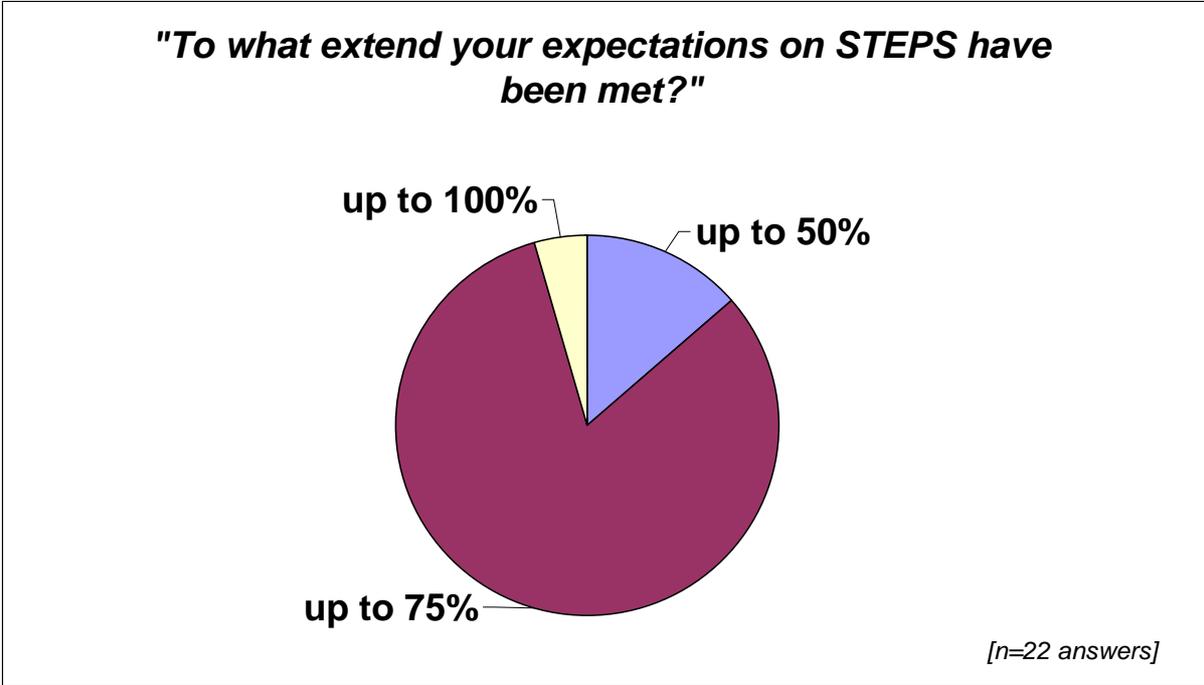


Klaus Buddeberg

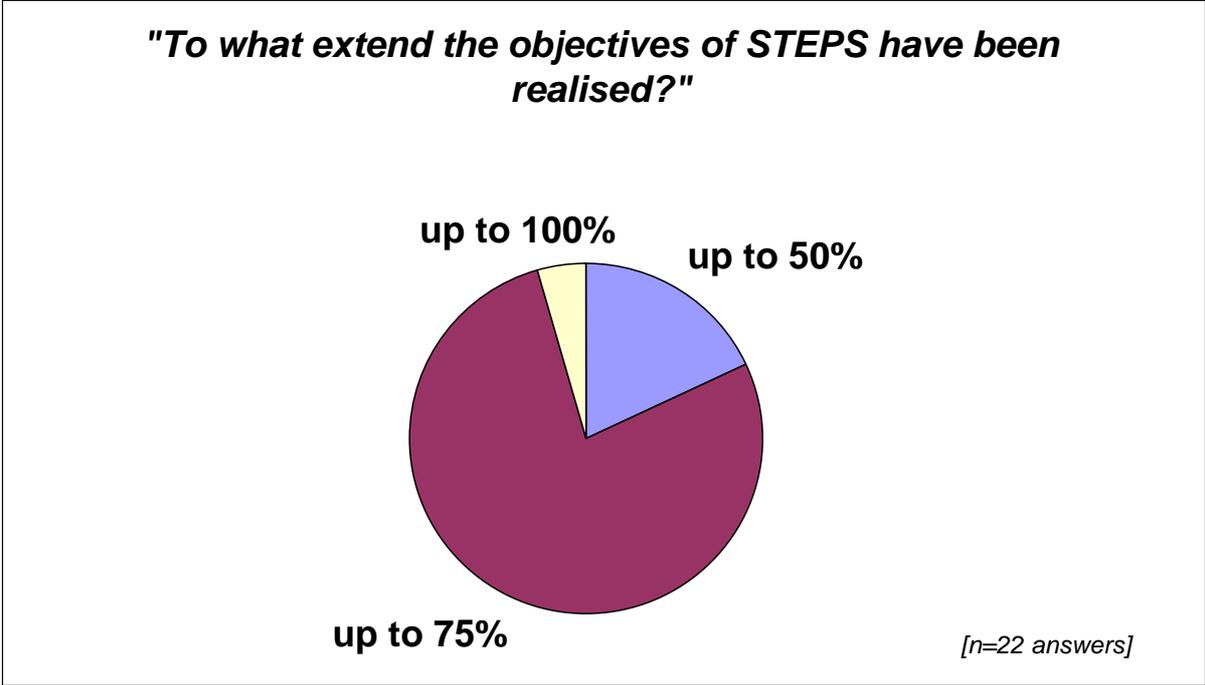
Evaluation of the STEPS-Project

At the last International STEPS Conference the STEPS members were asked to complete a comprehensive questionnaire to evaluate the anti-discrimination project, STEPS (see the enclosed questionnaire). The questionnaire focuses on the co-operation between the 18 organisations in STEPS, communication, organisation and the question of whether the project has reached its objectives. It also asks about the participation of people with learning disabilities and staff members. Another aspect is a possible continuation of co-operation. The questionnaire includes both 'closed' questions as 'open' questions (In this evaluation, the questions are written in bold and italic letters.). 22 persons from the five involved local partnerships completed questionnaires.

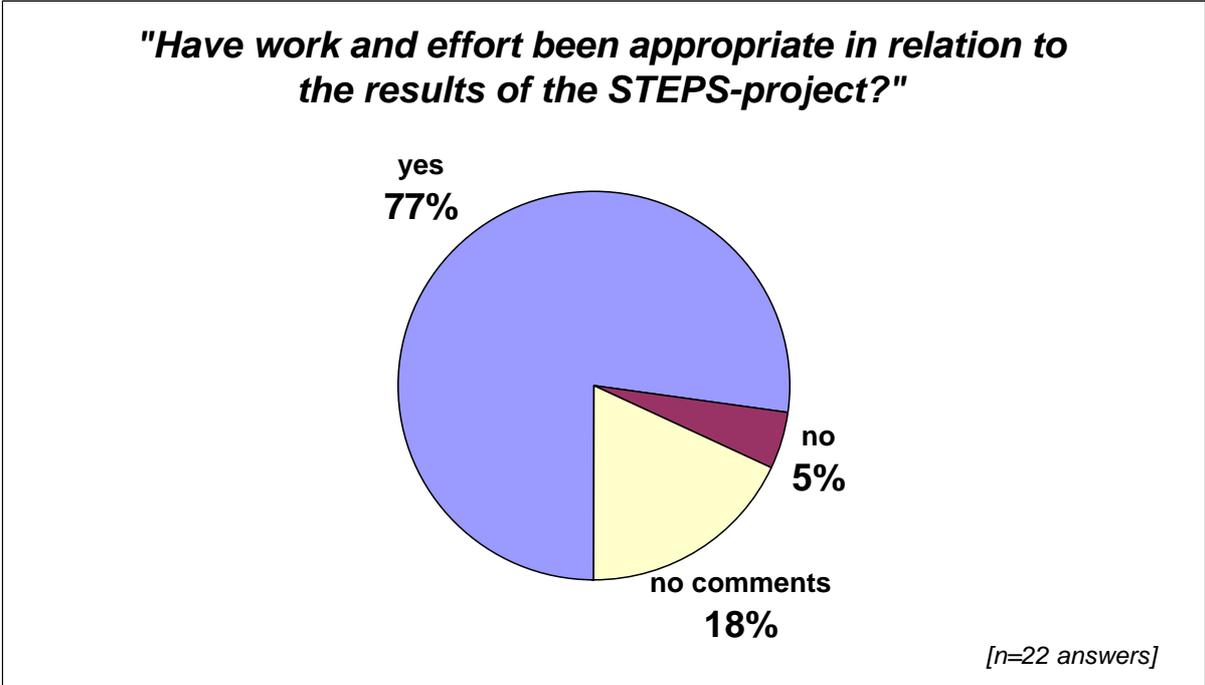
The majority of the STEPS partners say that their expectations in the STEPS project have been met up to 75 percent (18 answers). Three persons think that their expectations have been met up to 50 percent. One of the STEPS-partners answered, that his/her expectations have been met up to 100 percent.



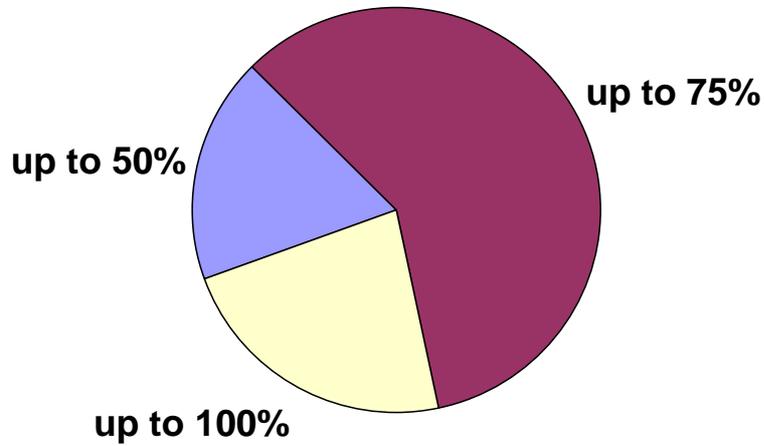
More than three quarters of the STEPS partners think that the objectives of STEPS have been realised to more than 50 percent.



About three quarters of the STEPS members are of the opinion, that work and effort were appropriate in relation to the results of the project. One STEPS partner thinks that the relation between work and result was not appropriate; four participants did not answer this question.



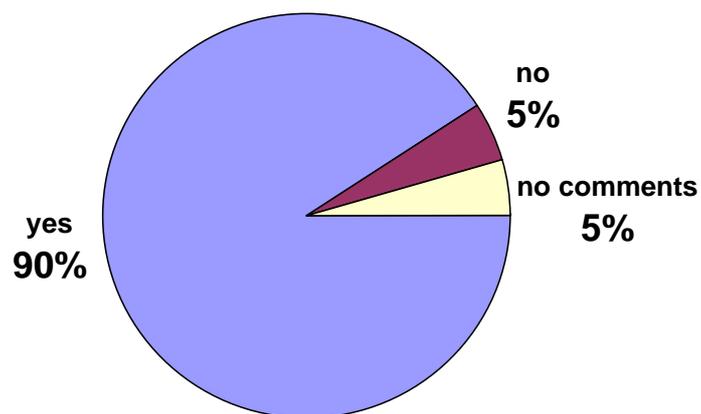
"To what extent the interest of your local partnership have been taken into account?"



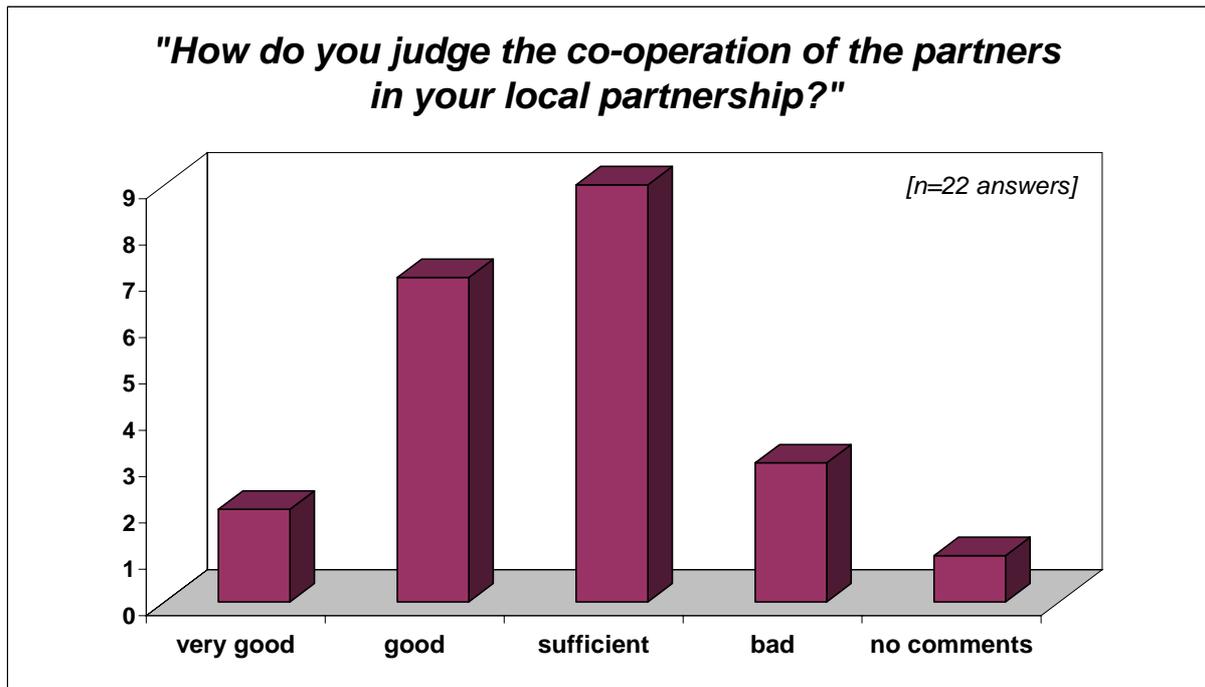
[n=22 answers]

The majority of the STEPS-members see the interests of their local partnership being taken into account by up to 75 or 100 percent. Most of them were satisfied with the consideration of the local partnership interests.

"Are you satisfied with the consideration of your local partnership interests?"



[n=22 answers]



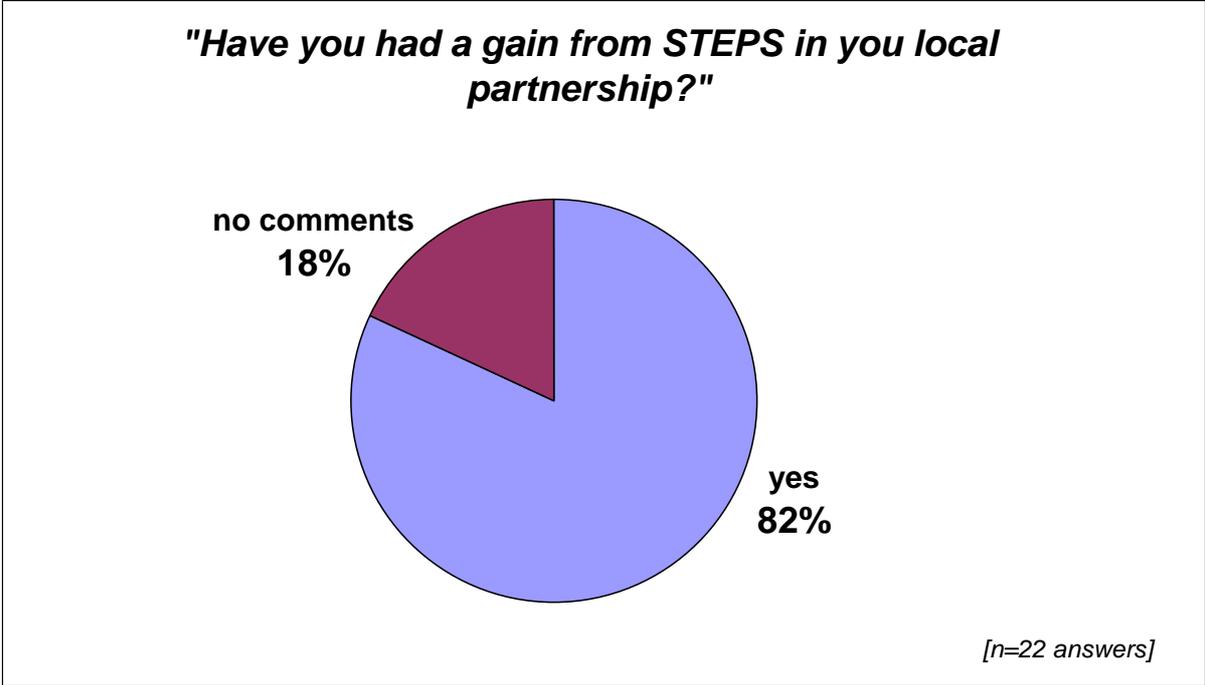
“What are the three most important developments or effects of STEPS in your local partnership?”

According to the STEPS partners, the improved co-operation on a local basis to combat discrimination was the most important result of the project. In a third of all answers to this question, the improvement of communication, trust and mutual understanding was emphasised. The concrete improvement of services was also frequently mentioned as a positive outcome at local level.

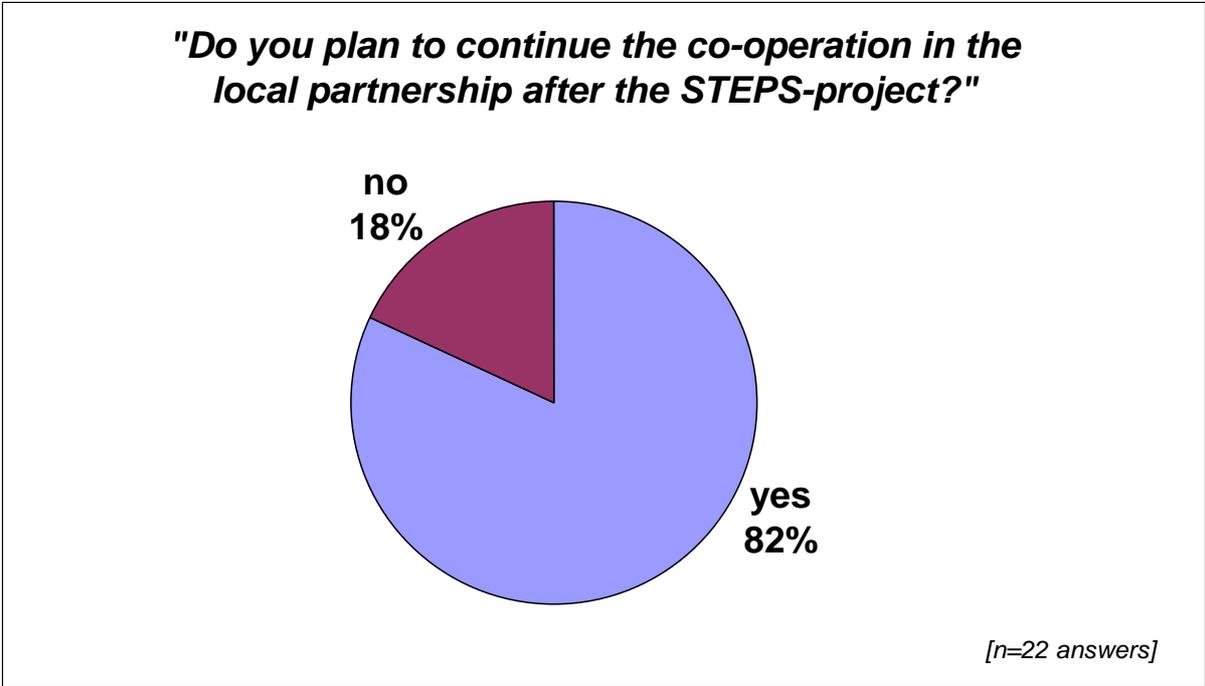
Other aspects, which were mentioned several times, were the co-operation with universities, an increased understanding of discrimination in the local context and the discussion of human rights as an important aspect of disability services.

The Handbook B.A.R.T., which focuses on the inclusion of disabled persons in a workforce, was mentioned as a concrete result of the Dutch dialogue. Also the inclusion of staff members and of people with learning disabilities in the local networks was mentioned as a positive outcome.

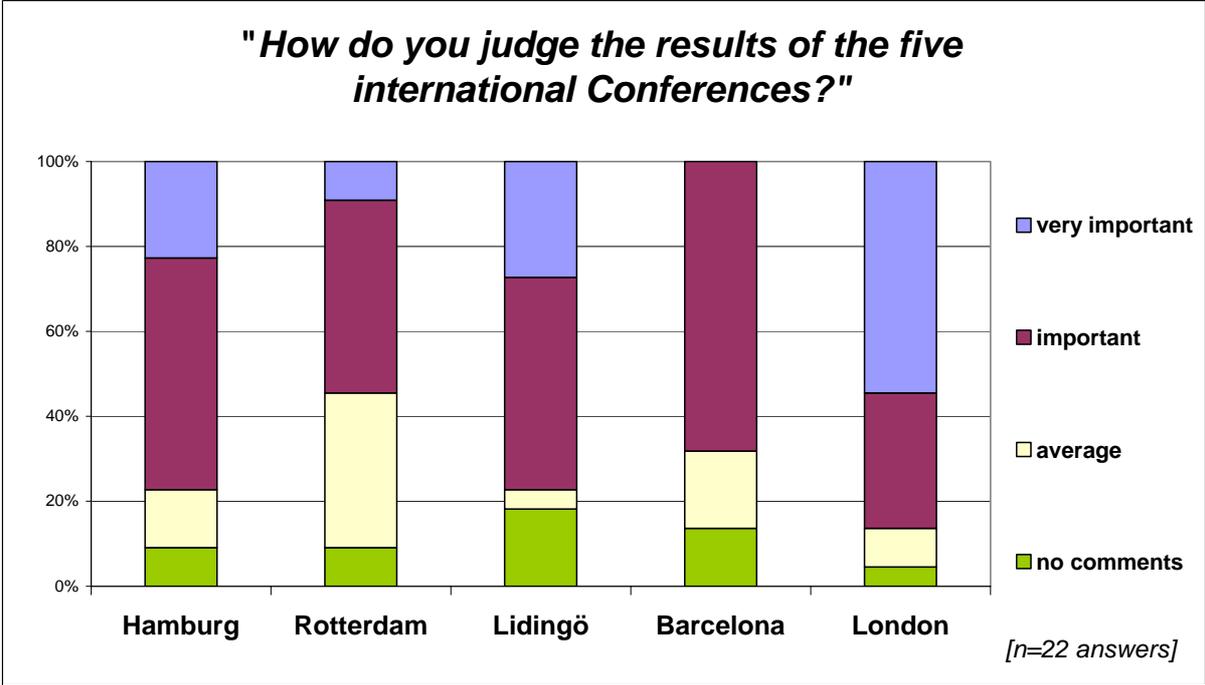
More than 80 percent of the STEPS partners said that their local partnership had gained from taking part in the STEPS project.



The same proportion answered 'yes' when being asked about continuation of work in the local partnerships.

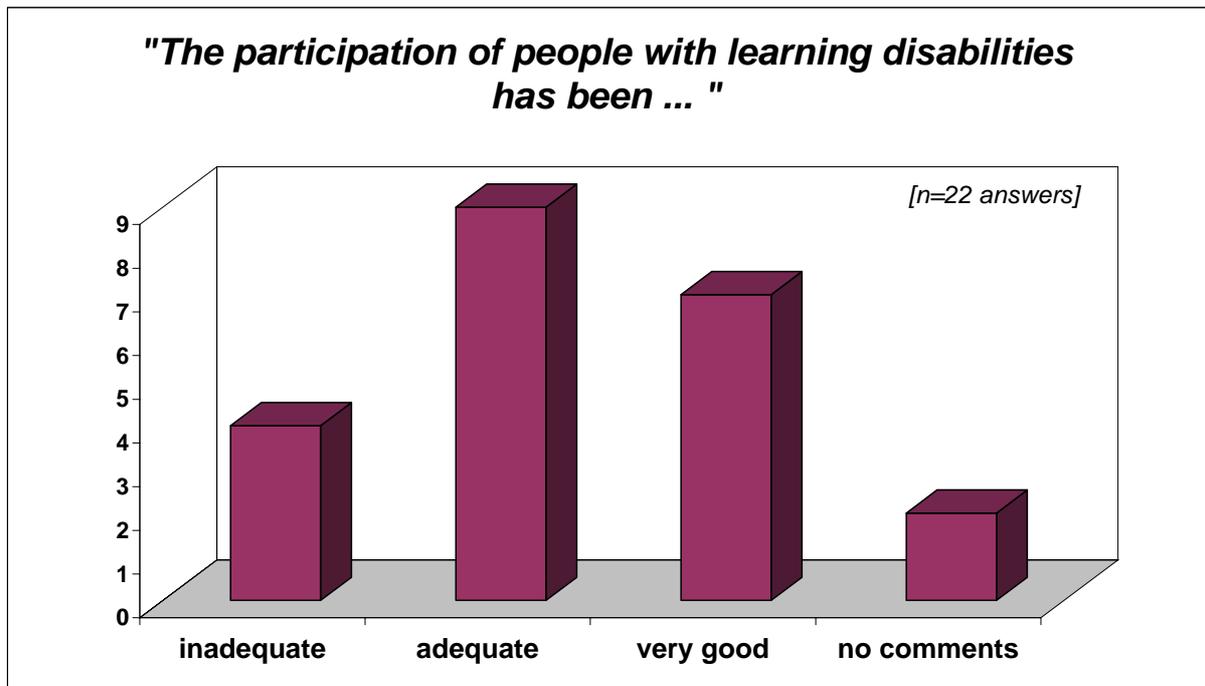


The final conference in London, where local and international recommendations for non-discriminative and user-centred services were discussed, was rated as 'very important' by most of the participants.



Participation of service users

From the beginning of the project, the participation of people with learning disabilities in the international discussion was a big challenge. Four of the STEPS partners believe that the participation of service-users in STEPS was not adequate. Nine persons rated the participation as adequate, seven as very good.



Comments on the participation of people with learning disabilities in the project

"Not about them without them"

The STEPS-partners highlighted the International User Conference in Hamburg, which was organised by the Hamburg user advisory group as an example of good or very good participation. User involvement at the London conference was also emphasised positively. In this perspective two models became visible: including in 'regular' conferences or facilitating international user contacts and conferences.

With the exception of these two aspects, the inclusion was valued as poor at the beginning of the project, but improved towards the end. The user contacts are seen as a starting point for the continuation of co-operation. Nevertheless, many people criticised the lack of inclusion of disabled people in the discussion at the international conferences.

It became apparent that participation is desired, but difficult to realise. It was also discussed, that each group within the project (universities, local authorities, service providers, staff members and disabled persons) has its own 'language'. Therefore communication between the groups is difficult but necessary (*'Levels must touch, but not mix completely'*).

“What is the best way to include people with learning disabilities in an international project?”

Inspired by the User Conference in Hamburg, most proposals tend towards conferences by and for people with learning disabilities. One participant reminds to organise the conferences not for, but in co-operation with the user groups, to enable them to define their own key issues.

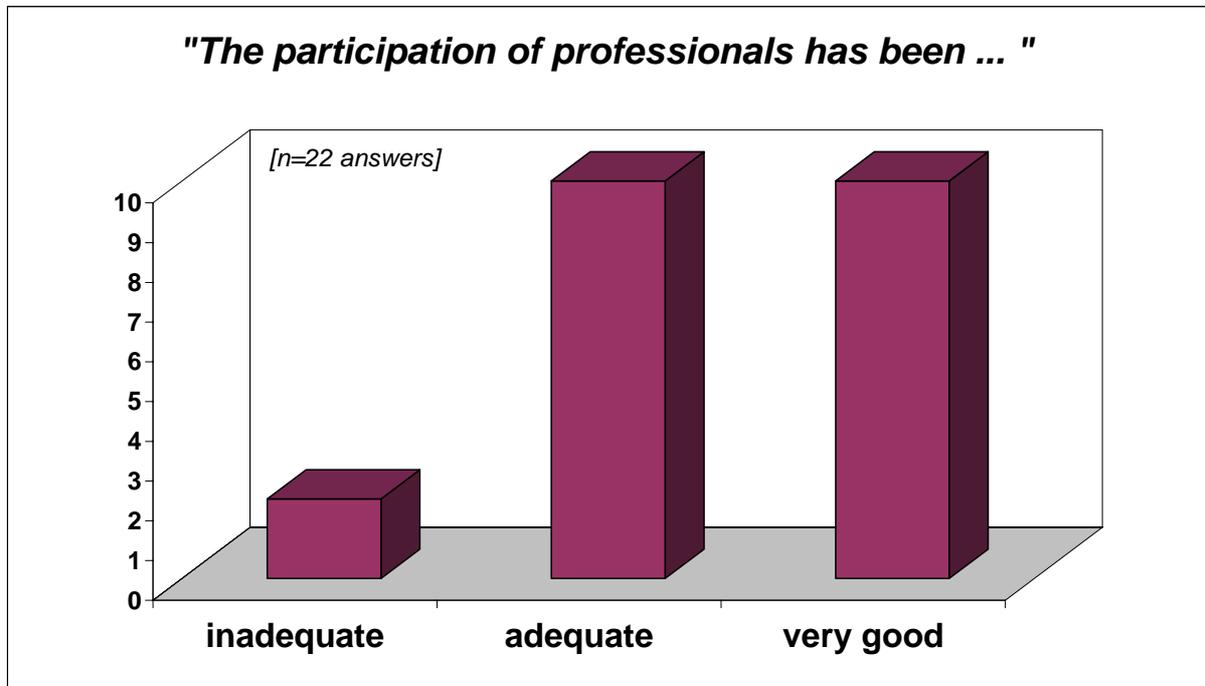
Other proposals tended towards an inclusion in the standard project process, as demonstrated during the London conference (*‘participation in all conferences’*).

The model of advisory groups, which accompany the development of the project, as seen in Hamburg, was also recommended as well as the inclusion of representatives (*‘invite their representatives if they cannot represent themselves’*).

The importance of the local level as the starting point for inclusion was also emphasised as the exchange between user groups. The users should be included from the beginning of the project.

Participation of professionals

Only two STEPS partners think that professionals from the services have not been included sufficiently into the STEPS project. The majority rated the participation as 'adequate' (10 answers) or 'very good' (10 answers).



Comments on the participation of professionals in the project

Most of the participants rated the participation as adequate or very good. The participation of staff members was generally seen as a gain for the project and as a driving force within the local networks. Commenting on this, many answers dealt with the high degree of commitment of the staff members involved in the project (*'professionally strong and personally nice people, good preparation, lots of energy, great knowledge of the subject by most of the people'*).

As with the participation of service users, the importance of international exchange of staff members was emphasised.

Few answers pointed out negative aspects (*'Their opinions have not been published strong enough, a participation on a broad base did not happen, more managers than professionals have been involved'*).

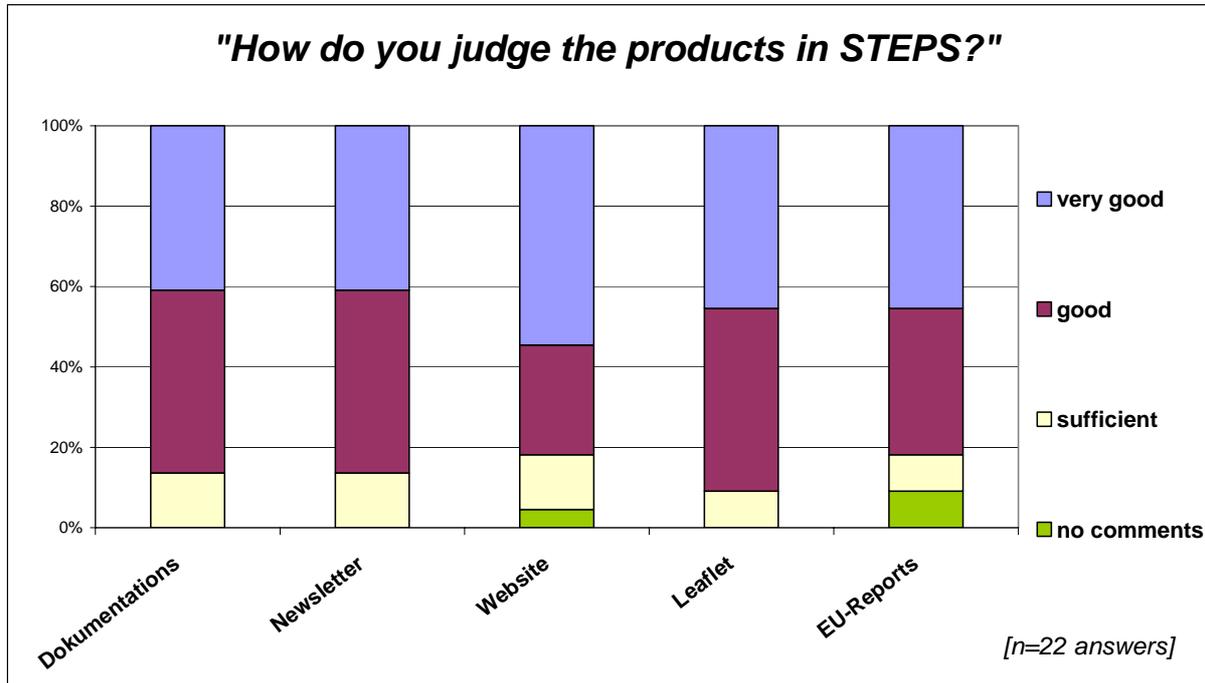
“What is the best way to include staff members in an international project?”

Two models of staff-member participation were mentioned. Some of the participants suggested the comprehensive integration in the whole project, which includes participation at every conference (*‘more access to the international level, mainstream integration like in London’*). Special sessions could be offered, which would be organised by staff members themselves.

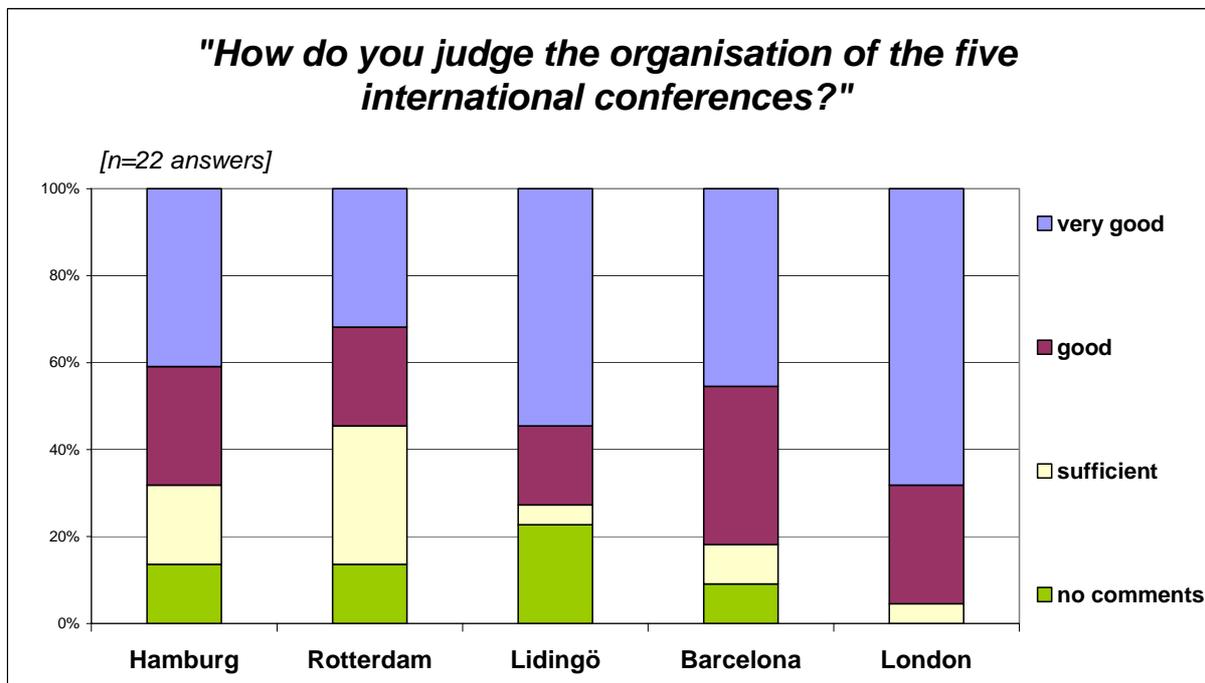
The other model would include staff members as advisory groups, like in the Hamburg partnership. Both ways include regular information via newsletters or websites and regular consultations.

As well as these two aspects, the importance of international staff exchange and joint education and training in co-operation with the project partners in the involved cities was raised. Generally, the participation of staff members should depend on the character of the project.

Questions about the organisation

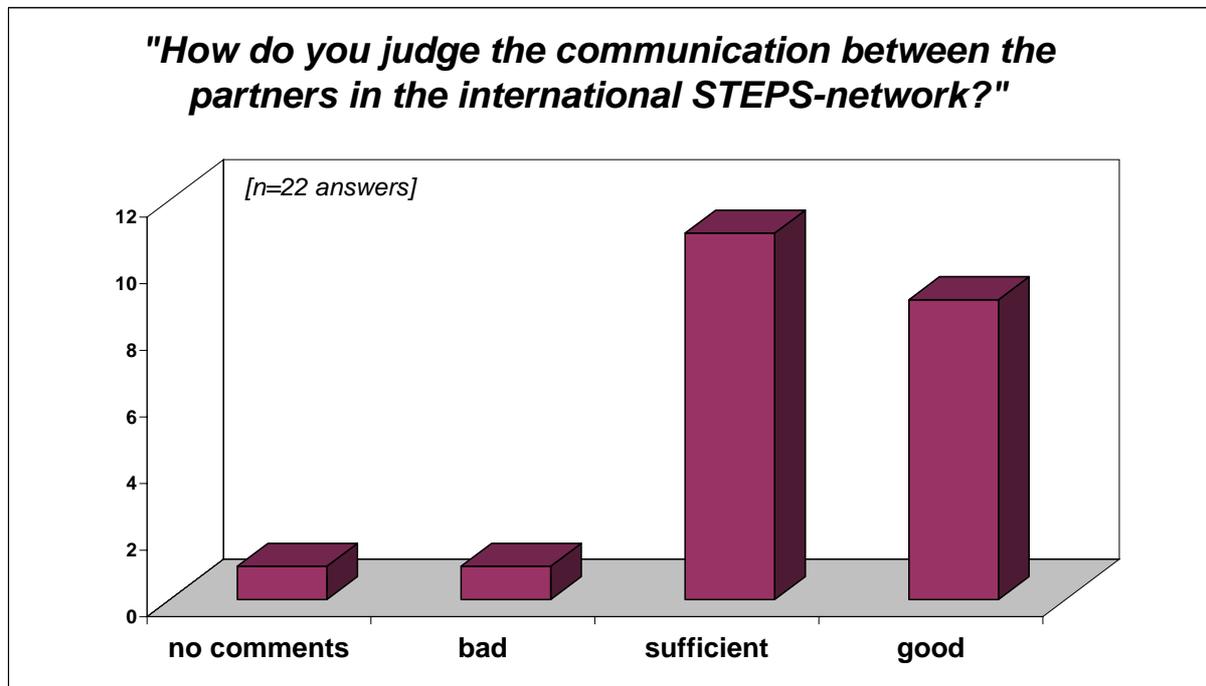


The products of project communication were rated 'good' or 'very good' by most of the STEPS partners. The organisation of the conferences received a wider variety of comments/ratings.



Communication, planning and decision making

In general the communication between the partners of the international network was rated as 'good' or 'sufficient'.



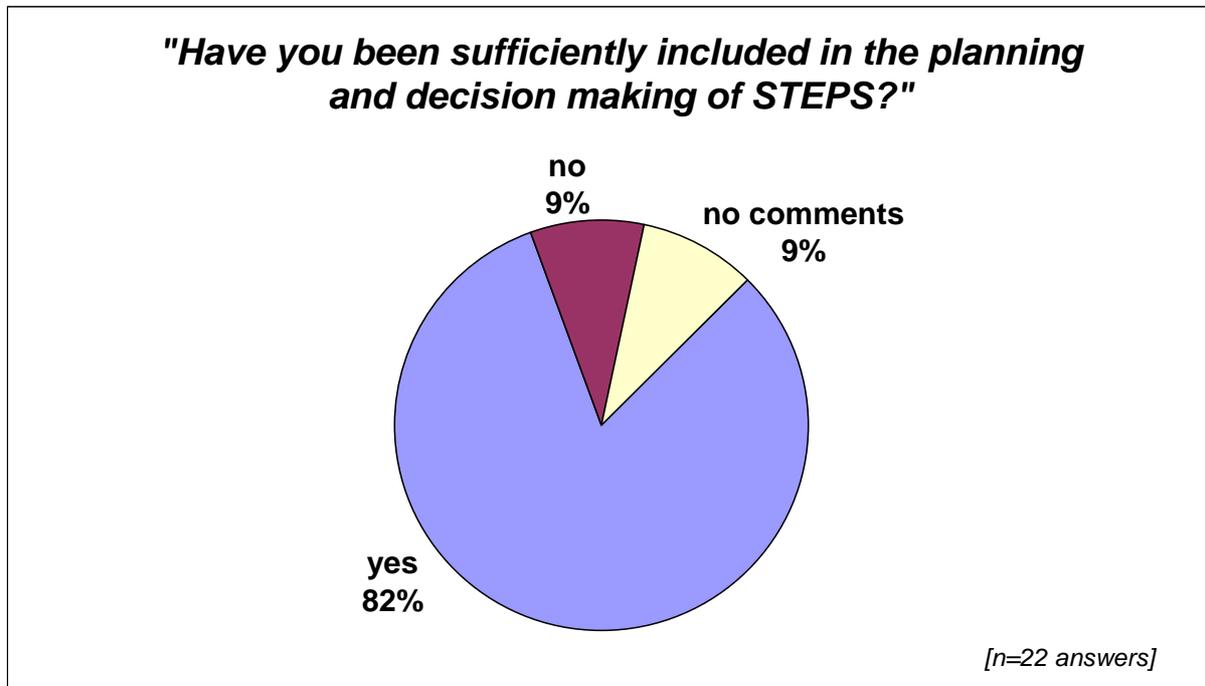
Comments on the communication within the international network

Although the communication was judged as 'good' or 'sufficient' by most of the STEPS partners, some communicational problems have been mentioned. They mainly result from the different languages. In particular, the communication with the Spanish STEPS members was difficult (*'some language problems, particular between Spanish and other groups, not enough translation into Spanish'*). Furthermore cultural differences were mentioned as the reason for linguistic difficulties.

The STEPS partners noticed that there was good or very good communication during the conferences, but less intensive communication between the conferences, which was organised by the project management.

Planning and decision making

Two STEPS partners felt to have been insufficiently involved in decision-making and the planning of the project. The majority of 18 STEPS members said that they were sufficiently included, two did not comment on this question.

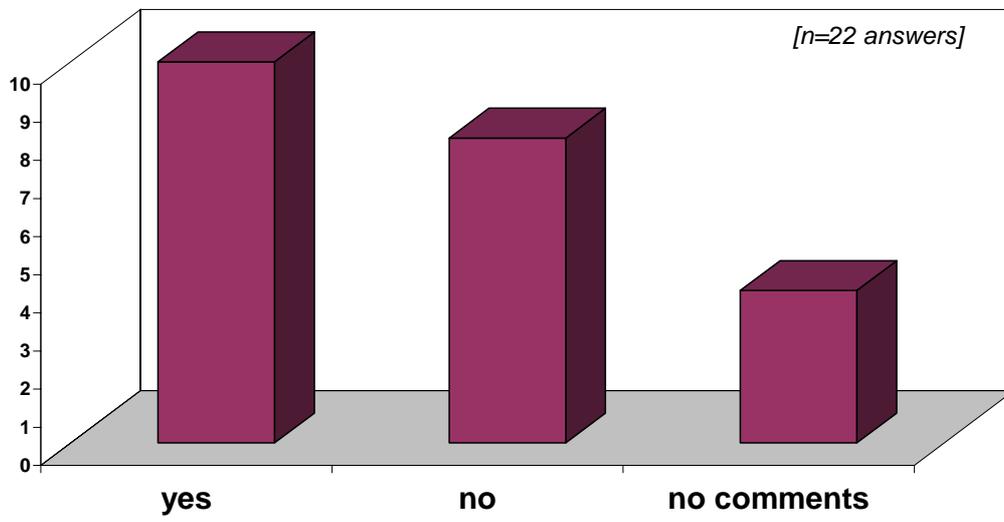


Comments on inclusion in planning and decision-making

In the view of some STEPS partners the communication and important parts of planning and decision making in a large international project like STEPS should be organised by the project management. In this context, the commitment of the project management was positively emphasised (*'good communication by the project management, consultation and feedback at all stages, inclusion in the planning at initial stage'*).

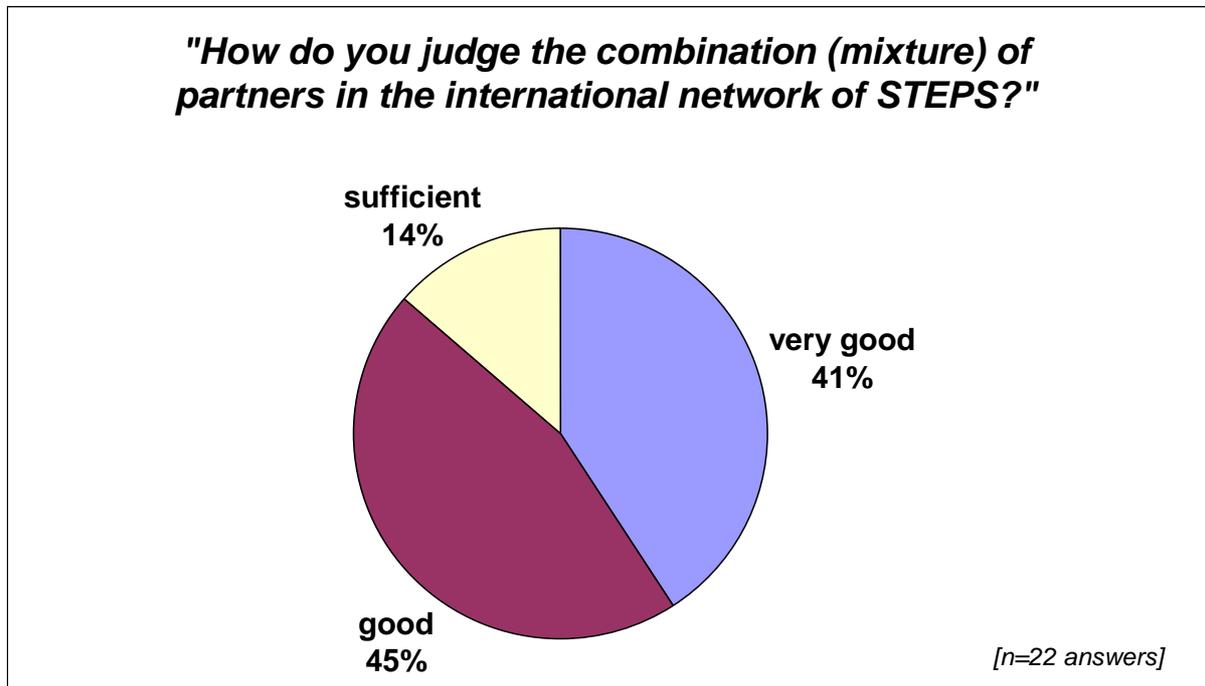
Some STEPS partners noted some communication problems and centralisation of the planning process. Less than the half of the project partners said, that in their of view, all partners influenced the project to the same extent.

"In your point of view, have all partners influenced the results of STEPS to the same extend?"



The STEPS Network

Most of the STEPS partners rated the profile of the STEPS network as 'good' or 'very good'.



Comments

"The diversity has been the key."

The partners pointed out several levels of diversity: different countries with different service systems and different interest groups within the local networks. The system of local dialogues (three way dialogue between universities, service providing organisations and local authorities) was considered to be innovative.

As a result of the complex network, some communication problems were mentioned, not only between members from different countries but also between representatives from different organisations. Nevertheless the inclusion of partners from other countries was proposed for further work.

"What are the three most important effects of STEPS on your daily work?"

On the local level, STEPS has had a direct impact on the daily work of the partners (*'more time for person-centred planning, change in some forms of work, instruments for the managers in social work'*). Further effects on the co-operation in the local network were pointed out (*'contacts deepened locally, improved co-operation with other service providers, intensified communication, planning further co-*

operation, the Rotterdam triologue grew stronger and now has a future'). In general, growing competencies in (international) co-operation, communication and networking were mentioned as practical results. Moreover, personal contacts and the exchange of both service users and employees were commented on positively.

“What have you learned from the STEPS Partners?”

“What have the STEPS-Partners learned from your experience?”

“We learned how to work together as a team.”

Learning processes occurred in several ways. The group process within the project led to improved competence in networking and co-operation (*‘working in mixed groups develops social competence, we learned how to work together as a team, tensions may exist but they can be worked through’*). This process includes mutual respect, patience and open-minded communication (*‘respect for historical and cultural influences; professionalism can be combined with easy-going’*).

The duration of the project led to a feeling of ‘belonging together’ by some of the STEPS partners (*‘new experiences, new jokes, feeling being included’*).

Knowledge was exchanged in the field of social-service systems. The project partners learned about *‘new and different methods of working with people with learning disabilities’*. Person-centred planning was mentioned as well as community based approaches. A higher degree of social inclusion of the service users was mentioned several times.

“There is more than your own point of view.”

The STEPS members learned to see things from a different perspective, e.g. concerning different national systems or different perspectives of macro and micro-levels. It is important to regularly change the perspective (*‘do not stick to one level, shift between the micro and macro level’*).

“Thinking in a European context”

Some of the STEPS partners explained that they learned *‘new ways of thinking and new ways of working’* as well as *‘new ideas, new approaches and new values’*. This learning process was seen as a result of the European networking. The comparison with service systems in other countries combined an increase of knowledge with *‘the of seeing colleagues elsewhere facing similar challenges’*.

“What are the most serious problems of an international project like STEPS?”

“Lack of shared terminology”

Almost all STEPS partners mentioned communication as the biggest challenge in an international project. Most partners, but not all, could communicate in English (*‘communication in the sense of translation, English should be possible for everybody as a project language’*). There was a discrepancy in the communication between native and non-native speaker.

Furthermore, different terms and different definitions in the field of social services are used in the different countries. Several STEPS members mentioned this issue (*‘communication in the sense of using common terms, problems of communication even when using common expressions, thanks for the glossary’*).

“Competition can be an obstacle for frank co-operation”

Some of the STEPS members mentioned a possible hidden hierarchy between persons and organisations representing different approaches in social services.

“It took a long time to find out how systems work in the different countries”

One STEPS partner complained about a *‘lack of time’* in the project. Others stated that it took a long time to understand different service systems and their specific problems, values and approaches.

Additionally it was mentioned that the complexity of the topic made work and discussions in STEPS difficult.

“What are the three most important results of the STEPS Project?”

“Learning from others, sharing experiences”

With its focus on non-discriminative practice, most partners judged the exchange of knowledge and comparison of services system as the most important result of STEPS.

*“e.g. learning about different experiences and about the reality in other countries;
learning about the situation of services and service users in other EU-countries;
learning new ways to approach people with learning disabilities;
getting to know other systems and other ideas; understanding of the service systems;
a widening of experience and understanding in the range of issues confronting the partnership”*

This included a reflection of one's own positions and practices (*‘Having a clear view of one's own position in the disability services in Hamburg’*).

“Construction of productive cross-national links”

Networking is important for most of the STEPS partners. The *‘creation of new alliances’* and *‘international partnerships’* were pointed out as important results of the STEPS project. New relations were not only established at international level but also at local level (*‘the development of the local co-operation, co-operation in the local network’*). STEPS-partners expect that bilateral contacts will be maintained in the future to strengthen their activities concerning the participation of people with learning disabilities.

In addition, in the context of networking, the international user-conference *‘Independent Living in Europe’* was as an important outcome of STEPS.

The partners highlighted once again the importance of communication and exchange:

*“e.g. international communication, exchange of information;
meeting people, reaching a level of communication based on trust within the network;
transcultural dialogue, networking and cross-national relations;
transnational communication about steps towards non-discrimination”*

„Joint action towards emancipation, participation and solidarity“

The European dimension of the project – co-operation within a European context and the discussion of joint European aims – was underlined by the STEPS partners:

“e.g. inter-European collaboration, the exchange of knowledge within a European framework, talking about problems on at European level”

„Comparing the differences in the partner countries“

Comparing and evaluating systems is the next step after getting to know other systems. Participants mentioned comparison and evaluation of service systems as important results of STEPS.

“e.g., evaluation of other services;

better understanding of how different countries deal with the same problem with strategic and financial planning, to see that other organisations struggle with similar problems.”

The STEPS partners learned about new inclusive methods and structures in working with people with learning disabilities. These aspects were mentioned by about the half the participants.

“e.g. developing new methods to work with and to include people with learning disabilities; new structures, new systems, validation of work as a tool for non-discrimination; methods used to promote non-discrimination, thinking about structural obstacles”

“Transfer of practice”

The formulation of expert recommendations and the definition of best practice concerning non-discrimination and user-centred services were defined as the key objectives of the project. Several participants highlighted the gain they had from learning about practice’.

“e.g. exporting and importing good practice, searching for instruments, methods and good practice the exchange of practice in learning-disability services and anti-discrimination”

In this context, best practice of person-centred planning was especially emphasised.

“Strengthening national co-operation”

Most STEPS-partners emphasised an improvement of communication and co-operation at the local level.

“e.g. new structures for the services in Hamburg, recognising one’s own system; clarity about the strategic role and responsibilities of the main service providers; co-operation in the local network, more insight into our own project; the development of our own project in Rotterdam; the project created a common ground to continue with a sort of policy-making project later”

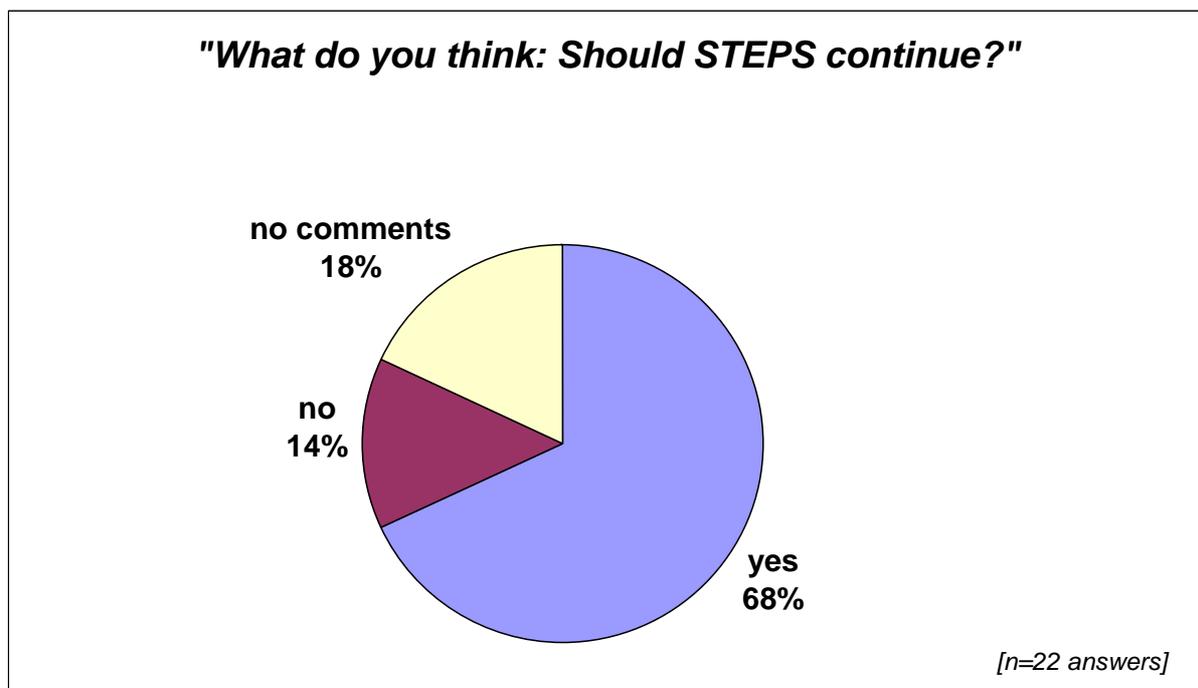
“Reflection about discrimination”

In the frame of STEPS, the project-partners have focused on non-discriminative structures and services in their daily work (*‘reflections about discrimination and about human rights’*). Some participants mentioned that they recognised the connection between service structures and discrimination.

“e.g. improving their quality of life, improving their access to work; expert recommendations for the improvement of services; joint actions towards emancipation, participation and solidarity”

Comparative Framework

Many STEPS-partners highlighted the comparative framework and the glossary as the most important practical results of STEPS to facilitate international exchange and discussion. The handbook B.A.R.T., worked on by the partnership in Rotterdam, and plans for further projects and documents in the local partnerships were also important.



Two thirds of the STEPS partners would like to continue the STEPS-project (15 out of 22 answers). Four STEPS partners did not answer this question. Three said that they did not think the project should continue.

"What would be your interests and priorities for the future of STEPS?"

"Working to find ways of working together in the EU countries in this field"

In the view of most STEPS –members, the continuation of the project should focus on the creation of common European positions and proposals for non-discriminative services for people with learning disabilities. Some members could imagine having an advisory role in law/policy making. The exchange of knowledge would remain a key aspect of further work (*'deepening the knowledge about the different systems of social care for people with learning disabilities'*).

“Self advocacy and work revisited”

The STEPS partners would like to focus on special aspects in the field of anti-discrimination: Some would like to concentrate on work as a tool for social inclusion, others on mainstreaming services or the role of self advocacy. Other partners would like to focus on the situation of disabled people from minorities or the change-making role of universities in disability services.

“Keeping in contact with the international partners”

A number of STEPS partners pointed out that they want to stay in contact with the international partners and would therefore like to continue STEPS with the same partners. The multilateral or bilateral exchange of staff members and service users should have a central position within any future project.