





Minutes Nordenham Conference 15-16th of March 2010, Nordenham, Germany

Monday, 15th of March

9.15 Opening – meeting round, discussion agenda/plan for the day, minutes Oostende.

1. Projectmanagement issues

Activities Deltares and budget consequences

Deltares was not present in Oostende due to the fact that they were uncertain about their position (illegal state-aid or not). Decision has been made that Deltares needs to step out as partner and bid in the public tender that is going to be set up. Secretariat has been contacted and the Province of North-Holland will take over the 'Deltares-activities' and set up a public tender for the activities. Group is asked for feedback on this: no objections.

New application will be filled in a few weeks; this will include the move of tool-development activities to the Province of North-Holland. This will cause some delay, 6 months is needed at least to set up a tender. The goal is to contract an organization and start in 2011. We need to discuss what this does to the planning of other activities (tomorrow)

Essex: this is all very specific expertise. Has the secretariat given any advice on whether the consultant has to be from within the NSR. Arjen: It is allowed (confirmed by secretariat) to contract an organization that can do the work from outside the NSR as long as European tender rules have been complied with.

Sjaelland: we should reconsider the common costs that we are putting into the assistant at this moment, since it is being put in a tender and starting in 2011. PNH/Arjen: Budget will be transferred to the Province, no rise in costs. Budget is expected to be lower due to competition for the tender. At least it will be neutral due to the project management costs that can be incorporated into the existing project-management activities of the Province (take out the doubling of work).

Essex: what will the language of the tool be? Has experience with high translation costs for previous databases. PNH: contract in Dutch (legal issue). Keeping in mind the goal of the project, English should suffice. Strömstad: All our material is in Swedish. Is the translation common costs or own? Arjen: They are not common costs, when the tool is being built a consultant will ask what you want the assistant to answer you. Don't expect high translation costs.

PNH: Incorporate communication, development, and dissemination in the tender. This to get a complete overview. The different activities are very much inter-connected. Furthermore, we need to think on how this is all going to be put continued after the project ends. This has been promised in the application (maybe through branding). This needs to be discussed together (later in the day).

Assistant-tender

Activities move to PNH, partners will think about which companies can do these sorts of activities. At the moment the tender is being prepared. Partners will be asked for input. In June secretariat will decide if activities can move to PNH, in the summer the tender will be set up and at the end of 2010 an organization will be contracted.

Time can be saved by asking the market to compare a few tools and select one organization that has the best idea/path. Deltares was going to compare 5 and then choose. This process will be cut by the tender. Idea is to hire a consortium due to combination of communication and dissemination. Contract will be in Dutch but the tool can be in another language. Input and feedback from partners during brainstorm later today. When offers are in the partners will be asked to help in selection procedure.

Remarks:

Nordenham: As soon as any information comes in, please keep partners up to date. PNH: Preliminary meetings/workshops will be held with possible organization. Partners will be asked for participation/input. Essex: tip: keep in mind organizations that deal with oil-spilling problems. They have experience with developing assistants. Strömstad: what will the tool look like? What are the guidelines? PNH: the application is our guideline but other than that we are free in choosing.

Flanders: meetings/workshops will be in Netherlands, invite EU organizations as well so as to get more of European input. Essex: if you want to approach it EU-level, needs to be done in Brussels. Get support from DG-environment. PNH: We need to avoid calling it a consultation because then it will have a legal aspect. We want 'reflection'. But the tender will be at the European level. Nordenham: look outside the better-known projects/areas. E.g. in Greece there is valuable information. PNH: idea is to get consortia and get different companies to cooperate.

Sjaelland: project management costs are also important, management of versions, keeping it up to date, availability for other countries, etc. PNH: We need to discuss this in the brainstorm. Also need to discuss legal ownership, maintenance. Ideal situation is that DGenvironment adopts the tool. ENCORA-network

Break 10.15-10.30

Partnership extension and preparations for oncoming call for proposals/ Partnership agreement

Arjen: Draft is entered in online system. Sent per e-mail (changes in red). Signed version needs to be signed by 7th of April. Required annexes:

- letter of intent from Strömstad (received March 18th) and Essex
- letter of intent (new) PNH
- Letter of acceptance from PNH to take over budget Deltares
- Communication plan
- Annex to the application with detailed project description (max 10pg)

The secretariat asked us to extent the partnership, but we still need to show added value.

ERDF left in priority 2 (804.529). We need to discuss this with secretariat. Essex: Project extensions are hardly ever turned down. Talked to Jesper who confirmed this: if we keep in mind the budget we should not have to expect problems.

Changes to agreement (changes in red):

- Deltares left, PNH takes over activities.
- 2 new partners
- Extension due to Deltares issue (7 months till end of 2013 instead of 31st of May 2013)

Remarks:

Flanders: Will all the projects move down a few months? Arjen: Not necessarily. But it is possible (if the partner wishes to do so). A way to solve this with the procedure costs of claims it to claim once per year in stead of twice. November claim is the most important. So practically, it is possible not to claim the first round of the year. Though this is not recommended.

ERDF funds cutting. Not at project level but at program level. If the program has low funds then at project level this could have an effect.

Arjen: extension shouldn't be a problem. It is more the extra costs for the partners (project management). Partners need to see if they can stretch the budget so that no extra co-financing is needed. Essex: recommends that the partners who have difficulties with this just manage with the original time and just report in the first round of 2013 like was foreseen. Partners who do not want to use more of their budget to reserve for reporting should stop their activities by the original end date of May 31st 2013.

Decision: keep the budget as it is, no extra co-financing, and stretch it for the remainder of the project. If the partners wish to change the budget planning this needs to be handed in to Arjen so that he can incorporate it in the application.

Meetings

See new meeting schedule.

Common Costs

A partnership agreement is necessary to divide the ERDF budget via the Lead Beneficiary (PNH), otherwise it is not possible. Will be signed before the secretariat approves it formally so that everything can move forward. This is not a legal problem.

See slides. 180.000€ is left to be covered by the partners (via percentiles). The overall costs have increased but the amount per partners is lower. The partner incurring the costs is claiming the ERDF funds. That is how the budget division of common costs is set up.

Agreement (based on one of the several templates available) needs to be signed before the first claim. Deadline end of April. May 14th it needs to be received by the secretariat. The agreement will be sent to all partners to be signed, the partners will sign the page meant for them. Then these will be attached to the agreement.

2. First reporting round process (activity report and financial report)

Total budget 3,56 million. Spending targets: to be discussed in financial meeting. Reporting via WP coordinators to Lead Beneficiary (PNH) to Viborg. Partners need to have a First Level Controller (FLC) in place, FLC of LB will also check the claims/reports. Are all FLC in place? Denmark: yes Nordenham: yes, present FHR: internal controller, still needs to be approved by the Flemish Ministry. Fife: yes PNH: still arranging it. Flanders: yes Essex and Sweden: not needed yet

Only one report per partners; so no reports for separate sub partners. These sub partner reports should be included in partner report. Activity and financial report: 2 separate reports. The project manager is responsible for drawing up the activity and expenditure report. These need to be in the same format every single time and match up.

Report rounds from October to March and from April to September. Deadlines 6 weeks after end of round. For this round the deadline is the 25^{th} of April. The FLC thus has to start around the 10^{th} of April, this will give sufficient time.

Note for new partners: the new partners don't have to produce a report yet. Once extension is approved, the new partners can claim their expenditure as of the 1st of September 2009 (official project start).

There are several templates for reporting which were sent around via e-mail. Partners will also be asked to report during the next round on indicators.

3. Communication, website and logo

It will take most of the rest of the year to set up the tender. This would mean no communication progress for the next few months. Therefore some actions have been undertaken/ are going to be started:

- website: <u>www.SUSCOD.eu</u>
- start development of corporate identity of SUSCOD
 - o logo
 - corporate style for reports, newsletters, etc.
 - start setting up the website (window-dressing). E.g. a link from suscod.eu to the project website of the PNH. The project page would be part PNH house-style and incorporate as much as possible of the SUSCOD corporate style.

Principles for development of style and logo:

- recognizable and useable for branding the assistant
- logo and colors represent high quality of cooperation
- needs to meet formal requirements of INTERREG NSR
- for internal and external communication, multiple use

To develop the logo the idea is to ask Thieme (communication partner of PNH) to select 3 design agencies to come up with ideas for the logo. From those ideas we can select the best option together. This way it is possible to have a logo by June (Fife golf-tournament).

4. Steering Group (SG), Advisory Board (AB), Reference Group (RG)

To be decided by each of the partners. In general SG will be someone at a managerial level. AB and RG are more of a lobby for the project. Getting people motivated for SUSCOD. AB is

for getting the link with the level that you are a partner on (higher managerial or political). The RG for with the international level link - e.g. national/regional politician.

For example:

- PNH will select the direct manager for the SG, the province politician for Coastal Affairs for the AB, and an already existing group that represents all parties in the coast for the RG (selection of someone).

- Fife: SG, Amanda McFarlane. AB, member of the council. RG, senior member of the Scottish Government.

12.30 Lunch 13.30 Site visit – two pilot areas 16.10 Continuation of meeting

4. State of the Art Inventory discussion

Questionnaire

MDK - just a few principles unanswered

Zealand – inventory needed to set pilot area, bilateral meeting helped formulate.

Nordenham - extra information needed (bilateral)

Fife – not all questions answered but very detailed description gives good information (bilateral for last questions)

Sweden – information not analyzed yet. Bilateral will help with this

PNH - few questions for bilateral

Essex – due to new in partnership, no input as of yet.

Analysis

Suggestion for partner reports:

- Answer questions per principle. Would require completed questionnaires
- Highlight positive aspects and/or learning points for other partners. Result would not be a description per principle
- Highlighted recommendation.
- Comparison of relevant cases
- Overview table

Draft general conclusion:

- Indicators are not often used
- Data is mostly free available and public
- The (impact on) marine environment is not or only to a small extend considered
- In some regions, ICZM is used in spatial planning (land)

Elements available:

- partner reports (questionnaire)
- partner analysis (3pg report)

Reporting overview/ Issues discussed:

- no scoring of partners on a scale; this is unnuanced (yes/no) and doesn't take into account the control that partners have on activities in the coastal area. What needs to be looked at as well is how coordination needs to be improved. Control is not always possible

- It needs to be clear what the added value is of ICZM. This is necessary to get support for the use of ICZM; this is necessary to make the tool worthwhile. We need 'good news' examples of ICZM in practice.
- There needs to be a change at the regional and local level. We don't only need good examples of ICZM, we need practical examples of how everyone can do this.
- Inventory is for a status quo and lets us find each other. Then that will let us develop the tool.
- The problem with the questionnaire is that it is focused on the partner organization, but this organization might not know the ICZM practice in other regions or at the national level. What is needed is a more nuanced and holistic view.
- We need to focus on 'in practice' tool and phases. It shouldn't be an 'in theory' inventory. It is often clear what aspects need to be improved, but not how this can be done.
- ICZM should be an approach, and not used in hindsight. Should be used as input.

Content of report:

- evaluation per region (analysis)
- comparison between partners where relevant
- general conclusions
- Overview table per principle. Decision: to be left out, not useful.
- Annex: Questionnaire should be filled in, but this information is for internal use. Problem is that all result must be public knowledge. As such, it is important to be careful how we publish the results.
 - Anonymous: questionnaire to be anonymous and thus not publish. The results will be formulated as 10% is above/below average etc. \rightarrow true state of the art. Analysis is for the partners and the general/anonymous recommendations. Key is to keep it positive and keep the details anonymous.

Timing:

End of April all templates filled in (aim) First analysis end of May, draft in June (aim) Next meeting discuss the draft. 2011: complete report.

5. Brainstorm Assistant

How should the tool work? What is the goal(s)? How much room do we want to give in the tender?

Two extremes: web based - iczm expert community

- The tool should be translatable to the partner-countries' language
- The tool should also be congruent with the national law/rules. It should not compete with these laws but work with the rules.
- Tool should be aimed at politicians and out-in-the-field experts (e.g. planners).
- The tool shouldn't be to let politicians use the toolbox, it should be that the tool uses the politicians (gets them involved).
- Needs to be up to date and regular maintenance (also after end of SUSCOD)
- It should allow you to see how others (partners) work. Despite the differences in structure of the different countries (municipalities, regions, counties, province, etc.)
- The tool should be directed at a behavior change and improving quality.

- In the tender organizations will be asked to do an inventory of ICZM tools. The idea is to set the boundaries and let the organizations do the preliminary work in their tender (catch up on schedule partially).
 - Nordenham mentions a tool in a local region of Australia
 - Rijkwaterstaat/Carol: Project of RWS in New Orleans, is also focused on creating awareness and changing behavior.
 - Essex: oil spilling response is another good example of a tool: decision support system. It is more of a manual so it doesn't really work for ICZM but it can be something to learn from. You have your situation (coastal issue) and then a series of options.
 - Strömstad: worked with a Dutch tool in the past.
- Not a pure decision support system, this does not take into account complex situations and different values.
- The tool is about knowledge participation.
- Possibility of it being more a network than a tool, but then it would not be a tool as such.
- It is an idea to score projects on an ICZM scale and then compare them to other projects as a learning process. Comparison, e.g. on a website. The tender can also provide a model of how the system can work. So not only phase 1, but also give an example.

Possible contractors:

There will be a pre-selection between possible companies that can do a bid. Pre-selection on the basis of a short description of the capabilities of the organization. After that approx. 5 bidders are selected to do a full offer. The building of a model could be part of the pre-selection phase.

The goal of the tender is to get an idea of what is out there and what is possible. The choice then is if the company is able to achieve what we want. If you have a specific tender then you'll get a very specific idea and miss out on all the options. We need to get the goals clear. No budget will be given to the bidding organizations for this work because then we move into a consultation-process which is extensive and will cause more delays.

Action:

- All partners put down their ideas, their goals on paper. Send it in to PNH for inclusion in the tender.
- PNH will get Thieme to set in motion the development of the logo/corporate-style.
- Two weeks to get a list of who is in the Steering Group, Reference Group, and Advisory Board. Check to see if balance is right.

Tuesday 16th of March

9.10 Opening

 Review and discussion on progress until now – per partner Sjaelland Main activities:
case areas – Lolland, Slagelse, Odsherred

One regional analysis Expert workshops

Course development

Odsherred: interview summerhouse owners to find out how the coastal defense is arranged (willingness to pay, what form of defense, planning). This will be used by politicians and planners. The result will be a tool for municipalities that can be used to prioritize and make choices in coastal defense.

Slagelse: floodrisk for innercity. Tool for political decision making for security measures. Based on risk areas.

Lolland: paper on climate adaption plan. Holistic plan to use water as an asset in planning.

Regional analysis for the entire region. Verification by municipalities and course development for the 3 municipalities.

PNH

Spatial Restrictions (the legal structures, values, interests of stakeholders in the coastal zone): organization has been contracted. Research will be done (by APPM/Grontmij) that will look at the current situation and historical situation in the PNH/Netherlands. Furthermore there will be a comparison with partner countries. Grontmij will use its network to do the comparison and ask the partners for verification of the analysis. Afterwards a recommendation will be made for the Province on how to improve work in the coastal zone based on these 'restrictions' and possible ways to improve the 'restrictions' themselves.

Sandnourishments: talks between the relevant Ministries and coastal Provinces are being held at the moment to decide the content of this activity.

Identity of Coastal Towns: the different products for articulating the identity of the towns are underway. No end results yet. Next step is to develop a communication plan (expert group and generic communication methods) to develop plans for strengthening the identity (development plans).

Essex

CZM: shoreline management planning, master plans, EMS, management plans. Create cohesion within the sectoral system. SUSCOD will be used to establish practical decision making coordination, community involvement, coastal vision, etc. Consists of mostly development activities, therefore there needs to be a close link with the other partners. Inventory/questionnaire will be used as a starting point. The focus is on getting the I added to CZM.

Nordenham

Two areas that need to be worked on: inventory needs to be worked on & WP7 needs to be filled in. Besides this the two pilot areas will be developed. Meetings have taken place with the people who live near the dike and relevant stakeholders. This has proven difficult because the stakeholders do not see this as a regular thing; they are not used to it. One meeting has taken place, but the progress must be taken step by step. The stakeholders need to be persuaded to participate. It needs to become a usual step in the development process. Progress has been made in the behavior change: input before projects are developed. The approach is becoming more holistic and less sectoral

Strömstad

Development of action plan for North Bohuslan: to highlight areas for further development (business, infrastructure, etc.). Politicians signed a commitment plan. This needs to be developed into an action plan.

Fair: a living Bohuslan: increasing full time residency in the area (momentarily 58000 full time, but up to 200000 visitors). Going to meet the part-time residents at the fair and show them plans of the municipalities and ideas for entrepreneurship.

Fife

Meeting has been held to get stakeholders involved. Asked them to fill in a form to show which activities they want to be involved in. Furthermore SUSCOD has been explained and expectations have been raised.

Inventory was a bit of a struggle, Fife believes that ICZM is not done properly. The inventory has shown that they need to hold shared meeting with planners and stakeholders. Working on management plan, it is about what the local government has to do to maintain coastal defenses (or not).

Scottish Climate Change Impact Forum : Cooperation between different agencies. Tools have been developed to show the impact of climate change on the coast. This will fit into the communication hub.

Pilot area: estuary and Natura2000 areas plans. Stakeholder committee to develop strategy to develop a management plan (focused on working together). Extra funds have been obtained to take plans into action (for the estuary). Amanda has been working on the old paper mill site which is a complicated issue.

Communication hub: looking for a method to combine information (IT and expert input). Looking for something to translate all the useful information into something the public can understand. Asking if the partners want to contribute to this hub. What is needed is information on creating a hub but also the expert information.

St. Andrews Golf Tournament: for this a logo is needed and preferably partner presence. It is an opportunity to create awareness.

Assistant: keen to give input for this. Look into Scottish ICZM experience.

Flanders

Inventory has already been discussed. Other main activity for 2010 is the masterplan for coastal defense of the Flanders coast, being finalized. Pilot case: take into account nature, tourism and come to an integrated solution. MDK will take with stakeholders and arrange workshops. FHR will make models and work on clearer communication. All this is planned for after the summer (bit of a shift in planning). Communication strategy is another activity, should be finished at the end of the year. Should provide good input for SUSCOD. FHR also sees a link with the Fife multimedia hub. Notes that Fife and FHR should find each other.

2. Meeting schedule

Selecting the organization that will build the tool will take place in November, as such it is an idea to change the 2010 meeting in November with the PNH meeting in 2011. This will allow

the consortia to give a presentation. Fits well with the overall planning of the tender. What do the partners think? No objections.

New meeting schedule approved. Meeting in November will be 2 days instead of 1,5. Leaves more room for talk/discussion. Meeting dates will me made know soon.

Good to keep in mind that the 2013 Brussels/Antwerp meeting needs to be set on time so as to get it in the diaries of the committee members.

Meeting in Stavanger, will any partners be attending? Fife, yes. Nordenham, maybe. Is possible have a logo and stand promoting SUSCOD. Partners need to send an outline of their project so that posters can be made for the stand (action Fife for all partners deadline end of April). Any addition information is also welcome.

It is important that we take advantage of any opportunity to promote SUSCOD. Furthermore any chances to look each other up. Via e-mail, physical presence, etc. Keeping in touch is important. A good way is to use Microsoft Office Workspace. PNH will see if it is a good way to keep in touch.

3. Workplan WP 5-8

3 issues:

1. Coordination: several partners are a WP coordinator. This is to keep an overview of the WP. After the activities have been reported on by the separate partners and sent to the PNH the information will be sent to the WP coordinator. This is for verification and so that the information can summarized at the WP-level.

- connection
- overview
- can be low profile, but can be active as well.
- stimulate transnational aspect and move up from the pilot level.
- no separate templates, just to highlight interaction

Nordenham: get a draft sent around for their WP (7) with a general planning. Ask involved partners to see if they agree. Idea is to come to a goal for a shared result. Nordenham would find it interesting to have some sort of report, to see how it all comes together. To see what we can learn from this WP. Arjen: most of this is in the deliverables of the activity report when people report on activities. Be careful not to do double work.

Essex: travel budget is limited. Therefore we should look into other methods of communicating (video conferencing, etc.).

Fife: Ask the organizations in the tender to give a tool for each of the principles of ICZM. Then the partners can test them on the pilots and rate them to see if they work. Then we can see what tools are adequate and which are lacking. This will also show us which principles we don't have tools for. Then we can go about looking for tools for these remaining principles.

PNH: So we'd get a tool-database. Our tool would be a navigation system to find the right tool. CC: maybe this already exists so we should look into this. Are there consultants who have looked into this previously? OURCOAST, might have insight in this. PNH/Fife: it would be an interface to put over existing tools. It is all about 'in practice'; linking the tools. Essex: one of the criteria to get INTERREG funding is to be innovative and produce an actual

tool. Fife: thinks it is innovative and it is an actual tool. More in practice, it is an overarching tool.

Essex: we need to see if this has already been done somewhere else. INTERREG-3, Baltic maybe. Atlantic maybe. Essex is a bit worried if this is the right way to go. Must be very careful with how we put it in the application. Furthermore, it is based on tools that might not be updated regularly.

Fife: See it as a basis. Part of the audit to see what is out there. From there we can move forward. Arjen: we should be aware that we should meet the application. It has to be innovative, this is the practical part and the fact that it is new. We need to be aware of this and keep it in sight.

2. Knowledge Exchange

Active participation, sharing of information. Get the transnational aspect in the work packages. Coordinate the content.

Fife: it is a complex issue that is quite huge. It is important that we are aware. The website could be a good way of doing it. Sjaelland: the next meeting more structured for the knowledge exchange. E.g. in workshops during the next meeting (aprox. 4/5 people in a group). Use the extra time for this. Full interaction in this set-up.

Strömstad: local people out in the field. We want to include them as well. We need to think about how we can do this. Essex: We have a double agenda: project management and project content. Sjaelland: e.g. meeting in Sweden, we could invite the Swedish local people. Ask them to participate.

RWS: We know each other by pilots, but maybe we write down what our own experience is. This way people can find out what other people know. What their experience is. We have more knowledge than the pilots. So that people can find each other. MDK: we need to divide the tasks more, so that it is not all done by PNH. We need to coordinate the division of tasks and get the overall picture. E.g. for the SG meeting we need to think about what we are going to share with them.

Nordenham: template to show the political and technical difficulties. To the point and short. We need to come closer to the main questions that we need to answer. Testing the tool will be very difficult big differences between the partners. PNH: this will be the same for existing tools and new ones. We need to be clear and have it understandable for everyone why it worked or why it didn't work.

Ideas for knowledge exchange:

- WP-coordinator presents results at partner meetings and takes minutes.
- Cooperation mostly during the meetings and in the coordination of the WP.
- Ed overview of the whole exchange and point where we can learn from each other.
- interactive websites
- staff exchange
- more meetings to discuss the content.
- 3. Involving other partners

Partners need to assess for themselves if they want input on their projects or want to share the results.

4. Plenary meeting

Minutes will be distributed soon. List of agreements/decisions.

Please look at the changed application. Particularly the added value of the extension. Please send remarks and additional information. Question on budget changes: Arjen will discuss it with Viborg (note d.d. 19th March 2010: this is allowed, partners are informed). Furthermore all projects have budget changes.

Closing words - Partners thank the hosts of Nordenham (Peter Kania and Hans Buchholz).

Decisions:

- Province of North-Holland will take over Deltares activities and put it in a public tender with communication and dissemination.
- Extension has no effects on co-financing. Partners agree to 'stretch' the budget for extension of 6 months.
- Logo and corporate-style will be developed separate from tender to get things running before the summer. Partners will be presented with the different logo ideas.
- No scoring of partners in the inventory and anonymity for the questionnaire.

Actions:

All:

- Partners will think about possible organizations to do the development of the tool, take inventory.
- Partners will send their goals concerning the tool to the PNH to be used for setting up the tender.
- Partners sign agreement before the end of April.
 - o letter of intent from Strömstad (received) and Essex
 - o letter of intent (new) PNH
 - Letter of acceptance from PNH to take over budget Deltares
- Partners will send a brief summary of their projects (map, photo's, short text, contact details) to Fife for use at the Stavanger conference (a stand) and at the St. Andrews Golf Tournament.
- All will start getting ready for the reporting round.
 - Any budget changes, not relating to the extension itself, must be discussed with Arjen before the 26th of March.
 - Certified reports (for this reporting round) must be handed in to the Lead Beneficiary by the 25th of April.
- Two weeks to get a list of who is in the Steering Group, Reference Group, and Advisory Board. Check to see if balance is right.

Fife:

- Communicate advantages of exposure at the Open Golf Tournament in St. Andrews to Viborg (Fife writes a text for this? For PNH to send?)

PNH:

- PNH sends around latest version of agreement
- PNH will set up tender (est. 6 months).
- PNH will get Thieme to set in motion the development of the logo/corporate-style.
- PNH will set up workspace for partners to interact and share knowledge.