The virtual platform of the Regional Learning Network - an artifact for creating new forms for development cooperation between research and development units and tourism entrepreneurs

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1 Introduction

The aim of the paper is to study the planning process of a virtual learning platform called Tietotori (market of knowledge) as a process of creating an artifact for the Regional Learning Network and as a learning process. This technical artifact Tietotori was born within a project called the *Regional Learning Network for Tourism Business in the Region of Itä-Uusimaa* (Eastern Newland) which aims at organizing and constructing possibilities for learning in a multi-voiced dialogue between different actors.

The Learning Networks represent a new form of project activity financed by the Workplace Development Program of the Finnish Ministry of Labour during the years 2004-09. The purpose of the Learning Networks is to increase the developmental expertise of the participants, to create and experiment with new forms of development cooperation between research and development units and workplaces, and to generate new, innovative solutions for Finnish working life. (Alasoini et al., 2004, 2006)

In the Regional Learning Network for Tourism Business in the Region Itä-Uusimaa the question was about an endeavour to perceive, what the Learning Network would or could be, and, what the object or objects of the Learning Network could be. From the perspective of activity theory and the idea of expansive learning (e.g. Engeström, 1987; Engeström et al., 2004), the challenge for the Learning Network would be to find out essential tensions and contradictions that could form the basis for regional developmental work and a target to strive for. In the activity of the Learning Network there is a question of shaping a new kind of shared object for regional cooperation between entrepreneurs, public organizations and research and developmental units.

When trying to understand the process of constructing the Learning Network we have found the activity theory and especially the concepts of expansive learning and a collective zone of proximal development (ZPD) quite fruitful. Expansive learning can primarily be understood as a process of expanding the object and the motive. The object of expansive learning comprises the whole activity system, in our case the whole learning network. The expansive learning process can be seen as a collective and long-term process, not progressing linearly but rather in a cyclic way. (Ibid.; Engeström, 2000). The idea of a collective zone of proximal development is based on Vygotsky's (1978, p. 86) concept of a zone of proximal development.

The expansive learning cycle represents an ideal type of learning that is a theoretical reduction. In real-life activity, there may be many different kinds of learning and development processes going on, both individual and collective, or processes related to some restricted part of an activity or of a process. It is important to understand how the various learning processes construct each other,

what kind of interaction takes place between them, and how they construct the whole learning cycle. (See e.g. Gherardi, 1999, 2000 and 2006)

According to Gherardi et al. (2003) the knowledge is communicated and institutionalized through an interorganizational network created by a system of practices and within which they circulate by imitation, diffusion of translation.

According to Toiviainen (2003) learning in a network can be perceived as a multilevel process. The levels are understood to be the levels of activity. Such levels of learning could be for example an entire learning network, an entity comprising some of the participants in a network, an individual workplace or an expert organization, a team, or an individual. The levels are special and local, and, they can be recognized by the object of cooperation and by the outcomes, and, by studying activity. (Toiviainen, 2003; see also Alasoini, 2004; Knight, 2002).

Toiviainen (2003) emphasizes that it is relevant to study, what is going on in the network. What will be produced? What are the outcomes to be realized? The target of the cooperation and learning is to direct the future. It is essential to question, how the network should be extended and how the Learning results and knowledge could be transported between the different levels. Is there a need for new intermediate levels that would create connections? Partnership can be seen as a way of making multilevel learning processes possible. (Toiviainen, 2003)

Learning is related to what is attempted to create and generate in cooperation. It is essential that cooperation and learning have some objects in the network. In our Learning Network, the challenge has basically been to shape, what the common object/objects could be.

One of the first aims of the Learning Network project was to build a shared vision among the actors and discuss together what a learning network could be and what could be the forms of its cooperation. The core ideas of the network in this project were flexibility and openness. The network was to be open for new actors and new ideas. According to the basic ideas of learning networks in the financing organisation, dialogue and new modes of cooperation and learning forums could be a way to respond to the innovation challenges in current Finnish working life. (Alasoini et al, 2004, 2006)

In our Learning Network we have taken as an interesting challenge to create, experiment and study new kinds of cooperative forums as learning forums. Learning is not taken as guaranteed, but as an object of research and development for the Learning Network Project.

The need for a virtual platform was one of the first ideas that rose from the interviews with tourism entrepreneurs conducted by Helia Porvoo – Borgå unit's teachers when asked about the needs for the future in the gathering stage of the Learning Network Project. This paper is inspecting the planning process of the virtual learning platform in the Learning Network Project and one specific discourse at Tietotori related to the regional strategy for tourism business. An interesting question in the long term will be, if Tietotori could form one essential

forum for making visible developmental tensions in the region Itä-Uusimaa related to tourism business.

2 REGIONAL LEARNING NETWORK FOR TOURISM BUSINESS IN THE REGION ITÄ-UUSIMAA

The Learning Network analyzed in the paper is regional, united by the geographic area of Itä-Uusimaa, situated about 50 km east of Helsinki, and by tourism business there.

The history of Itä-Uusimaa as a province is very short. The borders of the province are not based on natural geographical or historical things but instead on the decision of the Finnish Government to organize the local administration in a new way. Even if the province in an administrative sense is new, Porvoo as a central town of the province is the second oldest town in Finland and has rich cultural historical roots. Perhaps therefore, there are different ideas even of how to call the region in the context of tourism business. Often the question has also been expressed, whether it would be a better idea to name and to market the region as for instance "Porvoo District" than "Itä-Uusimaa".

2.1 The gathering stage of the Learning Network

The aim of the first stage of the project was to collect a learning network, which would enhance research and development activity in tourism industry in the region of Itä-Uusimaa. In the long run the aim was also to study and model new forms of cooperation between enterprises, public organizations and higher education institutions. One of the basic ideas was that all participants in The Learning Network were supposed to be learners and equal partners. The description of the process to create a virtual platform is a minor attempt to model a part of this cooperation. The idea was that the Learning Network would enhance innovations, which would benefit all the participants. (Ritalahti & Lassila, 2006)

The first stage of the project started 1.9.2004 and ended 31.1.2005, and, aimed to create the Learning Network in collaboration with Porvoo - Borgå Unit of the Helsinki Business Polytechnic Helia, Helsinki School of Economics (Unit of Organizations and Management), University of Helsinki (Department of Education) and Helia School of Vocational Teacher Education. Other actors consisted of companies, as well as other regional organizations working with tourism business in the area, the Regional Council of Itä-Uusimaa among them.

Porvoo – Borgå Unit of Helia has coordinated the project. (Kantola, Lassila, Ritalahti & Kalliokoski, 2005)

2.2 The ongoing stage of the Learning Network

Now the project is living its second stage (1.2.2005 - 31.7.2006). The main focus is in making the research and development targets visible in the area, in designing methodologies for analyzing and developing tourism business and work in the area, and in designing and developing a virtual platform in a cooperative way. Planning and creation of the virtual platform began in April 2005 and the platform was opened to public 14th of February 2006. Before the official opening the pages were in test use for those tourism entrepreneurs and regional organizations who participated in the planning process (see list below).

   - Aerohot Balloons Hki Oy (aerohot balloons flights)
   - Aluekeskusohjelma, kulttuuri (regional culture organization)
   - Augur Kalastuspalvelu Oy (fishing services)
   - Bertas Bad Oy (meeting and sauna services)
   - Ekymi Oy (business development company)
   - Handi Boat (tourism services for physically disabled)
   - Itä-Uudenmaan liitto (The Regional Council of Itä-Uusimaa)
   - Kannonnokka Oy (experience services)
   - Museo –kunnan käyntikortti projekti (regional museum project)
   - Porvoon kaupungin matkailutoimisto (tourist bureau of Porvoo)
   - Saaristolinja Ky (sea and river cruises)
   - Seurahovi (hotel)
   - Porvoo Tours (tourism services)
   - Sipoon kunta, Matkailutoimi (tourist bureau of community of Sipoo)
   - TMP-Ohjelmatuotanto OY/Porvoon Teatteri (local theatre in Porvoo)

The planning of the virtual platform is just one of the activities during the second stage of the project. The research topics in the project handle regional learning forums and networking, regional identity, change in lecturers work, and quality improvement in the enterprises. Carrying out research into these themes will also continue during the third stage of the project (1.8.2006 - 31.1.2008) even though the main focus of the development work shifts to innovative activity and winter tourism. The research and development themes are closely related to each other.

3 LEARNING FORUMS

The common/shared interest uniting the participants in our Learning Network has not been taken as given but has been perceived as a common object at the first stage of the project and, as an object of learning as well. Different learning forums mentioned below (Table 1.) were formed in order to enhance and create dialogue between the different actors and to perceive, what a new kind of a learning network could be. One of the main principles in the planning of the forums was that all the actors involved would be equal and that the research and development topics would arise from the dialogues between the different actors. Because of that, naming the different forums (the work team, the expert team) was problematic as each forum presents expertise, not the expert team only. (Kantola, Lassila, Ritalahti & Kalliokoski, 2005)

Stage of the Learning Network Project	Learning forums	Aims of the Learning forums
The first stage: Gathering stage 1.9.2004 - 31.1.2005	Internal work team Expert team Company interviews Learning network seminars	To enhance and create dialogue To find the common interest for the project
The second stage 1.2.2005 - 31.7.2006	Internal work team Guidance team Learning network seminars Morning coffee meetings Enterprises' own seminars Virtual learning platform	To enhance and create dialogue To enhance multi-voicedness To plan and create the virtual learning platform To enable entrepreneurs to take new roles in the development work To create new methods for learning in the region To make existing practices visible

Table 1. Learning forums of The Learning Network

The project's internal work team that consists mainly of lecturers and a researcher of Helsinki School of Economics, acts as a support organ and it is intended to be creative and dialogic by its nature. The internal work team meets once in every two weeks. The aim is to integrate the Learning Network's functions, as a part of the polytechnic's everyday educational work. In the second

stage of the project, the internal work team has offered an arena for research discussions and worked as a planning and executing organ in the development activities.

The name of the expert team was changed to guidance team in the second stage of the project. This was done in order to underline the principle of equality; there is no learning forum that represents more expertise than the others. The expert team, which comprised representatives of enterprises and, regional tourism organizations as well as researchers, met in every other month. In the second stage of the project two new entrepreneurs joined the team and it started to meet four times per year. The role of the guidance team has been to look at The Learning Network Project as a whole and give guidance in planning and making decisions related to developmental subprojects.

Learning network seminars have combined all the actors involved in the project, including also tourism enterprises that in the region of Itä-Uusimaa are mainly micro, small and medium-size enterprises. During the first stage of the project the seminars were built around the ideas that arose from the entrepreneur interviews. During the second stage of the project the focus has been in planning, testing and further developing the virtual platform, creating regional tourism strategy and planning quality improvement subproject.

In this paper, also the interviews are perceived as learning forums. During autumn 2004, 15 tourism entrepreneurs and representatives of regional organizations were interviewed. The aim of the interviews was to find out, what kind of research and development needs the enterprises or other organizations had. The starting point for the interviews was to listen to the entrepreneurs, in order to get a view of their business, needs and future expectations. This approach proved to be fruitful, as the interviewees felt that they were able to influence the content and the progress of The Learning Network Project. (Kantola, Lassila, Ritalahti & Kalliokoski, 2005)

The first ideas of a virtual learning platform can be tracked to the interviews of 15 tourism enterprises in the very beginning of this project. At the beginning, it was more or less just a question of a channel for information, but during the process the idea became refined towards an emphasis on dialogue and learning. Almost all the interviewees wanted The Learning Network to coordinate and conduct research and development work in the tourism field. This far, consumer behaviour and customer profiles have not been studied thoroughly in the region of Itä-Uusimaa. Learning networks that offer participants a chance of getting to know each other and deepen their cooperation in the future were appreciated especially among the new tourism entrepreneurs in the region of Itä-Uusimaa. There was also a need for forums that enable dialogue between tourism companies and culture organizations. (ibid.)

Also, synergy and dialogue were needed between many different development projects related to tourism business in this region. Helia's role in tourism research

could focus on processing and gathering existing information and arranging forums where this information would be easily available for tourism companies and organizations in the region. (ibid.)

Monthly morning coffee meetings started in December 2005 on entrepreneurs' initiative. New research findings are first introduced and discussed in these sessions and then published in the virtual platform. Another new forum for learning has been participation in seminars that are organized by other actors. One example of this is a quality programme in which 12 companies in the region of Itä-Uusimaa are participating. The role of the Learning Network is to model the quality development process from the entrepreneur's point of view, to identify phases were support is needed and to consider alternative paths for quality development work.

In the second stage of the project entrepreneurs have had a more active role in many forums. They have taken part in planning and organizing the actual programme as well as in coordinating discussions. Through this approach they have also been deeply involved in the development work. Quite recently a few entrepreneurs have also shown interest to be coordinating parts in development subprojects during the next stage of the Learning Network project.

Different learning forums and interviews of entrepreneurs have been audio taped and written to transcriptions and memos that constitute the main data of the study. Only those seminars, which have not been arranged by the Learning Network have not been audio taped.

Learning forums as tools for shaping common object for regional development cooperation

In the Learning Network, there has been a question about finding out the needs and expectations of tourism companies through the interviews mentioned above and about bringing these findings into a multi-voiced discourse in the other learning forums, as material for a possible object of the Learning Network. Progressing on the way of a regional zone of proximal development (ZPD) and the process of expansive learning there is also a question about making choices, in which process the other learning forums besides the interviews had an essential role. In this learning network, we have found crucial the idea, that each of these learning forums has an important role in perceiving the regional ZPD and the vision of the Learning Network in the future. So, the vision for the Learning Network was constructed in the work team as well as in the expert team and in the seminars.

The activity theory and especially the concept of a zone of a proximal development (ZPD) and the model of expansive learning seem to give a fruitful theoretical and methodological framework for the paper. Based on the preliminary analysis of the data, the hypothesis is that in the different forums mentioned above there is an on-going process of perceiving a ZPD on a regional level. Some very

inspiring questions seem to arise for a closer examination. What is Itä-Uusimaa as a region, and, how is it perceived and presented in the discourses on different forums?

Expansive learning can also be understood as constructing a collective zone of proximal development. This can be seen *"as a grey area between actions embedded in the current activity with its historical roots and contradictions, the foreseeable activity in which the contradictions are expansively resolved, and the foreseeable activity in which the contradictions have led to contraction and destruction of opportunities"* (Engeström, 1997, p. 10). The idea of collective zone of proximal development is based on Vygotsky's (1978, p. 86) concepts work of zone of proximal development.

4 THE VIRTUAL PLATFORM TIETOTORI

4.1 Expectations of the virtual platform

Dialogue is seen as the basic tool in the regional cooperation, but as a challenge as well. Creating possibilities for different voices to make themselves heard in the learning forums has been one of the most essential ideas in the project from the very beginning. (Kantola, Lassila, Ritalahti & Kalliokoski, 2005; Ritalahti & Lassila, 2006)

Based on the interviews, dialogue also seemed a contradictory topic in the region of Itä-Uusimaa. The need for dialogue seems to be different depending on the background of the entrepreneur. Whilst old enterprises regarded it sufficient, new ones were in need of more dialogue. As the companies are small and entrepreneur-driven, dialogue plays an important role. Enhancing dialogue was found to be one of the challenges for the virtual learning platform. (Ibid.)

At the moment, there are many different regional projects going on in Itä-Uusimaa, and many of them compete for the entrepreneurs' time and energy. Synergy and dialogue are needed between these different development projects. Helia's role in tourism research could focus on processing and gathering existing information and arranging forums where this information would be easily available for tourism companies and organizations in the region.

According to Helia's senior lecturer Sirpa Lassila (2005) the idea of a virtual learning platform came up in these interviews. All the information the interviewed enterprises needed could be placed in a virtual platform open for them, not only for information search but also for dialogue and networking.

In the interviews made at the beginning of the project the entrepreneurs emphasized their lack of time; because making business takes all their time they cannot spend much time on information retrieval. There was a need for a platform

that would collect all necessary information "under the same roof". This platform could also attract those entrepreneurs who are not often seen or heard in other forums. According to the brainstorms in the seminars mentioned above, the participants emphasized their bad experiences of former virtual platforms and forums they have been involved in. These bad experiences were not easy to define, but some of the identified reasons to them were that the platforms neither were very functional, usable nor up-to-date. Also the lack of suitable links and the content and the form of the information were found a problem. (Ritalahti & Lassila, 2006)

The representatives of tourism companies and regional organizations wanted to have a platform that is open and offers an opportunity for everyone to participate as a producer of more general or company focused information. Interaction was one of the keywords but not in the form of a chat forum. A living virtual platform also meant to them information of interesting meetings and seminars, of current topics under discourse, and instructions for using the platform on the first page. (ibid.)

4.2 The idea of the content and the form of the Platform

The aim was to help the local entrepreneurs to develop their business by offering a platform where they could discuss, inform others and search for new ideas and information. Tietotori is based on an idea of interaction and cooperation, which means that visitors can comment all documents saved at Tietotori and create new material for others to read. Tietotori also serves as home pages for the Learning Network.

This virtual solution goes hand in hand with face to face learning forums. Meetings are planned and prepared at Tietotori and after the meetings memos are available there even for those who could not come to the meeting. Discourse can continue virtually and processes can be made visible.

The actors of tourism sector in the region of Itä-Uusimaa agreed very strongly that the virtual platform must be a platform for learning. They saw the need to communicate with each other and the outside world.

The entrepreneurs and the other actors of tourism sector in the region need information on researches in order to develop their operations and business in general. But this information should be applied to their use and needs. Wanted topics were winter tourism, whether supply and demand meets, and the influence of regional marketing campaigns, regional tourism in numbers, and visitor feedback. A possibility to ask questions or to look for suitable researches via the platform was also emphasized. (Ritalahti & Lassila, 2006)

Information was needed of the regional tourism cluster that includes retailing and culture actors as well. The information needed from other companies will be discussed under the next sub-title.

The entrepreneurs also expressed, that they would appreciate a database with contact information of tourism companies in the region Itä-Uusimaa, in order to look for business partners. It is not only about pure tourism companies the participated entrepreneurs are looking for. Tourists of today are very seldom happy with one or two services a small provider is able to offer – they want more. And for this reason an individual supplier must have a wider network available. Networking was seen very strongly as a tool to look for partnerships, and not only in Itä-Uusimaa but also in other parts of Finland. (Ibid.)

Links and calendar for development events/learning forums were seen important as part of the platform. Preferred links were the links to existing registers, region's tourism enterprises and other actors like educational institutions, congregations, museums, theatres, festivals, municipalities and touristically attractive shops and markets.

Actors in tourism cluster are interested in regional projects that are going on. They want to know if it is possible for them to join and what are the costs. In order to make the decision easier, the projects should present their strategy plans in the platform.

Information on Enterprises

The needs of information concerning the companies present in the database are very basic: a short description of the company with some information of the location. General supply with core products and main season were also requested. Further wishes concerned direct links to companies' home pages and identification of contact persons. This information bank now comprises 90 tourism enterprises.

As to the database the first question that rose was: should there be a regional exclusion? Should only Itä-Uusimaa companies be involved? The second question concerned the tourism cluster in the region: should it be only the core of the cluster or a wider view of it? The participants preferred a wider cluster but the regional definition is still open. But it was emphasized that there should be enough user enterprises in the system.

Even though Eastern Uusimaa is a small province, tourism enterprises do not know each other that well. It is not a question of knowing the owners but a question of knowing the operations and products. According to the entrepreneurs the lack of the knowledge of the two latter ones is an obstacle for a deeper cooperation. (Ritalahti & Lassila, 2006)

4.3 Future of Tietotori

The present or second stage of the Learning Network focuses on making the challenges of research and development work visible in the province, as well as constructing methodological tools for development work. The project for building a virtual learning platform has been an endeavour for that.

For the moment the Learning Network Project is responsible for the development of the virtual learning platform. All the participants are very aware of this, and most of them are a bit worried about the future – what will happen after the project? They don't want to commit to a tool which lives only a short time till the end of the public funding. The vision or view must be in a more long-span action. (Ritalahti & Lassila, 2006)

In the next or third stage of the Learning Network Project, it is essential to develop further these tools in order to make them applicable to entrepreneurs and other actors in tourism business, as well as to establish a new way of interaction among actors and experts in tourism business. At the third stage of the project, the development work will continue with the themes initialized during the second stage, and new potential development challenges will be grasped. The development of winter tourism and innovations will take place entirely in the third stage of the project. (ibid.)

During the gathering stage of the Learning Network Project, enhancing and creating an open dialogue among actors and between projects in tourism has proved to be the essential challenge in the area. Enhancing dialogue and multi-voicedness has been one of the main goals of the Learning Network for tourism business in the region of Itä-Uusimaa. In the future, it will be important to study carefully the dialogue also through the methods of discourse analysis. It will be essential to understand, whose voices will actually be heard, and how to support the Learning forums to become more dialogical. Studying and developing the Learning forums will be the core task through the Learning Network.

The future aims and challenges of the virtual learning platform are linked very closely to the Learning Network Project in the region Itä-Uusimaa. The platform is one tool among other tools introduced by the Learning Network for the enterprises to develop their operations today and in the future.

5 PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Analyzing the situations organized for participative design of Tietotori is an ongoing process. We have audio taped and written to transcriptions and to memos the Planning Workshop (3.5.2005, 2 hours) and the Planning Seminar (23.5.2005,

6 hours). In the paper we will inspect some very preliminary analysis of the data of the Planning Seminar 23.5.2006, and especially of one workshop there.

5.1 Co-configuration as a multi-voiced process

The paper deals with the planning process of Tietotori as a process of 'co-configuration' (Victor & Boynton, 1998). The concept of co-configuration is near to the concept of co-creation (see e.g. Nambisan, 2002; Sawhney & Prandelli, 2000) used in the research of innovations and of product development. According to Victor and Boynton (1998) co-configuration has following characteristics: the object of co-configuration is a product or a service that has a long life-cycle and that will never be finished; that can adapt to the activity of the user. There is also 'customer intelligence' embedded that requires continuous reconfiguration in a dialogue between the user, the producer and the product (Engeström 2004, 80–82).

The views of Bodker and Groenbaek (1998) about a cooperative systems design support our view of a design process as a learning process, and thus, an importance of studying a design process as a learning process also. Hyysalo & Lehenkari (2005) consider the systems design process from the viewpoint of activity theory, and therefore emphasize the historical understanding of design activity besides the viewpoint of user. We have found historical understanding as a challenge for future in our study.

We are writing just now another article focusing on analyzing multi-voicedness of the design process. It will be interesting to see, what kind of "voice gallery" we will find out, and, what happened to different voices. And what voices or whose voices will be listened during the planning process. In the paper we will bring just some examples of the workshop discourse that will shed light on the dilemmatic topics in the discourse.

The workshop inspected here was working out the question: *"What kind of knowledge do you need for supporting the business development of your firm?"*

The dilemmatic discourse

The discourse been going on in the workshop brought up a contradictory like and dilemmatic topic related to a reliability of studies and statistics in tourism business area. On the one hand, the participators thought that reliable statistics are needed for planning their own business activity. On the other, the value of statistics were questioned and the entrepreneurs were not willing to give information about their own business and their customers to increase a reliability of statistics, because of a lack of time.

The theme of a reliability of studies and statistics formed a main topic in the workshop, especially in the beginning of the discourse. The voice of entrepreneur

picked up that statistics are not reliable. Many of the participants told examples of the problems of a reliability of the statistics.

> *"It is my view that the figures (in tourism statistics) are highly unreliable. The number of tourists visiting for instance Loviisa town is based on those tourists who have contacted the tourist office. (Entrepreneur, N6)*
>
> *Year 2001 there was an attempt to find out (the number of the visitors). There were interviews and ...perhaps not so reliable, but done by different way. (Entrepreneur, N2)*
>
> *As far as I am concerned I am too busy to make any statistics of my clients. Neither do I give any figures concerning them to the authorities. (Entrepreneur, N5)*
>
> *Certainly you are obliged to give the figures (to the authorities). (Principal lecturer, N4)*
>
> *I am not obliged to give any figures... I have made an agreement with the police. No one has asked me to give any figures. (Entrepreneur, N5)*
>
> *OK then, in that case it (the lodging house) is not registered. (Principal lecturer, N4)*
>
> *I don't send them anywhere...they have told me that it is enough to have them in a binder. (Entrepreneur, N5)*
>
> *It is really interesting to know, if someone has estimated that in Porvoo there are 700,000 day visitors in a year. A really nice report... It would be important to find figures of the overnight stays. Interesting, that the figures are not requested..." (Entrepreneur, N2)*

From the viewpoint of expansive learning just dilemmatic and contradictory like discourse is interesting, because it will possibly tell something about the developmental tension of activity. The developmental tension and contradiction will often arose as dilemmatic way of talk. (See e.g. Engeström, 2004, 117-118)

The co-configuration of Tietotori can be seen as an activity, in which a lot of experts in tourism business area work together in planning and grasping a shared object. The most of this work is speech; interaction between different kinds of viewpoints, ideas and opinions. Thus, methods of voice analysis are essential for analyzing co-configuration as an activity.

The concept of voice is a core concept in voice analysis. In the paper we understand a voice as a thought, opinion, idea or viewpoint that some person do produce is a certain social situation. The voice is understood also as historically formed and influenced by the personal experiences and by the organization the person presents, as well as by the other persons sharing the social situation and by the voices of them. Also, one person can produce different voices in a same situation. (Engeström, 2004, 112-113; Engeström, R. 1999)

The method of voice analysis is seen in the paper as a tool for studying a multi-voicedness of the co-configuration and for making it visible. The topic of a reliability of statistics is related to an important question of how the knowledge is understood that is basic question when constructing the virtual platform Tietotori. What knowledge is and who do produce it? Somehow the discourse inspected

above give the feelings that knowledge is perceived as coming from somewhere outside, not produced by the actors themselves and from their own activity.

5.2 Example of discourse on Tietotori: regional tourism strategy

Tietotori was opened officially 14th of February 2006. In the same time the province was developing a tourism strategy for the region. The Regional Council of Itä-Uusimaa, which was coordinating the process, wanted to give the tourism actors an opportunity to involve already in the writing of the strategy plan. The writing group just gave the outline for the strategy plan with open questions and published it at Tietotori. Entrepreneurs in the region were able to read the outline and write their comments in the strategy plan. All the comments were visible for other entrepreneurs and also they could be commented. During the four weeks, when the commenting was encouraged, there were 93 visitors in the strategy pages and all together 45 comments made by 12 different persons.

There are clear signs of both hope and fear in the comments. Some entrepreneurs write that in the past they have not been heard in decision making in the region and therefore they do not believe that this time the strategy would bring any difference.

> *"There is no use to create branch strategies as there is no future due to administration which has negative attitude towards entrepreneurship." (Entrepreneur, N9)*

The strategy writing process also receives criticism. Even if the entrepreneur had participated in the discourse actively he still had a feeling that entrepreneur involvement in the process is insufficient.

> *"I would like to come back to the questions that were raised already in the strategy evening. If and when the implementation of the strategy is very much dependent on entrepreneurs, should the entrepreneurs be more actively involved in the strategy work? For some reason I myself have a feeling that strategy work is not at the level in which we could reach the most necessary dimension that is involvement of the entrepreneurs in creating and implementing the strategy. What could help? I would say if I knew." (Entrepreneur, N7)*

When the first draft was published in the virtual platform this topic came up again.

> *"In overall the strategy seemed to be one of the best tourism strategies in Finland. Thank you especially for the actions that you have drawn. The main frame is still production driven or especially administration driven. We can not really talk about strategy, but*

about vision and making the vision reality in administrative sense. This kind of paper has the value of just a paper; it does not guide the practices. No one will deeply involve." *(Entrepreneur, Lecturer, N10)*

The tensions in the discourse seem to appear between the different tourism areas of the region Itä-Uusimaa: archipelago, countryside and old towns which present cultural heritage. Another tension is the customer focus: does the area serve business customers or individual customers?

"So fa the projects in the archipelago have focused on developing services in the archipelago. This benefits those people who have summer cottage or boat as well as those who live in the archipelago... Most of the enterprises which operate in sea tourism business offer services mainly for companies and foreign travelers. ...The products have high quality and they are rather expensive. In order to reach these target groups we need to use different marketing tools." (Entrepreneur, N8)

"I would like to add the word countryside to that text 'Well developed services in the archipelago', because we have important tourism clusters there as well." (Entrepreneur, N12)

"... Should we emphasize more the special characteristics of the region?" (Senior lecturer, N13)

"New models are built all the time both in Finland and abroad, so nurturing the old and valuable could offer also historical knowledge for the visitors. We could use this in marketing our product and services." (Entrepreneur, N11)

"Tourism image of Itä-Uusimaa Region has been discussed also in workshops. It is important to differentiate from other regions. In Finland we have few old towns. Therefore Finland's second oldest town Porvoo and chic Loviisa differentiate positively from the newly built towns. Porvoo River and Loviisa seaside are an important part of regional identity. The tourism interest of the region is mainly built on Porvoo's attraction. Porvoo is part of the Finnish national heritage." (Entrepreneur, N8)

In order to enhance the discourse inspected above and to give alternative ways to participate, The Learning Network arranged a discussion evening 27.2.2006 under the strategy theme. This discourse continued 5.4.2006 in a yearly held seminar called Tourism Parliament and the final strategy paper will be available in the virtual platform.

6 CONCLUSION

In the gathering stage of the Learning Network a stimulating concept of 'learning region' turned up. A learning region can be identified with following characteristics: identity and authenticity based; a shared vision; horizontally and vertically networked actors; developed information and evaluation systems; development strategies. A learning region can be regarded as a metaphor but it can also be understood also as an ideal of regional development; a striven state of

a region that continuously makes visible and develops its practices and social capital. Later, in the project, it will be possible to study, how a learning region and regional identity will be constructed in research and developmental practices, and, in the virtual platform of Tietotori among them.

In the activity of the Learning Network, promoting open dialogue among actors and projects in tourism has proved to be one of the essential challenges in the area. As a matter of fact, enhancing multi-voicedness has been one of the main goals of the Learning Network for Tourism Business in Itä-Uusimaa, and, as a research object as well. In the future, it will be important to study the dialogue through the methods of discourse analysis carefully. It will be essential to understand, what voices and whose voices will actually be heard, and how we can support the learning forums to grow more dialogical. Studying and developing the learning forums will be the core task for the Learning Network through entire project. The region and regional identity were matters that were captured in the different forums of the Learning Network. In a long run, it would be interesting to analyze, whose voice would be listened, in what context that would happen, and, what would that listening mean for the regional development.

The role of the Learning Network is to make more visible, how the region and developmental challenges there are understood and conceptualized in the different discussion forums. The preliminary hypothesis is that these conceptualizations contain essential and contradictory elements related to the regional zone of proximal development. ´The learning region` can be conceptualized as a region that becomes more conscious about its regional characteristics, and contradictions within, which provides a basis for regional development work. In the Learning Network, making tensions shared and visible has been taken as a challenge.

From the activity theoretical viewpoint of learning it is essential to create multi-voiced forums, where the different voices could participate on the process of: -perceiving new kind of common object for regional cooperation; -recognizing and making tensions and challenges in the region more visible; -and making choices about how to progress at the regional zone of proximal development.

Perceiving the Learning Network from activity theoretical perspective - as progressing on the regional learning cycle, hopefully expansive learning cycle, and, as progressing at the regional zone of proximal development - enables that the activity of the Learning Network can be analyzed as a process of recognizing tensions in the region. The object of the Learning Network can be seen as evolving through a multi-voiced discourse. The idea of expansive learning and zone of proximal development as the theoretical-methodological framework has supported the idea that progress takes place through such multi-voiced, tensed discourses. The research and development work of our Learning Network has an important role in finding out and making visible the developmental tensions and contradictions related the tourism business in the region of Itä-Uusimaa. It has been a huge challenge for the Learning Network to perceive a qualitatively new

kind of common object for regional cooperation and development work in tourism business area. The Learning Network is targeting long term developmental work instead of answering only situational needs for cooperation and development, as before. As a consequence, it will be important that research and development work are progressing hand in hand in a close dialogue. In future, it will be necessary not only to carry out development actions but also to conceptualize the phenomena we are working with.

Also, one of the difficult challenges in the Learning Network has been that it is not easy to go beyond the orthodox empirical and rational Western epistemology. Most of the participants of Learning Network are not that familiar with the notion of Action research, or the idea of 'extended epistemology'. As a consequence, the participants do not easily grasp what is or could be regarded as 'practical, living knowledge', that would be useful to people in their everyday conduct of their lives/tourism business. Knowledge is easily understood as a traditional way; as an information coming somewhere outside, not being produced from the own activity of participators and by themselves.

Ideally, knowing will be more valid – richer, deeper, more true to life and more useful – if different ways of knowing are congruent with each other; if our knowing is grounded in our experience, expressed through our stories and images, understood through ideas, concepts and theories which make sense to us, and expressed in worthwhile action in our lives (Reason 1999). These ideas would form challenge when developing Tietotori and the Learning Network as entire in the future.

It is also a question of empowerment; how the micro-firms could affect and participate more to the developmental work in the region in the future, and, to construct the region as a learning region as subjects, in active roles and possible as coordinators of subprojects, too.

In this paper, the process of planning the virtual Tietotori is perceived as a process of co-configuration and collective learning. The paper describes the backgrounds of Tietotori and the planning process of it, that process was purposed to be multi-voiced, targeted at shaping conceptions of the virtual platform. The paper also inspects one example of the discourse that has been going on quite recently at Tietotori. The planning discourses of Tietotori and the discourse have been going on at Tietotori have been preliminary analyzed as an example of a discourse picking up tensions related to development work of tourism business in the region Itä-Uusimaa.

In this stage, after the preliminary analysis of the data, there seems to be more questions turned up for future study than ready-made answers to the questions. It will be of interest to analyze future efforts on how the region and regional development will be identified through discourses, and what forms discussions may actually take. It is important to find out how the shared process of perceiving

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and conceptualizing the region, its identity and developmental challenges, does contribute to constructing Itä-Uusimaa as a learning region.

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