

DELIVERABLE 6.1

Report: A Framework for Studying Communities of Practice in a Media Cluster Context

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Part of Work Package 6:
Media workers as communities of practice



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Media Clusters Brussels – MCB – is a collaborative and interdisciplinary research project of the Brussels Capital Region involving the three leading universities of Brussels, VUB, ULB and USL-B. The aim is to analyse the many facets of the media industry located in the Brussels Capital Region and explore the development of clusters.

The *Projet de Plan Régional de Développement Durable / Ontwerp van Gewestelijk Plan voor Duurzame Ontwikkeling* for Brussels (2013), approved by the Brussels Regional Government on 12th December 2013, identifies the cultural and creative industries as one of the four key sectors of the metropolitan economy, and more specifically proposes a media city at Reyers as the first strategic cluster (Pôle Reyers) to develop. However, despite the fact that the Brussels Region is committed to foster the development of the media sector, there is up until now hardly any empirical data available about the structure and dynamics of the media industry in Brussels. This project aims at creating socio-economic value for the media industry in the Brussels Region and beyond by providing decision-makers with the in-depth knowledge they need regarding the media industry in Brussels while accompanying the phases of implementation of the Pôle Reyers. The overarching research question is: How can the structure and dynamics of the media sector in the Brussels metropolis be enhanced to improve its social and economic roles?

MCB is divided in six **Work Packages**. Work Package 1 offers a general overview, definitions and common framework of the project. Work Packages 2 & 3 focus on Brussels media institutions by studying Brussels' media clusters from a macro and socio economical perspective. Work Packages 4 & 5 focus on the media workers within Brussels from a micro perspective and Work Package 6 on the communities the media workers form to create interactions and communities of learning from a meso perspective. These three points of interest, media institutions, media workers and media communities, enable MCB to grasp all dynamics of media clusters in Brussels.

More information on the Media Clusters Brussels project is available on the Internet (www.mediaclusters.brussels).

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Scope of this report

This report aims at providing a theoretical and methodological framework for studying communities of practice in the media sector in the Brussels Region. It is the first Deliverable of **Work Package 6** on “Media workers as communities of practice”, which is handled by PReCoM (Center for Research on Communication and Media) at Université Saint-Louis – Bruxelles. WP 6 focuses on how and why Brussels media workers (should) create communities of practice in order to interact with each other, share knowledge and develop new practices. In order to do so, WP 6 adopts a meso level approach where other WPs adopt either a macro and socio-economical perspective (WPs 2 and 3 on clusters and media companies) or a micro perspective (WPs 4 and 5 on media workers). The findings of this Deliverable will be used in the future research of Work Package 6 to scope the framework.

All the future Deliverables will be built on the findings of this report:

Deliverable 6.2 - Overview report on existing and emerging communities of practice in the media sector in Brussels.

Deliverable 6.3 - Detailed report on communities of practice, triangulating quantitative and qualitative results.

Deliverable 6.4 - Workshop in order to present findings to relevant researchers and stakeholders.

Deliverable 6.5 - End-Report: Future prospects and recommendation for fostering communities of practice in the Brussels media sector.

Key findings

What are communities of practice?

- Communities of practice are “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger, 2006, p.1).
- They are based on three characteristics: a common domain of interest, joint activities and regular interactions within a community, and a shared repertoire of resources creating the practice.
- They can be of different kinds (within or across organisations, self-driven or artificial, more or less virtual...) and develop through different kinds of activities such as after work meetings, workshops, or more informal meetings or gatherings.

Why should we study communities of practice in a media cluster context?

- Studying communities of practice helps to bridge the gap between the micro- and the macro-levels of analysis: it helps to understand the structures and processes through which media workers interact with each other and thereby develop shared practices.
- Communities of practice are known for being a key driver of innovation, which is indeed a critical output expected from media clustering.
- Identifying these communities and understanding their needs, dynamics and success factors will provide decision makers, media organisations and other stakeholders with various insights on how to enhance their potentials in a media cluster context.
- It will also help to identify the different kinds of workers and professions taking part in the current innovation process, as well as identifying some key and influential people in the Brussels’ media sector whose inputs may be relevant.

How do we plan to study them?

- We will *identify* the main communities of practice in the Brussels media sector using in a first step online search and the snowball method. In a second step a survey (in association with the other Work Packages) and semi-structured interviews will help us to identify more confidential communities of practice that may have stayed under our radar.
 - Through an in-depth analysis of the data collected through a survey, semi-structured interviews and direct observations, we will study the structures and dynamics of these communities of practice and *characterize* them along different dimensions, which will provide a comprehensive overview of the communities of practice in Brussels' media sector.
 - We will also analyse the *needs* and the *potentials* of these communities of practice for the development of a lively media sector in Brussels and highlight the key *success factors* that are relevant for different initiatives and stakeholders.
 - The analysis of the communities of practice in the Brussels media sector will focus on 7 parameters (the "7 Ps"): place, proximity, pertinence, profile, path-dependency, policies and performance.
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Table of contents

Scope of this report	3
Key findings	4
Table of contents	6
Introduction	7
Part 1: Approaching communities of practice in Brussels' media sector...	8
What are communities of practice in the Brussels media sector? An illustration	9
Etienne Wenger and the situated learning approach	10
The sociolinguistic approach	13
The knowledge management approach	15
The project's definition of communities of practice	19
Part 2: The parameters of communities of practice from a cluster perspective	21
First parameter: Places of communities of practice	22
Second parameter: Proximity within communities of practice	23
Third parameter: Pertinence of the communities of practice	24
Fourth parameter: Profile of the members	25
Fifth parameter: Path-dependency of communities of practice	27
Sixth parameter: Policies for communities of practice	28
Seventh parameter: Performance of the communities of practice	29
Part 3: Future Research Methods and Conclusion	31
Ethnographic approaches	31
(Semi-)structured interviews and surveys	32
Conclusion: Where do we go from here?	34
Appendix 1: References	36

Introduction

This report aims to provide a framework for researching the communities through which media workers share and develop new work practices. **Communities of practice are groups of people, formal or informal, where members are sharing knowledge and develop practices** (Wenger, 1998). They are of noticeable interest as they are linking workers and companies with each other, and are a valuable asset for clusters as they are seen as means to foster cooperation and innovation, which are key elements for a cluster success. Even if they were not referred to as communities of practice per se, various works and studies on clusters identified places, groups or individuals helping knowledge and innovation to spread as essential for a working and successful cluster (Porter, 1990, 2000; Hakanson, 2003; Tallman et al., 2004; Cooke, 2006; Chesnel et al., 2013). Innovation is a core purpose for clusters, and anything that can foster it is much valued.

This report is divided in three main parts: the first part is a theoretical approach towards communities of practice, with some examples and a look at different approaches, the second part consists in the elaboration of the seven parameters (places, proximity, pertinence, profile, path-dependency, policies and performance) for studying communities of practice, and the final part introduces different methods we could use to study communities of practice in the Brussels media sector.

In the first part, after giving an illustration of what are media communities of practice in Brussels, **we discuss different approaches and concepts** that will contribute to identify, study and analyse communities of practices in the Brussels media sphere and to understand how media workers develop practices while interacting with each other. Thus the first part presents the state-of-the-art on communities of practice, addresses how this concept first appeared and has been studied and analysed, and discusses the most frequently used definitions and characteristics. This will help us to define what are the different characteristics making a community of practice relevant for our research.

The second part of this report will **elaborate further the seven parameters** identified in Deliverable 1.1b from the perspective of communities of practice. The first parameter, place, identifies the physical location and concentration of existing communities of practice in Brussels. The second parameter, proximity, points out the different kinds of links or interconnections existing between different communities of practice and between the members of these communities. The third parameter, pertinence, addresses the domain of these communities (are they relevant for media clusters?) and their composition. The fourth parameter, profile, analyses the profiles and roles of the members of

communities of practice. The fifth parameter, path-dependency, looks at the different historical and institutional factors that can explain why communities of practice are how they are today. The sixth parameter, policies, approaches the different official frameworks, actions, incentives and legal statutes that impede, encourage or regulate communities of practice. Finally, the seventh parameter, performance, analyses the benefits that media workers and media organisations in a cluster gain from participating in communities of practice. Through the analysis of these 7 parameters the study will provide important insights to consider for implementing new communities of practice or supporting better existing ones, and thereby bringing a fresh dynamic in the Brussels media sector.

The third part of this report is **a preliminary approach to the main methods** that researchers use to study communities of practice: ethnographic studies, (semi-) structured interviews and surveys. We will discuss the relevance of these methods in the context of Work Package 6.

Part 1: Approaching communities of practice in Brussels' media sector

Before going in depth in the different approaches to communities of practice, **it seems relevant to give here an example of what can be a community of practice of media workers in Brussels.** This will help to understand in a concrete manner the central concept of this report. As explained in the introduction a community of practice brings together workers who share a common interest and who are meeting on a regular basis to exchange and share their knowledge. We have already identified a few of those in Brussels, and we will give the example of two of them: the Medialab sessions and Storycode. We will then have a deeper look at the different approaches and fields we could use to study communities of practice. Exploring these will allow us to identify relevant elements for our Media Clusters Brussels perspective. This report focuses on three main fields that have been more interested in communities of practice than others. Among them are the situated learning approach, which was at the origin of the concept of communities of practice, the sociolinguistic approach, and the knowledge management approach. Finally, we will attempt to give our own

definition of what we consider as relevant communities of practice for media clusters in Brussels.

What are communities of practice in the Brussels media sector? An illustration

Brussels-based media workers willing to share their knowledge and to learn new practices can meet up regularly at different kinds of events in the Belgian capital. **These after-work workshops are based on a common principle: media workers (and amateurs) come at their own initiative to present new ideas and projects they are working on.** The audience, constituted of other media workers, is then invited to interact, to suggest and propose changes to the projects, and all this finishes with a drink and some chit-chat:

- (1) The first workshop, "Medialab sessions", is a concept created by Romain Saillet, a French journalist who organises brainstorming events for media workers. The meeting occurs every second Monday of each month at the European Communication School (ECS) of Brussels, it is free and anyone can come. The goal of these after-work sessions is to meet, share, brainstorm and have fun with other people and colleagues working in the media sector.
- (2) The second workshop is "Storycode Brussels", a community dedicated to transmedia creation and innovative storytelling. They organise at least two meetings per year in the IHECS buildings (Institut des Hautes Études des Communications Sociales) in Brussels. The idea is quite similar to the Medialab Sessions: conferences and workshops are organized for journalists to present ideas and projects, and to help them creating a team, finding mentors, fundings, and opportunities to publish or broadcast their stories.

The principle for both events is roughly the same: participants come with ideas of projects they have or would like to do and pitch, brainstorm, express their needs and get feedback. At the end of each presentation (15-20 minutes) a round of questions and answers (Q&A) is organized with the audience, constituted mainly of other media workers and students. After these formal presentations and Q&A the floor is given to the audience and anyone with an idea, a project or who just wants to introduce himself can take the microphone and speak. What is interesting and represents a great value is the diversity of profiles, backgrounds and jobs of the participants. These sessions are not made exclusively for journalists, but really for all media enthusiasts. Amongst the participants are journalists of course, but also managers, web developers and designers, coders,

cameramen, writers etc. Some of them are working for “traditional media” (e.g. *L’Echo*, RTL), other for “new media” (e.g. Emakina, Newsant, MediaMonkey), but the majority are freelancers and students looking for ideas and contacts. These events, where new ideas and innovation are key elements, can be considered as activities of communities of practice as they fit perfectly with the **definition given by Etienne Wenger: media workers having a same domain of interest and meeting regularly to share their knowledge and experience** (Wenger, 1998). Mentioning these examples as a preliminary point allows the reader to visualise more concretely what we are talking about when we mention communities of practice for media workers in Brussels. But as we will see later on not all communities of practice have this scheme, and not all gatherings of workers are a community of practice. These differentiations will be developed with the help of the different approaches and parameters examined in this report.

Etienne Wenger and the situated learning approach

The concept of communities of practice has originally been developed by Etienne Wenger and Jean Lave (1991) when they were working on situated learning. Based on a social learning approach, the idea is that there are other ways to learn, receive and share knowledge than in schools during classes or lectures, or within companies during trainings. Wenger and Lave noticed that workers are sharing knowledge outside of the usual framework and on a voluntary basis. They studied alternative places where knowledge was shared, such as workshops, gardens and field trips, and how it was shared. In their work, Wenger and Lave focused on apprenticeship as a learning model. They realized that apprenticeship was much more than just a vertical relationship between a student and a master, and that it involved various social relationships. An apprentice can go from workshop to workshop, meet several masters or other apprentices, and the knowledge is shared through social interaction.

Wenger kept working on those communities where knowledge was shared in order to develop further the concept of communities of practice. He noticed that people who were part of this exchange of knowledge had a shared interest and a shared passion (Wenger, 1998) and he defined communities of practice as **“groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly”** (Wenger 2006, p.1). According to him communities of practice are made of three crucial characteristics (Wenger, 1998; 2006; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002):

- (1) **The domain:** the members of a community of practice have a shared domain of interest, to which they are committed. They also have shared competences that distinguish them from other people and they have a certain level of expertise. In the case of media workers the domain can be transversal and across professions (e.g. transmedia storytelling) or specific (cameramen, special effects engineers, reporters, web developers...). The fact that communities of practice can gather people from different professions but sharing a common domain of interest is interesting for our research as it highlights the links between the workers regardless of their actual job. This allows us to consider interactions between workers that we may not have suspected otherwise. While doing exploratory research we have been witnessing communities of practice of media workers gathering journalists, infographists, web developers, cameramen etc. at the same event. These people were there regardless of their profession, because of a common domain of interest: creating new multimedia news coverage.
- (2) **The community:** interaction is at the core of the community. Having the same job or the same title does not make for a community of practice unless members interact and learn together. In pursuing their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. This can take different forms and occur in various locations. So far we witnessed that the workshop format was often used in Brussels. Workers would meet after work hours and do some presentations of their ideas and ongoing or future projects. They use visual presentations and videos of projects or examples to initiate the conversation and then exchange ideas over a debate. Often the sessions are filmed and put online for future access or for people who could not come. Through these joint activities the community members build relationships. To illustrate this we can mention the example of the International Press Center in Brussels, hosting around 25 media companies in downtown Brussels near the European Commission. The people in this building share the same professions; they have a common domain of interest, but as witnessed and corroborated by workers from the building they do not interact with each other. This lack of interaction prevents us to say that the people working in this building are a community.
- (3) **The practice:** for Wenger, "members of a community of practice are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems — in short a shared practice. This takes time and sustained interaction" (Wenger, 2006, p. 2). The practice is how these people do their work as media workers. Through their participation in communities they get access to, and develop new

knowledge and new work practices that are relevant to their domain of interest.

Communities of practice are not a new phenomenon. They may have always existed, says Wenger, and people are quite often part of one or several communities of practice without realising it. As Wenger puts it, **communities of practice “are everywhere. They are a familiar experience, so familiar perhaps that it often escapes our attention”** (Wenger, 2006, p.3). The point that communities of practice are part of our life without people being aware of them is acknowledged by most of the researchers working in the field (Roberts, 2006). For Wenger, the sense of belonging to a community sharing a common passion is the first clue to realize that one may be part of a community of practice, and it is a key element. It is through the commitment of the members that such a community can exist. It is for him the first and the most crucial characteristic for communities of practice, and Wenger (1998, p.189) distinguishes three modes of belonging to such social learning systems:

- the *engagement* or involvement, achieved through doing things together;
- the *imagination*, where members of a community of practice are part of one because they imagine an ideal and orient themselves in order to achieve it;
- the *alignment*: the participant align himself with the other members beyond his own ideal because he can see the benefits in having an effective community.

For Wenger **communities of practice can be considered as a social fabric of learning**. They have an important value for individuals and organisations, as they are a place for preservation and creation of knowledge: “They can preserve histories of learning as living practices, not just books and databases. For that reason, they are also the ideal context for ensuring that new generations of members are ready to carry a competence into the future” (Wenger 1998, p.251). Communities of practice put together competences and close interaction, which are likely to result in the production of new knowledge. They are also places where debate can be vivid through what Wenger calls the “negotiation of meaning”, as members are talking and debating with each other through *participation* and *reification* (representation of facts or assertions). This allows a quick spread of information. When one member acquires a new piece of information, it can quickly become everyone’s.

To **sum up the relevance of communities of practice for media clusters**, we can use this longer extract from Wenger:

“communities of practice are organisational assets because they are the social fabric of the learning of organisations. Not being formal entities, however, they are a resource that is easily overlooked. They are important

organisational assets whether they are contained within an organisation or stretched beyond its boundaries, and whether it is fully or only partially in the context of the organisation that they define their enterprises. In some cases, it is precisely their ability to cross institutional lines that makes them crucial. An organisation's ability to deepen and renew its learning thus depends on fostering – or at the very least not impeding – the formation, development and transformation of communities of practice, old and new" (Wenger, 1998, p. 253).

Since Wenger has developed the concept of community of practice, many researchers have been using it in their respective fields. We will now have a closer look at how the concept has been appropriated by the sociolinguistic and the knowledge management approaches and what are the inputs they brought that can be relevant for this study.

The sociolinguistic approach

Sociolinguistics has also used the concept of community of practice. Especially relevant here is the work of **Penelope Eckert (2006, 2008) focusing on the relation between linguistic style variation, social identity and social practice**. Eckert argues that the community of practice approach provides a valuable input to sociolinguistics because it offers a way to relate linguistic variations to social groupings that is different from the speech community approach. The concept of speech community refers to the fact that people within a social or cultural group have shared rules of speech (e.g. Hymes, 1986). For Hymes (1986), members of a speech community use shared rules to interact and understand each other. Hymes explains that members of a speech community use a specific way to talk that will only be understood by people of the community. An observer from the outside will be able to identify the words, the sentences, but will not understand the meaning of the communication. According to Hymes one can be able to distinguish the words and the grammar used by a group of people but may miss the meaning of the message if one is not familiar with the rules for the conduct and the interpretation of speech that are constitutive of that community.

Eckert's point is that the community of practice approach allows **performing an analysis of linguistic variation and social identity on the level of the individuals and their interactions**. Unlike speech communities, which are groups of people defined by broad social categories such as place, age, gender or class, communities of practice are groups of people who are there willingly, who are interacting with each other regularly and thereby create and share new practices. Instead of grouping individuals on the mere basis of, say, their

geographical location or their social class, the community of practice approach looks at actual groupings that are intentional and created through shared practices. Or, to put it simply, the concept of communities of practice allows sociolinguists to identify groups through their social interactions instead of their social background. As can already be seen, there is an ethnographic perspective in this approach to communities of practice that disrupts with the more traditional sociolinguistic approaches based on those fundamental social categories.

This idea is interesting for our research as it echoes findings from clusters analysis: it is not because people are in the same building or the same place that they develop a shared practice or identity, and companies who have offices next to each other will not necessarily cooperate. In other words, co-location does not necessarily mean interaction, shared practice and common identity. Plus, it suggests that new work practices in the media sector do not emerge out of broad, abstract categories, but rather that they come from media workers themselves who interactively develop practices regardless of their social category or profession, as long as they are committed to shared (transversal) domains of interest.

In order to characterize communities of practice, Eckert rephrases the definition given by Lave and Wenger to “a collection of people who engage on an on-going basis in some common endeavour” (Eckert, 2006, p.1). Like Wenger, Eckert highlights **conditions that are “crucial” according to her for defining a community of practice, and that would fit for our research:** “a shared experience over time, and a commitment to shared understanding” (Eckert, 2006, p.1). To identify the possible communities of practice she studies a common speech practice that will characterize the community. According to her, the commitment to a community of practice (even if the participants may not be aware that they are part of one) shows the member’s will and determination to belong to a group, which may lead to the development of a unique linguistic style.

A linguistic style is a way for a distinct group of people to interact with each other by using specific words, idioms or locutions. Doing so gives people using them a sense of belonging. As she explains, linguistic styles are on the same level as other styles (material style, clothing style, consumption style...), which are, once combined, creating a common identity and developing social interaction (Eckert, 2008). These linguistic styles are created through a process of “bricolage”, whereby participants take elements here and there as they suit them to create their own language and thus their own social identity. In that sense, Eckert writes, « it should be clear that the speech community and the community of practice approaches are both necessary and complementary, and that the value of each depends on having the right abstract categories and finding

the communities of practice in which those categories are most salient. In other words, the best analytic process would involve feedback between the two approaches » (Eckert, 2006, p.3).

To illustrate her thoughts, Eckert gives the example of a group of white working class Italian-American women who are meeting regularly and are developing their own way of speaking. For Eckert these women will not develop ways of speaking because they are women, from the working class or Italian-American, they will develop them from their day-to-day experiences that they share in their group, to which they belong. By creating this specific way of speaking these women are increasing the sense of belonging to a community.

To take another example, linguistic styles might also be part of the practices developed by media communities of practice. A community of practice of foreign journalists based in Brussels to cover only the European institutions may have a specific linguistic style much more similar to the one of a European parliament workers community of practice than to the one of a cross-media start-up community of practice based in downtown Brussels. And this crossmedia start-up community of practice may have a linguistic style very close to the web developers or video games creator's communities of practice.

These examples illustrate the fact that **shared practices (such as linguistic styles) that are emerging in communities create links between the members who are engaged in a common endeavour**. It helps the members to identify each other but also others to identify them.

The knowledge management approach

The review of the literature on communities of practice shows that managerial approaches can be another interesting entry to the topic. Indeed, a certain strand of knowledge management aims at providing managers with a comprehensive understanding of communities of practice and explaining them what could be the benefits for their organisations should they want to create and foster such communities. Our own objective in this report is not to provide a user manual on communities of practice to decision makers but to highlight **the main possibilities and limits of communities of practice from a managerial perspective**. As explained before, communities of practice host interactions and foster cooperation and creativity, which are considered by decision makers and managers as two very important dimensions of successful clusters. It is thus important for them to understand the dynamics of communities of practice and how they can be fostered without being disrupted (Lewis, 2012).

Knowledge management is a multi-disciplined approach that emerged in the 1990's (Nonaka, 1991) to achieve organizational objectives by making the best

use of knowledge. "It focuses on processes such as acquiring, creating and sharing knowledge and the cultural and technical foundations that support them" (University of North Carolina, 2007). Knowledge management has been quickly linked to communities of practice by various researchers (Kim et al., 2003; Wright, 2005; Bootz, 2013). As Wright explains, the **inputs from communities of practice theory to knowledge management allowed to bring the human back into scope**. According to him, at its beginning knowledge management failed to focus on the workers. It is when knowledge management scholars tried to understand knowledge processes on an individual level that they linked them to communities of practice. For knowledge management, understanding how knowledge is spread is key but researchers were focused on the vertical spread of knowledge, from the top (managers) to the bottom (workers), but communities of practice helped them to understand the horizontal spread of knowledge (from worker to worker). According to Wright, knowledge management researchers are more and more interested in natural knowledge processes, such as communities of practice, and are thus keener to explore the connections between individuals and knowledge (Wright, 2005)

Table 1 gives an overview of different kinds of communities of practice according to knowledge management research.

Table 1 – The different kinds of communities of practice.

Researchers identified various kinds of communities of practice, which we can classify as follows (Wenger, 2006; Roberts, 2006; Snyder & de Souza Briggs, 2003; Amin & Roberts, 2008; Cohendet et al., 2010):
- Self-driven communities of practice could be considered as the original ones. Mostly informal, they have been created by the desire of workers with a common passion to learn and to share from each other (Wenger, 2006). Unlike the artificial communities of practice no return on investment is expected, only the fulfilment and the satisfaction of its members.
- Artificial communities of practice are created by managers within a company or a public institution to foster cooperation between the workers. Managers saw the potential in communities of practice and want to encourage workers to cooperate by « structuring spontaneity » in order to get a strategic advantage (Roberts, 2006). The SafeCities example shows us an artificial community of practice, developed intentionally by an institution (Snyder & de Souza Briggs, 2003).

- **Professional communities of practice** can be artificial, but they don't have to be. Workers can be committed in their work and passionate about their jobs, and will create and be part of a work related community of practice without their employers or managers being aware. The example of Xerox where workers shared tips about sales and led to the creation of the Eureka! Management tool is a famous example (Langelier, 2005). Professional communities of practice is a term used in opposition to non-professional communities of practice, such as hobbies (repairing cars or computers, drawing, or other sports activities).

- **Virtual communities of practice** can be of any kind (artificial, self-driven, professional...) but will differ in the fact that members don't interact physically with one another. They will use social media as a communication tool to share their experiences and knowledge. Where non-virtual communities of practice imply a physical and geographical proximity to meet occasionally, virtual communities of practice can be global. Members may never meet in person, but they are connected through their passion with the help of social media (Amin & Roberts, 2008).

While Wenger developed his first thoughts about communities of practice, he did not initially focus on their dynamics with a managerial eye (Cox, 2005). It is only later, in 2002, that he and two colleagues wrote the book *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge*, which aims at helping managers to deal with this issue. Based on this book Etienne Wenger created a start-up guide for cultivating communities of practice¹ in which he explains what are the benefits of communities of practice, how they work, how to foster them and what are the critical success factors.

Wenger identifies **several benefits of communities of practice along several dimensions**: values for the workers and for the organisation, both in the short and long terms. For the members, being in a community will, in the short term, help them with challenges, allow them to have access to expertise, increase their confidence, make them having fun with colleagues and allow them to appreciate that they are doing a meaningful work. In the long term it will increase their personal developments, their reputation, their professional identity, their network and their marketability. For the organisation, the benefits of having communities of practice will allow, on the short term, problem solving, time saving, knowledge sharing, synergies across units and a reuse of resources. On the long term it will

¹ Wenger, E. (2002). *Cultivating communities of practice: a quick start-up guide based on the book « Cultivating communities of practice », Harvard Business Review Press, 2002. Retrieved 13 June 2015 from http://www.ewenger.com/theory/start-up_guide_PDF.pdf*

help the organisation to increase strategic capabilities and innovation, to keep abreast, to keep and attract talents, and to develop new strategies.

For Wenger it all starts with a strategic context in which problems must be identified. In order to overcome these problems there should be an articulation between a strategic value proposition and a need to leverage knowledge. Once this strategic context is established, Wenger identifies **five ways to encourage communities of practice**. First, educating (I) the workers in the community can take several aspects such as conducting workshops for workers and managers to understand the implications involved or helping people to appreciate how communities of practice are inherently self-defined and self-managed. Second comes the support (II), which starts by identifying needs in terms of time, infrastructure and technology, and then consists in providing support. Third is what he calls "get going" (III). For this part he recommends to have a few pilot communities going as soon as possible that will create examples and allow people to learn by doing. In order to do so Wenger recommends interviewing members in order to understand issues, to identify potential leaders, to gather a core group for the launch process and to encourage them to take responsibility for sharing their knowledge. The fourth step is encouraging (IV) the members of the community of practice by finding sponsors to encourage participation, by valuing the work of the community and by publicizing success. Finally, the last step is integrating (V) the communities of practice within the organisation. For that he recommends to create within the organisation different processes and structures in order to include and integrate the communities in the way the organisation works. It can be done through identifying and removing obvious barriers (in terms of time and availability of the workers, for instance) and through aligning key structural and cultural elements.

Finally Wenger identifies the **critical factors for a successful community of practice**, which he lists as follows: the community needs a domain that energises a core group, and skilful and reputable coordinators. It also needs involvement of experts to address details of practice and a right rhythm of mixed activities. Organisations must have a strategic relevance of domain, a visible management sponsorship, a variety of formal and informal structures, an availability of adequate resources and finally a consistent attitude from the management.

Understanding **how communities of practice are working across organisations is a key element for the Media Clusters Brussels project**. If the point is to improve cooperation and innovation between the workers and the companies on site, communities of practice will have a major role to play. It is important for policy makers and companies' managers to realise what are the things to do and to not do if they want to foster or create such communities.

The project's definition of communities of practice

In order to study communities of practice, **it is essential to define what kinds of entities the researcher wants to enclose under this definition** (Lorenz & Barlatier, 2007). As observed above, communities of practice can take various forms, and there is not one exclusive definition that rules on whether an entity is or is not a community of practice. This is why based on the existing literature we have to delineate further our research focus in line with the objectives of the Work Package 6 and the Media Clusters Brussels project as a whole.

From the situated learning approach we borrow the three “main characteristics” of communities of practice as defined by Wenger: the domain, the community and the practice. Based on the sociolinguistic approach we will focus on groups of people not because they form a sociologically coherent category (i.e. same profession) but because they interact with each other and thereby create a shared practice. Finally, the knowledge management approach allows us to characterize further the different communities of practice being active in Brussels and to evaluate their added value and benefits for media clusters.

We will **leave aside the internal communities of practice** (inside a company or an organisation and closed to outside members) in order to focus only on cross-organisational communities of practice. This choice is dictated by the fact that we need to see how media clusters are benefiting from communities of practice. Internal communities of practice, in addition to be less likely identifiable and to have a more restricted access, are less relevant for us as they do not imply an exchange of knowledge between different companies or organisations within a cluster. They are then less relevant from a cluster perspective than cross-organisational communities, where practices and knowledge are shared, and where innovation can be beneficial for various companies from the cluster. In this respect we are especially interested in those communities of practice that are connected to the different media clusters that will be identified by Work Package 2. By “connected” we mean that members of a community are working in one of the identified media clusters.

To sum up, an entity, in order to be considered as a relevant community of practice for Media Clusters Brussels, will need to:

- Cut across several media organisations, be open to participants “from outside”;
- Have a defined domain relevant for a media cluster (creating new content, new ways to produce media etc.);
- Be a lively community (committed members, regular activities);

- Develop a shared practice through joint activities (regular interaction, use of tools to share knowledge, etc.);
- Have amongst its members media professionals working in one of the identified media clusters or be potentially relevant to media professionals working in these clusters.

Table 2 – The importance of communities of practice for media clusters.

Communities of practice are “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger, 2006, p.1). They are based on three characteristics:

1. Common domain of interest;
2. Joint activities and regular interactions within a community;
3. A shared repertoire of resources creating the practice

They can be of different kinds (within or across organisations, self-driven or artificial, more or less virtual...) and develop through different kinds of activities such as after work meetings, workshops, or more informal meetings or gatherings.

Studying communities of practice is important for media clusters because:

- Studying communities of practice helps to bridge the gap between the micro- and the macro-levels of analysis: it helps to understand the structures and processes through which media workers interact with each other and thereby develop shared practices.
- Identifying these communities and understanding their needs, dynamics and success factors will provide decision makers, media organisations and other stakeholders with various insights on how to enhance their potentials in a media cluster context.
- It will also help to identify the different kinds of workers and professions taking part in the current innovation process, as well as identifying some key and influential people in the Brussels’ media sector whose inputs may be relevant.

Part 2: The parameters of communities of practice from a cluster perspective

As mentioned in Work Package 1, three different entities of media clusters have been identified: media companies, media workers and media communities. Deliverable 1.1b created a general framework to approach these entities from a cluster perspective. This framework is constituted of seven parameters (referred to as the 7Ps): place, proximity, pertinence, profile, path-dependency, policy, and performance. The table below (Table 3) shows the different parameters, how they were understood for clusters and how we will address them for studying communities of practice (cf. Deliverable 1.1b).

Table 3 – Communities of practice within the 7P framework.

Parameter	Understood for clusters as	Question for communities of practice
Place	...the geographical scale and local conditions influencing the media cluster's dynamics.	Where are the existing communities of practice for media workers in Brussels, where do they actually develop and share their practice (online and offline)?
Proximity	...the topographical and topological nearness influencing the media cluster's dynamics.	What are the links, relations and bounds between the different kinds of communities of practice? Through which kinds of activities do they develop these?
Pertinence (of the CoP)	...the scale of the cluster in quantity of entities and concentration for the place linked to the development phase of the cluster.	What are the different domains of these communities of practice? How many members are needed within a community of practice to make it pertinent?
Profile (of the members)	...the type of entities and their functions within a cluster.	Who are the members composing communities of practice? What are their profiles and roles inside the communities of practice?
Path-dependency	...the historic litigation , the origins and historically developed patterns influencing the dynamics of the cluster.	What is the evolution of communities of practice for media workers in Brussels? What can explain that they are what they are today?
Policy	...the media governance tools from all levels influencing the media cluster's dynamics.	Which policies, if any, (regional policies, community policies and organisational policies) are regulating communities of practice? What are the incentives that could help implementing them, and how are communities of practice responding?
Performance	...the endogenous and exogenous externalities that media clusters produce.	What output can we expect from communities of practice and how can we measure their performance? What are the benefits on the short-term and long-term for members, for companies, for the cluster?

First parameter: Places of communities of practice

In cluster research place is understood in terms of geographical scale. Similarly place is a relevant parameter of communities of practice as it gives indications on the scale of the communities we are observing. **The literature usually identifies three main categories of communities of practice depending on their scales:** communities of practice occurring inside a single company or an organisation, communities of practice developing across several organisations (thus gathering members from various companies) and online communities of practice, which develop through social networks sites or other web platforms (Wenger, 1998; 2003; Snyder & de Souza Briggs, 2003).

Communities of practice within a single organisation can be “self-driven”, meaning that they are at the initiative of the workers, or “artificial”, at the initiative of the managers. In theory they are an added value for the company but can become hermetic to innovation, as they won’t be easily opened to new people who could bring new ideas and inputs (Roberts, 2006; Chesnel et al., 2013). **Yet today communities of practice are increasingly open and interconnected**, one reason being that they use the web to communicate and expand the reach of their activities and outputs. This might make it more difficult to draw a line between “purely” internal communities of practice and the others. In any case those internal communities are not the main focus of this study for two main reasons. First, in a cluster perspective, we are interested in the interactions between companies inside a media cluster. Secondly, there might be many internal communities of practice and these might be difficult to access during the time span of the study. However, we may refer to them in future Deliverables, as it is expected that during the interviews media workers will mention what they do inside their companies to share knowledge and practices.

Our focus in this study will be on communities of practice that are wittingly cross-organisational, with members gathering in one of the member organisations or outside in a third location (university, bar, start-up incubators...). Workers going there come from various companies and backgrounds and are often interacting outside of their working hours, showing a proper commitment. Moreover, we are interested in **the geographical locations of the joint activities** organised by the communities of practice. Through the analysis of the place parameter of communities of practice in Brussels we will answer questions such as where are they gathering? Why these places? Are they moving or stable? Do they need to be physically close to the companies and the media clusters? Can we notice a specific concentration of communities of practice in some areas of the city and how can we explain it? The answers to these questions will hopefully

bring insights for Brussels Region decision makers to develop strategies for attracting and supporting communities of practice in the city, which would make Brussels a more attractive and innovative place for media workers.

Online communities of practice will also be interesting to analyse to see **how new technology, of which media workers are quite found, expand the scale of the activities and outputs of the community**. We will make a distinction between online communities of practice that are only online (members never meet physically, or very rarely) and other communities of practice that use social media as communication tools in addition to their offline activities (Amin & Roberts, 2008). After a first look it seems quite difficult to find online communities of practice that would be for Brussels-based media workers only. The online communities of practice found so far are all opened to media workers for everyone in Belgium and abroad. This will need to be more deeply analysed later, but it suggests that these communities are open to members from everywhere, which can be a good way for learning new processes and new practices. Moreover, all the communities of practice identified so far and which develop offline activities are also present online, using the Internet to extend their activities beyond the physical meetings. One question that will be asked through the place parameter is whether and how communities of practice extend their place through different online activities, and whether it helps them to gain greater participation, recognition and visibility.

Second parameter: Proximity within communities of practice

In cluster research proximity is often emphasised as a key dimension of clusters in the sense that it creates the dynamics happening within a cluster. **Proximity in this context is understood as both spatial co-location and “interconnections” or “linkages” between the entities of a cluster**. As regards communities of practice, the concept of proximity is interesting as well as it points to the different kinds of links or interconnections that exist and develop between the members of these communities.

A first aspect of proximity that is central in community of practice research is the fact that, **just like clusters, communities of practice develop through sustained interactions between their entities**. By “interactions” it is meant different kinds of joint activities like meetings, after work sessions, publications, seminars or conferences, sharing information through social media, etc. We are interested in the different activities that communities of practice organise, the value they bring to the life of the communities, and the rhythm at which these interactions occur. We would like to see if patterns and routines of successful

collaboration within communities of practice emerge and, on the other hand, if there are constraints and limitations to what they can actually do.

A second aspect of proximity that is also **at the core of a community of practice is "commitment"** (Wenger, 2003). The commitment of the members can take different forms. Some people are part of a community of practice because they care about the domain, they are passionate about it and want to develop it. Others are just interested in being part of a community, in which they will seek value in terms of knowledge and networking. Finally, some participants can just be curious and want to learn about the practice, what standards have been established, which tools are being used etc. (Wenger, 2002).

This dimension of the proximity parameter has also been highlighted by the sociolinguistic approach when they emphasized the role of social interaction and shared practices in creating and sustaining identities. Commitment is essential to have a working and dynamic community of practice, as it is this commitment that keeps the community alive (Lambotte & Coekelberghs, 2011). Literature shows (and we have already noticed the same thing in Brussels) that most of the communities of practice are open to members from various companies and backgrounds as long as they share the same commitment and the same goal. Moreover, media workers can be part of several communities of practice, creating proximity and connections between them. The empirical part of the project will provide a better understanding of the different modalities through which media workers engage in one or several communities and develop a sense of belonging that can be plural and dynamic (and which can also challenge the social and professional identities in the media sector).

Third parameter: Pertinence of the communities of practice

It is acknowledged that communities of practice are a key element for clusters as they are a hub for networking and innovation (Chesnel et al., 2013). But in order to play such a role, **the communities have to be relevant for the clusters in question**. Our questions here are: What makes a community of practice relevant to a media cluster? Are all communities of practice relevant to a media cluster? Will the cluster automatically benefit from all of them? And on what grounds do we evaluate if a community of practice is pertinent for a media cluster?

First, **the pertinence parameter will be studied through the lens of the domains that are addressed by the communities of practice**. As communities of practice have an identified domain (Wenger, 1998, 2002) it is interesting for us to identify which domains are relevant for which media clusters

in Brussels. A well-defined domain creates a common ground and a sense of common identity and legitimizes the community as it affirms its purpose and identity to the members and the organisations (Wenger, 2002). Intuitively we could consider the members' professional identities as markers of different domains. For instance, there would be communities of journalists, of web-programmers, etc. This might be misleading because media are increasingly crossmedia and transmedia, with different formats (print, sound, video, multimedia) being combined on different platforms and devices. In our exploratory research we have already noticed that many events attract media workers with different professional backgrounds. With this in mind, we will figure out what are the domains covered by the communities of practice in Brussels and whether they do, or not, respond to the needs of the media clusters in Brussels.

A second dimension of the pertinence parameter is the number of members that engage in communities of practice. In order to be pertinent a community of practice needs a minimum number of members. Literature shows that if we cannot specify exactly from how many members is a community of practice relevant, it takes a "critical mass" to make it work. If not enough members are committed to the community it might lose its dynamics and collapse (Lambotte & Coekelberghs, 2011). Two media workers sharing a drink every Tuesday night after work to discuss about their practice will not be sufficient to be considered as a community of practice. Without enough members and outside contributors the dynamic is likely to suffocate and creativity and innovation will have difficulty to appear (Roberts, 2006).

Fourth parameter: Profile of the members

The **profile parameter for communities of practice focuses on the profile of the members composing them and on their relevance for the community** rather than on the profile of the community itself, which has already been developed under the pertinence and place parameters. With this parameter we will identify who are these media workers attending events and joining communities, and if some specific profiles, not only in terms of professional activity but also in terms of their role within the community, are needed to have a successful community of practice.

Anybody can be part of a community of practice. There is a self-selection based on expertise or passion for a topic (Wenger, 2002), and we noticed that it is actually the case in communities of practice already identified in Brussels: there is no formal selection by the members or the organisers on who is allowed to attend the events, who is relevant or not. But if communities of practice are in principle open to everyone, different kinds of profiles can be identified.

The literature on communities of practice identifies **different roles that are important for the development of a community**. Practitioners who are at the origin of the community can be identified as implementers or leaders (Snyder & de Souza Briggs, 2003). They identified a need and created a community of practice to develop tools and knowledge to address it. These leaders can be at the origin of the community and then leave the responsibility to run it to the members, even though it is likely to see the community fading in such cases. This volatility of communities of practice makes it difficult to identify and study them, as they can be quite ephemeral (Roberts, 2006). However, identifying and interviewing some leaders would be interesting for our study in order to understand what are their concerns and needs.

Another **key profile is the members who can be identified as “brokers”** (Wenger, 1998), or “gatekeepers” (Chesnel et al., 2013), who are creating links between the different communities of practice to ensure the spread of new ideas. These individuals are essential for our study as they are part of various communities of practice and can identify what kind of knowledge sharing would be beneficial for these communities. They are creating a link between different communities of practice by importing and exporting new knowledge and are a key element for creativity as they ensure that new ideas, new processes and new practices are shared (Halbert et al., 2008). Interviewing them will help us to get a broader picture of the dynamics of media workers communities at the scale of the city. They will be key elements to identify communities of practice that we may have skipped or ignored, and they are likely to be interesting interlocutors for decision makers who want to improve the communities of practice dynamics in the city.

Van de Poël (2005) identifies other profiles of members of communities of practice, such as technicians (in charge of implementing and maintaining collaborative tools), guests (needed occasionally for their expertise), administrators (in charge of financial, organizational and administrative aspects), mentors (experimented, in charge of welcoming new members), and a few others such as animators, moderators, etc.

We will also of course be interesting in **interviewing other members profiles, people who are part of a community of practice as members**, without a leading role, but who are forming the “critical mass” of the community, without which it would not exist. They are as relevant for us as the leaders and brokers or gatekeepers in order to understand what are the dynamics in Brussels for media workers, why they are part of a community of practice and what do they seek by (and obtain from) joining.

Fifth parameter: Path-dependency of communities of practice

The **path-dependency parameter will look at the historical and institutional factors that can explain why the communities of media workers in Brussels are how they are today.** Here we will not look at the different policies that regulate or encourage communities of practice, as this is the focus of the policy parameter, but more at the historical and institutional context of the media sector and the Brussels Region.

For instance, **one important aspect is the institutional structure of Belgium**, with Brussels being a Region with two linguistic communities, and a lot of people living and working in Brussels are speaking a third language. A 2013 survey by the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) shows that 22% of the Brussels inhabitants are speaking Dutch, 61% are speaking French and 17% neither Dutch nor French (Janssens, 2013). During our preliminary observation we have noticed that three different languages were used in the various communities of practice we went to: French, Dutch and English. Because of the existence of two official languages in Brussels, and as not all of the media workers are bilingual, English is often used as a common middle ground in order for all the members to understand each other. It is also important to notice that Brussels hosts major international institutions, such as NATO or the European Union, resulting in the presence of a significant number of international journalists. In 2013 the European Council revealed that 1024 journalists were accredited for the EU institutions coverage. These journalists are representing 533 media and are coming from 68 different countries. This diversity can also explain the need to use English to be understood by as many people as possible within communities of practice. One can ask how this institutional and language complexity impacts communities of practice in the Brussels media sector. It will be interesting to see if there is a kind of “Brussels spirit” among communities of practice that cut across the linguistic communities or if language is prevalent in the way communities of practice take shape. From a macro perspective, Roberts warns that communities of practice are “likely to be more successful in those regions and nations that have a strong community spirit compared to those nations that have a weak community spirit” (Roberts, 2006, p.12).

Other historical and institutional aspects are relevant for our study, for instance the evolution of the working conditions of media workers (about the working conditions of journalists, see Standaert, 2015). Looking at the path-dependency parameter for Brussels based communities of practice will **give insights for whoever wants to understand the trajectories of these communities** and reflect upon different potential scenarios for their development.

Sixth parameter: Policies for communities of practice

The **policy parameter will look at what are the official frameworks, actions, incentives and legal statutes that encourage and regulate communities of practice** in the Brussels media sector. This parameter will be examined on three levels: regional policies, community policies and organisational policies.

Incentives and help for media clusters and communities of practice can come from policies implemented on the Brussels Region level. **The Brussels Region ministry of economy is directly responsible for the economic attractiveness of the Region**, and various tools and policies have already been implemented to promote the creation or resettlement of media companies in Brussels. The best example would be the creation of Screen.Brussels in 2013. Screen.Brussels is an online media cluster financed by the Brussels region to support companies from the audio-visual sector. It works as a public service and has three main goals: reinforce locally and internationally the visibility of the Brussels region for audio-visual projects, provide supports and collective actions to respond to the needs of audio-visual companies, and create and support a dynamic ecosystem and collaboration between the public and private sectors. This initiative shows that there is a need from regional policies to help and promote the creation of media clusters. This could also be applied to communities of practice: Screen.Brussels is creating or financing various events where media professionals are meeting and are sharing practice. The Brussels based video-game developers community of practice called Brotaru is a good example. It was promoted by Screen.Brussels and on March 11, 2013, the official launch of Brotaru was done with the presence of Didier Gosuin, minister at the Brussels Region for Economy and Employment who gave an introduction speech.

The community level (French-speaking community and Flemish community) has also a part to play as they are in charge of promoting media and cultural aspects. They are already taking actions on their levels, with, for instance the funding of the Association des journalistes professionnels (AJP), which is a cooperative platform to help journalists. It is funded by the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles representing the French-speaking community, and is a major player for journalist's activities in Brussels and Belgium, together with its Flemish counterpart, the Vlaamse Vereniging van journalisten (VVJ), linked to the Flemish community. This initiative is again an example on how the community level can help and support communities of practice in Brussels. The AJP is not a community of practice in itself but the organisation is at the origin of

several events, conferences and workshops for journalists to learn from each other. By providing a place and funding, it allows journalists to gather and exchange on their practices.

Finally, the policy parameter is relevant on the organisational level as well as **companies do have internal policies that can encourage or impede the creation of or the participation in communities of practice**. Knowledge management research and practice has already put forward several organisational policy elements to be implemented in order to support communities of practice (Wenger, 2002; Snyder & de Souza Briggs, 2003; Roberts, 2006; Grandadam et al., 2010). As examples of such incentives for the workers we can mention the valorisation of the participation in communities of practice by acknowledging the new practices and the new knowledge gained within the company, or the fact that companies could count as working hours the time devoted to the preparation and participation in such events. These organisational policies are crucial for promoting communities of practice, as it was proven that if there are no incentive elements and no recognition, the worker will eventually stop participating in communities of practice (Wenger, 2002; Lambotte & Coekelberghs, 2011). The management structure of media organisations can promote the creation of, and the participation in communities of practice through different kinds of measures towards the workers but also by providing logistic help, like having a meeting room that can be used by the employees or providing administrative support to community of practice leaders.

By looking at the policy parameter **we will highlight key aspects for policy makers and other decision makers to consider in order to support communities of practice** in the Brussels media sector.

Seventh parameter: Performance of the communities of practice

Approaching the performance of communities of practice, which is obviously a critical issue for managers and decision makers, faces the same challenges as approaching the performance of a media cluster: researchers often meet troubles to identify and measure the added value and the return on investment (Snyder & de Souza Briggs, 2003). **Yet measuring the performance of communities of practice (often described as “values” or “benefits” in the literature) is most relevant in a media cluster context**. It is often taken for granted that innovation is a benefit of clustering but this has not yet been properly investigated (Porter, 1990, 2000). One way to provide some insights about this is to look at the benefits that media workers and organisations in a cluster gain from participating in communities of practice.

The **literature on communities of practice, especially from the knowledge management side, provides some relevant dimensions and indicators** that we can use to evaluate the short-term and long-term values of communities of practice, both on the members level and on the organisations level (Wenger, 2002; Snyder & de Souza Briggs, 2003; Cummings & Van Zee, 2005; Roberts, 2006; Cohendet et al., 2010). When looking at the short-term value for the members one can ask for instance whether:

- They find the help needed with the challenges they are facing;
- They get access to the expertise they are seeking;
- They get the feeling to achieve a meaningful work and get fun with their colleagues.

Similar questions can be asked about the long-term value for the media workers, for instance if they have been able to:

- Measure the effects of the community of practice on their personal development;
- See if it changed their reputation and professional identity;
- Expand their network and increase their marketability.

The values of communities of practice on the organizational level can be of different kinds. On the short-term one can ask, among other questions, if:

- Workers are more successful in resolving problems;
- Tasks are done faster or in a better way, resulting in time saving;
- Workers are more eager to share knowledge and new synergies across units and organisations more easily created.

As for the long-term value for the organizations relevant questions can be for instance whether media clusters:

- Are implementing new strategic capabilities thanks to communities of practice;
- Are keeping abreast with new practices and innovation in their field;
- Are innovating more and are able to implement new strategies linked to what was learned in the communities of practice;
- Are more keen (and able) to keep the talented workers they have.

This list of performance dimensions and indicators is not exhaustive but it already provides a fair indication of the aspects that will be investigated further in relation to the performance of communities of practice in a media cluster context. The empirical research that will be carried out in a next phase of the research

(survey, interviews and direct observations) will provide key insights about those different aspects. **Indeed we need to meet media workers as well as (top) managers in media companies in order to understand more precisely what are the benefits and limits of communities of practice** for individual workers and media companies.

Part 3: Future Research Methods and Conclusion

This aim of this part is not to give our definitive method for studying communities of practice in the Brussels media sector (the final methodological design will be defined in Deliverable 6.3) but rather to provide an overview of the main methodological paths used in community of practice research that could help us observe and analyse the existing media communities of practice in Brussels.

Lorenz and Barlatier (2007) identified different methods to study communities of practice. The main issue they noticed is that **as the definition of communities of practice is broad, different researchers observed and analysed a large variety of different entities**, which were all labelled as communities of practice even if they were quite different. According to them, “this diversity is not bad in itself [but] has contributed to the lack of cumulativeness in empirical research on communities of practice, since it is often difficult to know whether different researchers are indeed studying the same thing” (Lorenz and Barlatier, 2007, p.5). However they noticed that two main methods have proven relevant for studying communities of practice: ethnographic approaches and case studies based on structured interviews. To these two methods we will add the use of a survey in order to grasp some dimensions that are unnoticeable otherwise. For instance, the survey will help to see if broader trends are emerging, which would not be possible if one is only focusing on particular cases.

Ethnographic approaches

The ethnographic approach is the method used by most of the researchers on communities of practice we reviewed so far. As communities of practice can be a blurry concept for the members of these very communities, only an outside eye may be able to grasp the characteristics and dynamics that define a community of practice. Being present and witnessing first hand how the knowledge is spread, what kind of practices is being developed allows the

researcher to examine closely how a community of practice works. When Grandadam et al. looked at how workers from Ubisoft created communities of practice for video-game creation in Montreal he was there to witness it, using an ethnographic approach (Grandadam et al., 2010). Using an ethnographic approach is relevant in the way that it allows the researcher to notice indicators that are tacit and invisible for the members.

Similarly when Wenger lists the key indicators of a community of practice, he mentions items that can only be identified through an ethnographic approach. Among them are “the absence of introductory preambles, as if conversations and interactions were merely the continuation of an on-going process”, “local lore, inside jokes, knowing laughter” or “certain styles recognised as displaying membership” (Wenger, 1998, pp.125-126). Only a physical presence of the researcher during these events allows him to identify these indicators, as it is unlikely that members are aware that they even exist.

However, if Lorenz and Barlatier affirm that it is commonly admitted that ethnographic approaches are well suited to capture the tacit understandings and the dynamics inside a community of practice, **this approach has some limitation, depending on what we want to understand and study**. The first limitation would be to generalise from the results of case studies. The second is that the use of ethnographic approaches is not suited to capture certain broader dimensions of communities of practice, such as its integration within a cluster. This approach is fit to help the researcher to determine if the grouping he is studying is indeed a community of practice and to methodically analyse its functioning. In our case, we are obviously interested in understanding as much as possible the internal dynamics of communities of practice, but our goal, more than the community in itself, is to study how they benefit to media clusters. Plus, the framework of the research and its time span will not allow us to undertake a proper ethnographic research. We will indeed join some communities of practice (as we have already started to do) but we do not have the manpower and the time needed to attend each and every gathering of the identified communities of practice and develop a thorough ethnographical understanding of these communities. However, we will rely upon some key principles of ethnography (like participatory observation and taking field notes) to perform our direct observations.

(Semi-)structured interviews and surveys

Lorenz and Barlatier highlight structured or semi-structured interviews as a second method for studying communities of practice. The use of interviews, in addition to an ethnographic approach, allows the researcher to reach additional relevant information and to check and validate direct observations.

Together with the other Work Packages we will create an interview guide that will encompass the three entities (media companies, media workers and media communities of practice). For Work Package 6 **the aim of these interviews will be to uncover the media workers' experiences of their participation (or lack thereof) in communities of practice.** We also expect that the interviews will allow us to identify various communities of practice that we have not noticed so far. More in-depth interviews will be conducted with some selected profiles (see the profile parameter above) in order to understand how communities of practice are working, what factors are making them a success or what is missing and could be improved on the members level.

A survey will also be conducted in order to characterize further the media communities of practice and their relations with the media clusters in Brussels. Using a survey method will allow us to define the different domains of the communities, what are their activities, the frequency at which they gather and their actual practices. These elements will be helpful to see if we can notice trends among those communities, what are their differences or similarities, and this will give general indications on the community level on what is needed to have a successful community of practice.

Table 4 – The methods used to study communities of practice within MCB.

- We will *identify* the main communities of practice in the Brussels media sector using in a first step **online search** and the **snowball method**. In a second step a **survey** (in association with the other Work Packages) and **semi-structured interviews** will help us to identify more confidential communities of practice that may have stayed under our radar.
- Through an in-depth analysis of the data collected through a survey, semi-structured interviews and **direct observations**, we will study the structures and dynamics of these communities of practice and *characterize* them along different dimensions, which will provide a comprehensive overview of the communities of practice in Brussels' media sector.
- We will also analyse the *needs* and the *potentials* of these communities of practice for the development of a lively media sector in Brussels and highlight the key *success factors* that are relevant for different initiatives and stakeholders.

Conclusion: Where do we go from here?

This Deliverable was intended as a theoretical and methodological framework for studying communities of practice in the media sector in the Brussels Region. It fulfilled its role by **providing a relevant definition of communities of practice for Media Clusters Brussels based on the existing literature**. As explained above, we decided to consider as a community of practice a group of people who are gathering (online and offline) to talk about a defined professional domain relevant for a media cluster, who are forming a lively community and develop shared practices. We also decided to exclude from our framework internal communities of practice, to better focus on cross-organisational communities, which are more relevant as they are more likely to benefit various companies within the cluster.

We used **the 7Ps framework to approach communities of practice in the Brussels media sector in a systematic way**. The first parameter, place, highlights the physical location and concentration of existing communities of practice in Brussels. The second parameter, proximity, points out the different kinds of links or interconnections that exists and develop between different communities of practice and between the members of these communities. The third parameter, pertinence, addresses the domain and the composition of these communities to see if they are they relevant for media clusters. The fourth parameter, profile, analyses the various profiles and roles of the members of the communities of practice. The fifth parameter, path-dependency, looks at the different historical and institutional factors that can explain why communities of practice are how they are today. The sixth parameter, policies, approaches the different official frameworks, actions, incentives and legal statutes that encourage and regulate communities of practice. Finally, the seventh parameter, performance, analyses the benefits that media workers and media organisations in a cluster gain (or not) from participating in communities of practice.

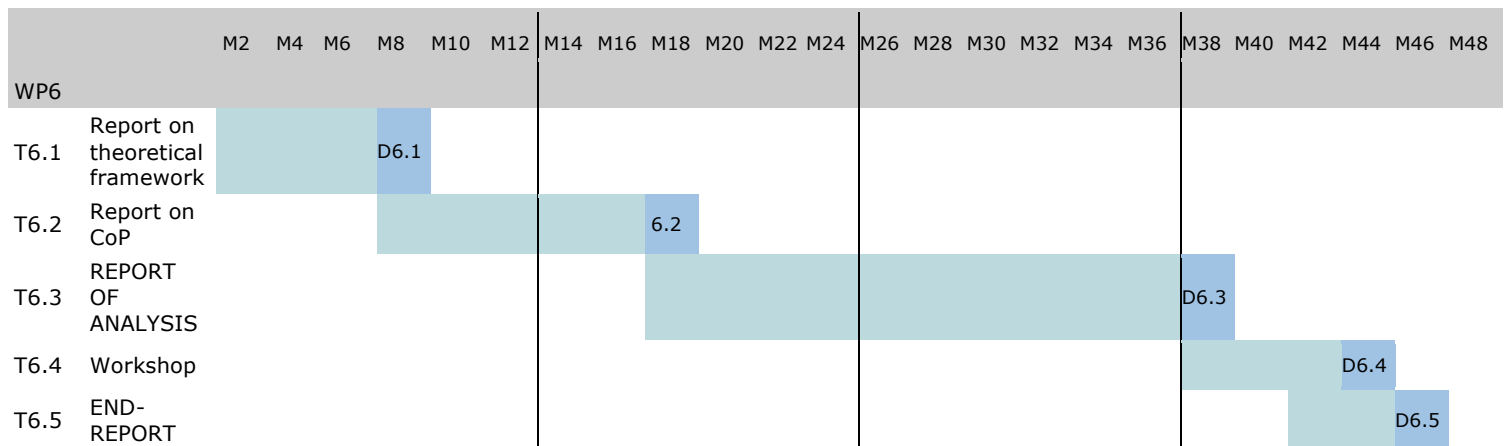
All these parameters will be thoroughly analysed in the future Deliverables of Work Package 6, thanks to the data that will be collected through a survey, semi-structured interviews and direct observations. The exact methodological design will be further defined in Deliverable 6.3 (as the table below shows).

WP6		
6.1	Report on theoretical and methodological framework.	Developing a theoretical and methodological approach for studying communities of practice in the context of the media sector in Brussels and beyond.
6.2	Overview report on existing / emerging communities.	Conducting exploratory interviews with media workers from a range of organisations and domains, in order to get an overview of the existing / emerging communities..

Media Clusters Brussels: DELIVERABLE 6.1

Report: A Framework for Studying Communities of Practice in a Media Cluster Context

6.3	Detailed report on communities of practice.	Conducting a multi-method study of communities of practice on three levels: (1) a survey, (2) observing selected communities of practice, (3) organizing in-depth interviews with a diversity of selected individuals.
6.4	Workshop.	Preparation and organization of internal dissemination of findings (relevant stakeholders and researchers).
6.5	End-Report.	Preparation and finalization of End-Report.



Appendix 1: References

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Media Clusters Brussels: DELIVERABLE 6.1

Report: A Framework for Studying Communities of Practice
in a Media Cluster Context