide teaching faculty with an orientation to networking opportunities for each department and for each faculty member personally. The above-mentioned Coordinator of Network Relationships could then have the ongoing responsibility of keeping the faculty informed using a variety of means of communication.
Specific faculty, for example in specific disciplines or based on a special interest, could also get focused communications from the Coordinator. The latter could also directly contact key interested faculty when it is known to the Coordinator that unique or new opportunities have arisen that may be of benefit to the University of Tartu.

**Tartu faculty members**

Tartu Faculty members, including departmental leaders, could be encouraged to assume a more active, information-seeking approach to network cooperation. In some measure, this aspect will also be a function of the above-referenced Coordinator. However, it would be best if faculty made the effort to attend network information meetings, read and follow up with website and email communications from the Coordinator and ultimately participate in network activities if those activities are aligned with the faculty's interests and are of benefit to the University of Tartu.

For the benefit of the entire university, it would be especially useful if the individual faculty who get involved of network cooperation activities were provided an opportunity to share their experiences with both the Coordinator as well as with relevant faculty members and administrators who are related to the faculty members’ area of study or contribution. A combination of oral and written reports, including local internet postings, could easily serve to further educate and motivate other faculty to engage in network cooperation. Such faculty engagement strategies will enhance the potential of others in one’s department to get involved and will create continuity of participation in network activities from the University of Tartu.

Such a systematic concerted strategy by the University of Tartu will optimize all the likely benefits of membership in both the Coimbra Group and the Utrecht Network.
The Utrecht Network and the Coimbra Group

Every cooperative network should strive to find a balance between advocating for its collective goals while keeping appraised of the network-related needs of its individual members. This research study, it is hoped, will provide useful background reading for leaders of the Utrecht Network and the Coimbra Group, so that they can better understand the views of key informants from the University of Tartu. The networks will also have a unique opportunity to interact with the Coordinator of Network Relationships, so that both the broad goals and the specific opportunities of the networks are better portrayed for both administrators and faculty in Tartu.

This study suggests that the Tartu respondents are more likely to be interested in cross-border joint graduate level programs and other discipline-related research collaborations. As a traditional research university, the University of Tartu very much seeks international recognition of its research accomplishments, which are promoted by the networks cooperative activities.

Many Tartu respondents also supported the importance that networks can have as advocates for innovative European higher education policy advice.

The responses from the University of Tartu administrators suggested that the Utrecht Network’s should consider making the development of the Interest Groups to Task Forces better regulated and transparent to the institutions, so that there would be an opportunity for every member to join if there is an interest or need.

The study participants from the University of Tartu did not make any unique recommendations regarding the Coimbra Group.
Both networks should consider making their long term goals and strategies in terms of respect and sensitivity towards providing equal opportunity to influence its cooperation activities, so that the opinion of every institutional member is given an equal consideration and value. Ultimately, the true strength and value of a network may be determined by how the views and values of smaller institutions are incorporated into broader European values.
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University of Tartu Booklet

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[http://www.ut.ee/544423](http://www.ut.ee/544423)


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Appendix A: The List of the Universities in the Coimbra Group

University of Graz  
Austria

Catholic University of Leuven  
Belgium

Catholic University of Louvain  
Belgium

Charles University of Prague  
Czech Republic

University of Aarhus  
Denmark

University of Tartu  
Estonia

University of Turku  
Finland

Abo University  
Finland

University of Lyon  
France

Montpellier I  
France

Montpellier II  
France

Montpellier III  
France

University of Poitiers  
France

Georg-August University of Göttingen  
Germany

University of Heidelberg  
Germany

Friedrich Schiller University of Jena  
Germany

University of Würzburg  
Germany

University of Thessaloniki  
Greece

Eötvös Loránd University  
Hungary

University of Dublin, Trinity College  
Ireland

National University of Ireland, Galway  
Ireland

University of Bologna  
Italy

University of Padova  
Italy
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<th>University of Pavia</th>
<th>Italy</th>
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<td>Leiden University</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Bergen</td>
<td>Norway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jagiellonian University</td>
<td>Poland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Coimbra</td>
<td>Portugal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alexandru Ioan Cuza University</td>
<td>Romania</td>
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<td>Universitat de Barcelona</td>
<td>Spain</td>
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<td>University of Granada</td>
<td>Spain</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Salamanca</td>
<td>Spain</td>
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<td>University of Uppsala</td>
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<td>University of Geneva</td>
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<td>Oxford University</td>
<td>UK</td>
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Total: 39
Appendix B: The List of the Universities in the Utrecht Network

University of Graz*  Austria
University of Antwerp  Belgium
Masaryk University  Czech Republic
University of Aarhus*  Denmark
University of Tartu*  Estonia
University of Helsinki  Finland
Lille University  France
University Louis Pasteur  France
University Marc Bloch  France
University Robert Schuman  France
University of Bochum  Germany
Leipzig University  Germany
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki  Greece
Eötvös Loránd University*  Hungary
University of Iceland  Iceland
University College Cork  Ireland
University of Bologna*  Italy
University of Latvia  Latvia
Vilnius University  Lithuania
University of Malta  Malta
Utrecht University  Netherlands
Utrecht School of the Arts  Netherlands
University of Bergen*  Norway
Jagiellonian University*  Poland
University of Coimbra*  Portugal
Alexandru Ioan Cuza University*  Romania
Comenius University in Bratislava  Slovakia
University of Ljubljana  Slovenia
University Complutense de Madrid  Spain
University of Lund  Sweden
University of Basel  Switzerland
Queen's University Belfast  United Kingdom
The University of Hull  United Kingdom

Total: 33

* marks the institutions that are members in both networks
Appendix C: The Questionnaire for the University of Tartu administrators

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study about the factors that enhance mutually beneficial cooperation in European institutional university networks! Please answer as fully as you can with reference to either or both of the two networks, the Coimbra Group and/or the Utrecht Network.

When answering the questions you may choose to answer either in English or in Estonian.

1. From your prospective what are/were the motives for the University of Tartu to join an institutional regional level network such as
   a) the Coimbra Group?
   b) the Utrecht Network?

2. From your prospective what are the University of Tartu’s goals for participating in these kinds of institutional regional level networks such as
   a) the Coimbra Group?
   b) the Utrecht Network?

3. From your prospective what benefits has the University of Tartu received from participating in these kinds of institutional regional level networks such as
   a) the Coimbra Group?
   b) the Utrecht Network?

4. What would be the examples of the successful cooperation activities that the University of Tartu has participated within the
   a) the Coimbra Group? Why?
   b) the Utrecht Network? Why?

5. What are the most important resources that the University of Tartu brings to these kinds of institutional regional level networks such as
   a) the Coimbra Group?
   b) the Utrecht Network?

6. What are the factors that help effective participation in such networks as the Coimbra Group and/or the Utrecht Network on
   a) institutional level?
   b) national level?
   c) regional level?

7. What are the factors that hinder effective participation in such networks as the Coimbra Group and Utrecht Network on
8. From your prospective are there any inherent risks that international university networking can cause on
   a) institutional level?
   b) national level?

9. How is the knowledge of networks activities and opportunities disseminated among students, academics and administrators within the University of Tartu?

10. How does the University of Tartu support the involvement of academics in
    a) the Coimbra Group?
    b) the Utrecht Network?

11. What are the advantages of multilateral network cooperation compared to bilateral institutional partnerships?

Thank you very much for the time you have given and the effort you have made answering these questions!
Appendix D: The Questionnaire for the University of Tartu faculty coordinators

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study about the factors that enhance mutually beneficial participation in European institutional university networks! Please answer as fully as you can with reference to either or both (the Coimbra Group and/or the Utrecht Network) or another institutional network that you are involved with.

When answering the questions below you may choose to answer either in English or in Estonian.

1. From your prospective what are/were the motives for the University of Tartu to join institutional level regional networks such as
   a) the Coimbra Group?
   b) the Utrecht Network?

2. From your prospective what are the University of Tartu goals for participating in the institutional level regional networks such as
   a) the Coimbra Group?
   b) the Utrecht Network?

3. From your prospective what benefits has the University of Tartu received from participating in the institutional level regional networks such as
   a) the Coimbra Group?
   b) the Utrecht Network?

4. What are the most important resources that the University of Tartu brings to these regional networks?

5. What are the factors that help effective participation in such networks as the Coimbra Group and/or the Utrecht Network on
d) institutional level?
e) national level?
f) regional level?

6. What are the factors that might hinder effective participation in such networks as the Coimbra Group and Utrecht Network on
   a) institutional level?
   b) national level?
   c) regional level?
7. How is the knowledge of institutional networks **activities and opportunities for academic cooperation** (provided by these two organizations) disseminated to your department?

8. From your prospective are there any inherent **risks** that international university networking can cause on
   a) institutional level?
   b) national level?

9. How can institutional networks like the Coimbra Group and or the Utrecht Network **enhance the work** of faculty members in your academic department?

10. How does the University of Tartu **support** the involvement of academics in
    a) the Coimbra Group?
    b) the Utrecht Network?

11. How would you characterize **the need for involvement** of academics within your department in institutional networks such as
    a) the Coimbra Group?
    b) the Utrecht Network?

Thank you very much for the time you have given and the effort you have made answering these questions!
Appendix E: The Questionnaire for the Coimbra Group coordinators

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study about the factors that enhance mutually beneficial participation in European institutional university networks!

1. Describe your perspective on the motives that make it important to operate as a regional institutional network such as the Coimbra Group?

2. From your prospective what are the institutional goals for participating in the Coimbra Group?

3. From your prospective what potential benefits can institutions receive from participating in the Coimbra Group?

4. What are the most important resources that institutions can bring to the network?

5. What are the factors that help effective participation in such regional networks as the Coimbra Group on
   a) institutional level?
   b) national level?
   c) regional level?

6. What are the factors that hinder effective participation in such regional networks as the Coimbra Group on
   a) institutional level?
   b) national level?
   c) regional level?

7. How can an institution support its academics to be involved with the network activities?

8. In your opinion, what are the key institutional characteristics that enhance the participation in the Coimbra Group?

9. In your opinion what might be the potential risks that institutions should consider prior joining the Coimbra Group?
   a) on institutional level
   b) on national level?

10. What have been the most successful cooperation activities of the network? Why, what brought the success?
11. Do you have any further comments about institutional networking with the University of Tartu?

Thank you very much for the time you have given and the effort you have made answering these questions!
Appendix F: The Questionnaire for the Utrecht Network coordinators

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study about the factors that enhance mutually beneficial participation in European institutional university networks!

1. Describe your perspective on the motives that make it important to operate as a regional institutional network such as the Utrecht Network?

2. From your prospective what are the institutional goals for participating in the Utrecht Network?

3. From your prospective what potential benefits can institutions receive from participating in the Utrecht Network?

4. What are the most important resources that institutions can bring to the network?

5. What are the factors that help effective participation in such regional networks as the Utrecht Network on
d) institutional level?
e) national level?
f) regional level?

6. What are the factors that hinder effective participation in such regional networks as the Utrecht Network on
d) institutional level?
e) national level?
f) regional level?

7. How can an institution support its academics to be involved with the network activities?

8. In your opinion, what are the key institutional characteristics that enhance the participation in the Utrecht Network?

9. In your opinion what might be the potential risks that institutions should consider prior joining the Utrecht Network?
   c) on institutional level
d) on national level?

10. What have been the most successful cooperation activities of the network? Why, what brought the success?
11. Do you have any further comments about institutional networking with the University of Tartu?

Thank you very much for the time you have given and the effort you have made answering these questions!
Appendix G: The Approval from the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board

University of Toronto
Office of the Vice-President, Research
Office of Research Ethics

PROTOCOL REFERENCE #23655

January 9, 2009

Prof. Ruth Hayhoe
Dept. of Theory and Policy Studies, OISE
University of Toronto
252 Bloor Street West
Toronto, ON M5S 1V6

Mrs. Merli Tamtik
118 Reiner Rd
Toronto, ON M3H 2L6

Dear Prof. Hayhoe and Mrs. Tamtik:

Re: Your research protocol entitled “An Analysis of the Factors that Enhance Participation in European University Networks – a Case Study of the University of Tartu, Estonia”

ETHICS APPROVAL

Original Approval Date: January 9, 2009
Expiry Date: January 8, 2010
Continuing Review Level: 1

We are writing to advise you that a member of the Social Sciences, Humanities & Education Research Ethics Board has granted approval to the above-named research study, for a period of one year, under the REB’s expedited review process. Please ensure that you submit an Annual Renewal Form or a Study Completion Report at least 30 days prior to the expiry date of your study.

The following consent documents received November 24, 2008 have been approved for use in this study: Administrative Consent Letter and Individual Consent Letter.

Any changes to the approved protocol or consent materials must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation. Any adverse or unanticipated events should be reported to the Office of Research Ethics as soon as possible.

If your research has funding attached, please contact the relevant Research Funding Officer in Research Services to ensure that your funds are released.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your project.

Yours sincerely,

Dean Sharpe, Ph.D.
Research Ethics Officer--Social Sciences and Humanities
Appendix H: The Institutional Consent Form  
(on OISE/UT letterhead) 

To: 
Rector 
University of Tartu 
Ülikooli 18 
Tartu 50090 
Estonia 

Dear Rector Prof Alar Karis,

My name is Merli Tamtik and I am a Master of Arts Candidate at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, Canada. I am planning a research study on “Analyses of the Factors that Enhance the Participation in European University Networks – a case study of the University of Tartu, Estonia”. My thesis supervisor is Dr. Ruth Hayhoe and I am also receiving guidance from my thesis co-supervisor, Dr. Jane Knight. In order to conduct this research, I require your written consent.

This study examines the factors that contribute to a successful participation in European university networks. The study provides a comparative analysis of two European university networks, the Coimbra Group and the Utrecht Network, with a focus on understanding the mechanisms, rationales (motives), benefits and risks gained by the University of Tartu and its contribution to these networks. Studying Estonia’s premier research university, where the internationalization has been set as a priority but the geographic location is not an advantage, may provide significant value in terms of analysing the factors that enhance the institutional performance in the strategic networking. The study can help lead to better administrative decision-making strategies within an institution and help the University of Tartu to strengthen its participation in international collaboration.

This letter requests permission to conduct email interviews with up to 28 staff members of the University of Tartu (in the Department of Academic Affairs, in the Department of Research and faculty members). These are the individuals that hold a specific position of representing the University of Tartu in the Coimbra Group and the Utrecht Network or are coordinators for internationalization activities within their departments (faculty members). Individual permissions will be asked from every participant from the University of Tartu as well as participants from the Coimbra Group and the Utrecht Network.

The participants will be interviewed by short questionnaire sent by e-mail where their personal opinion is asked about their perception of the gained benefits, possible implications and ways to enhance the contribution of the University of Tartu in the Coimbra Group and the Utrecht Network. Answering the questions will take about 20 minutes of their time. The participants will be well informed about the nature of the study,
including the assurance that they may withdraw at any time. In addition, they may request that any information be eliminated from the project. Participants will at no time be judged or evaluated, and will at no time be at risk of harm. The participants may request a summary of results or copy of the study. The information gathered from individual questionnaires will be kept in strict confidence and stored at a secure location. All information will be reported in such a way that individual persons cannot be identified. All collected data will be used for the purpose of a Master’s thesis and perhaps for subsequent research articles. All raw data (questionnaires) will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study.

If you agree, please send this signed letter to me by email at merli.tamtik@utoronto.ca and the original copy by regular mail to the following address

Merli Tamtik  
118 Reiner Rd  
Toronto M3H 2L6  
Canada  

Your positive response to this e-mail is considered as consent and that you are fully aware of the conditions above and have agreed that the University of Tartu members participate in the study.

After receiving your consent I will contact the individual informants by email to proceed with the study. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at merli.tamtik@utoronto.ca. You may also contact my thesis supervisor, Dr. Ruth Hayhoe, at hayhoe@bellsouth.net or my thesis co-supervisor, Dr. Jane Knight, at janeknight@sympatico.ca.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation and support.

Sincerely,

Merli Tamtik

________________________________________

Rector Prof. Alar Karis
Date

Merli Tamtik
M.A. Candidate, Higher Education
Theory and Policy Studies
OISE/UT
252 Bloor St. West
Toronto, Ontario
M5S 1V6
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Appendix I: The Institutional Consent from the University of Tartu

TARTU ÜLIKOOD

University of Toronto
OISE/UT Theory and Policy Studies in Education
252 Bloor St West
Toronto ON M5S 1V6
Canada

February 5, 2009

Letter of Institutional Consent

I hereby declare that Mrs Merli Tamtk, Master of Arts candidate at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, Canada is authorised to contact the employees of the University of Tartu, Estonia to request their participation in the academic study (email interviews). The organizer of the study must guarantee the protection of personal data.

Yours sincerely

Alar Karis
Rector, professor
Appendix J: The Individual Consent Form

(Sent by email)

Dear ...,

I am writing to ask your consent to participate in an e-mail interview for my research study. My name is Merli Tamtik and I am a Master of Arts Candidate at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, Canada. My study “Analyses of the Factors that Enhance the Participation in European University Networks – a Case Study of the University of Tartu, Estonia” focuses on the factors that contribute to a successful participation in European university networks. My thesis supervisor is Prof. Ruth Hayhoe, second reader Prof. Jane Knight.

The study will provide comparative analyses of two European institutional university networks, the Coimbra Group and the Utrecht Network, with a focus on understanding the mechanisms, rationales (motives), benefits and risks gained by the University of Tartu and its contribution to these networks. It is not an evaluation of those networks or participation in them. Studying Estonia’s premier research university, where the internationalization has been set as a priority but the geographic location is not an advantage, may provide significant value in terms of analysing the factors that enhance the institutional performance in the strategic networking. The study can help lead to better administrative decision-making strategies within an institution and help the University of Tartu to strengthen its participation in international collaboration.

After receiving your consent, I will send you a short questionnaire by email where I will ask your personal opinion about institutional networking and your perceptions of the benefits, risks and factors that in your opinion might enhance or hinder the cooperation between institutions participating in the network. It will take a maximum of 20 minutes to respond to those questions. I would also like to ask an opportunity for one-time follow up with you, in case there are issues in your answers that need some clarifications.

Participation is voluntary; you may withdraw from the study or refuse to answer at any time. In addition, you may request that any information provided by you would be eliminated from the project. At no time will be value judgements or evaluations be placed on your responses. You may request a summary of results or copy of the study. The information gathered from individual questionnaires will be kept in strict confidence and stored at a secure location (password protected researcher’s computer). All information will be reported in such a way that individual persons cannot be identified. All collected data will be used for the purpose of a Master’s thesis and perhaps for subsequent research articles. All raw data (questionnaires) will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study.
Your positive response to this e-mail is considered as consent and that you have agreed to participate in the study.

Thank you in advance for your participation!

Sincerely,
Merli Tamtik
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