

Integrating values, purposes and visions for responsible development<sup>1</sup>

Federico Niccolini

Associate Professor, Organization Science, Department of Economy and Management,  
University of Macerata

Elizabeth B. Davis, PhD

Dean, McLaren & Masagung School of Management, Professor of Management,  
University of San Francisco.

Monia La Verghetta

Phd, Economics and Management, Department of Economy and Law,  
University of Macerata

Valentina Pilotti

Department of Economy and Law,  
University of Macerata

Correspondence concerning this chapter should be addressed to Federico Niccolini,  
Department of Economics and Management, Università degli Studi di Pisa, Via Ridolfi,  
10 - 56124 - Pisa – Italy, e-mail: [federico.niccolini@unipi.it](mailto:federico.niccolini@unipi.it)

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<sup>1</sup> Part of this chapter builds on and considerably enhances the works by Davis, E., Niccolini, F. (2013). *Visionary networks for Responsible Development*, Proceedings, *International Eastern Academy of Management Conference “Managing in a Global Economy XV: Collaboration, Learning, and Discovery”*, Seville, Spain - June 23-27, 2013 and Niccolini F., La Verghetta M. (2013), *Envisioning for sustainable development. A cross-country experience*, Proceedings, *International Forum on Knowledge Asset Dynamics* Zagreb, Croatia, 12-14 pp. 356-372.

Abstract

This chapter highlights a study showing that knowledge sharing and envisioning processes can have positive effects on human and social capital growth within a network. The chapter begins by arguing that a responsible development perspective can be more proactive approach than a sustainability perspective. Some actors (non-profit, public, and private) have achieved responsible development goals by integrating values, purposes and visions. More specifically, we conducted a study testing a methodology that can guide a process of building a strategic vision within a network with the goal of improving their responsible development orientation. The chosen methodology is “Participatory Action Research”. The implementation of the envisioning process was studied via quantitative/qualitative research tools. The methodology was tested in an official cross-country project funded by the European Commission. The project was selected as a best practice by the same European Union Commission. The study highlights the importance of envisioning processes in building social and human capital at the inter-organizational level and, in particular, in highly complex sectors such as those oriented towards improving social responsibility. In fact, work on the envisioning process itself represents an essential instrument for developing strategic objectives to be shared among actors within networks that intend to promote responsible development and improve their human and social capital. This bottom-up process of envisioning can also facilitate cultural interaction among community members, even in a cross-country context. This relevant “learning-by-interacting” experience, can create a growth process for the human and social capital of entire communities. The creation of social capital also promotes the development of shared knowledge and advances leading to the general understanding of common core objectives and appropriate ways of acting within the social system. The chapter ends with recommendations for future research.

**Keywords**

Networks, Sustainability, Responsible development, Vision, Envisioning, Cross-country case study

## Integrating values, purposes and visions for responsible development<sup>2</sup>

### Introduction

For decades numerous authors have highlighted that a paradigms based only on economic and financial indicators are failing to bring the society to a real state of well-being. The urgency to change the development model from a merely political and economic one to a more comprehensive one that should include the triple bottom line dimensions (Elkington, 1998) is evidenced by various authors and institutions, such as the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP, 2007), among others. In this holistic point of view, Russ (2014, 2016) introduced the concept of “homo sustainabiliticus” as a more comprehensive model of human development. In the same holistic perspective, we believe that social, ecological, economic, and even cultural considerations need to become focal points in every intra- and inter-organizational process for organizations that truly want to achieve sustainable development goals. An organization can become “sustainably oriented” by building a set of coherent core purposes, values, and visions. Moreover, in the actual networked knowledge-driven economy (Russ, 2016), no single organization can achieve significant sustainable goals by itself. A network approach, possibly with a wide stakeholders’ involvement is necessary for organizations that seriously aim to reach sustainability goals. These organizations need to go beyond the traditional organizational mind-set and approaches by embedding a *sustainability-oriented philosophy* in their relationships, not only at group and organizational levels, but also at an inter-organizational one.

### **Sustainable or Responsible Development?**

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Sustainability and sustainable development are concepts that can be interpreted in different ways. Yet, the impact of organizational processes on the human environment can be seen at the global level. Today global society might reasonably be defined as “organizational” (Presthus, 1978), (e.g. considering that social life styles, assets, and levels of well-being are determined by organizations). As a result, one might argue that the responsibility of organizations for positive or negative scenarios of social sustainability is a real requirement. For decades many have argued for a wiser, safer, and longer-term perspective on global development. Currently, the global situation is alarming. Nearly a decade ago UNEP (2007: 2) warned that “major threats to the planet, such as climate change, the rate of extinction of species [...] put humanity at risk”.

The global sustainability debate has become more formalized over the last four decades. One of the most significant calls for global effort directed towards sustainable development was expressed in 1972 at the United Nations Conference on Human Environment held in Stockholm. This document stated that the “Protection and improvement [of the human environment] is a major issue which affects the well-being of people and economic development” (Par. I, c. 2). The principles of global sustainable development were better pinpointed in the 1992 “Rio Declaration on Environment and Development” which articulated the vision to “entitle human beings to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature.” (Pag. 1, principle 1).

Sustainable development became well known globally after 1987, when the UN World Commission on Environment and Development, also known as the “Brundtland Commission”, drafted its famous report, entitled “Our Common Future”. This report defines development as sustainable when it “meets the needs of the present without compromising the abilities of the future generations to meet theirs [needs]. (pag. 27)”.

This definition embodies two important aspects. First, it introduces a long-term perspective which includes the rights of future generations as the main focal point.

Second, the report presents a holistic approach toward development. The title itself “Our Common Future” denotes a systemic and holistic view (*Our* and *Common*), expressing an interconnected and long-term vision (*Future*). This holistic perspective can be conceptually connected to the work of a group of organizational scholars who look at the creation of “common futures” (Emery & Trist, 1973; Morgan, 2002) and explicitly link this approach (sustainable development) to personal and human development (Trist, 1979, 1983).

However, the Brundtland definition also contains an implicit weakness, it focuses on *maintaining* resources, avoiding their decrease, rather than creating new opportunities. Thus, the emphasis is on a negative or static approach to development (*what we want to avoid*) rather than on a positive one (*what we want to create*, Senge, 2006). Moreover, there is an inherent contradiction between the concept of *sustaining* (to keep or maintain something, in a way that it will not decrease) and *developing* (to empower, to increase). One might suggest that a first step toward establishing a more positive development approach aimed at continual improvement should involve the concept of responsibility. As such, we propose a perspective of *responsible development* that “meets the needs of the present generation while envisioning and planning for increased opportunities for the future ones” (Niccolini, 2008; p. 99). In a responsible development perspective, individuals are committed to satisfying present needs and to increasing opportunities for this and future generations.

So, the notion of responsible development is conceptually different from sustainable development.

The need for responsible development was first expressed more than a century ago by a visionary named George Perkins Marsh. Marsh was the first United States Ambassador to Italy, where he wrote “Man and Nature” (1864), a seminal book on responsible development. In this work, Marsh clearly expressed his vision of “global responsibility”,

stating that “We are not passive inhabitants of the earth. [...].. we are responsible for it.... As social beings we are responsible for the world we hope our descendants will inherit.” (Perkins Marsh G., as cited in Lowenthal, 2009: 427).

Like sustainability, responsible development also requires a holistic perspective in which the triple bottom line model, proposed by Elkington (1998) (society, economy, ecology) is placed in a cultural “humus”.

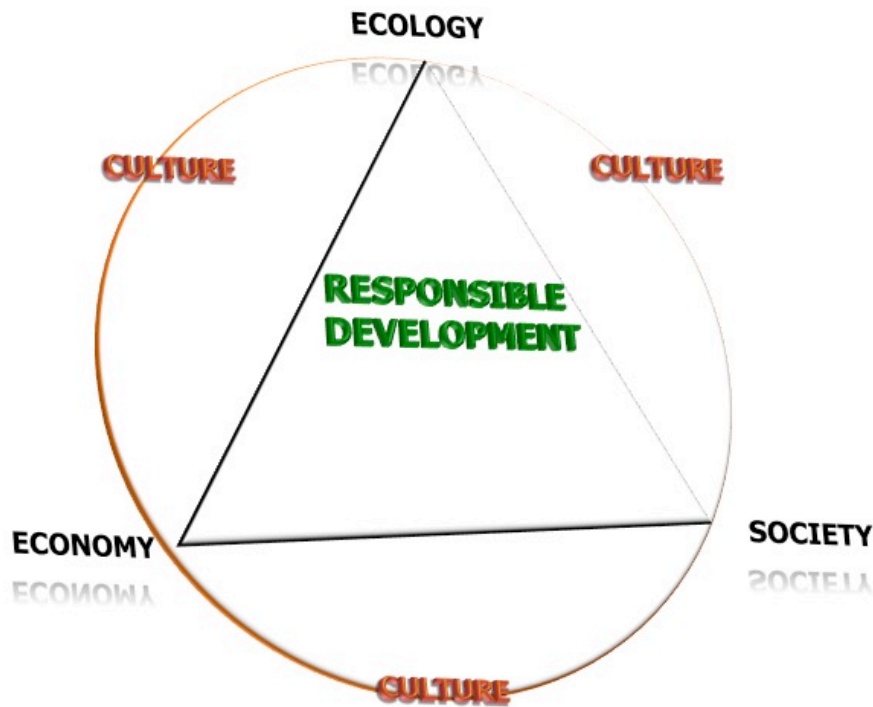


Figure 1: The fundamental dimensions of responsible development  
(Source: authors)

The cultural variable identified in Figure 1 is a critical dimension for understanding the responsible development construct. Both culture and ethics were recognized as important concepts by the IUCN (2008), as prominent dimensions of sustainable development. We believe culture, and also ethics, too, are the key variables for responsible development. They are the synthesis of the inputs and outputs of the

dynamic interaction among the societal, ecological and economic systems. In this perspective, it is clear that for all types of organizations (public, private, and non-profit) in the process, responsible development requires leaders to invest in human and social capital, both at intra and inter-organizational level, thus promoting an organizational culture with a responsible development orientation. This also means at its broadest level that creating a culture of responsible development involves more than single organizations acting individually; in other words, achieving responsible development ecosystem requires collaboration at the inter-organizational level.

### **Distinguishing values, purpose and vision for responsible development**

In order to identify and achieve responsible development goals, organizations need to initiate and sustain continuous learning processes. On the network level, such learning processes are facilitated by those actors who identify and share purpose, values and vision (Davis & Niccolini, 2013) valid for the whole network.

Moreover, even at the network level, people who share a core purpose and some core values and who work to identify a common vision exchange information, thereby activating knowledge creating processes. These are processes which continuously reinforce human and social capital dimensions during the envisioning process.

According to Lin (1999, pp. 77-79), participating and working on an envisioning process leads to the social embeddedness of the social relationship, thus improving social capital.

Social capital is typically understood as the features of a set of relationships in a social structure that facilitates action (Adler & Kwon, 2002) and /or the sum of actual and potential resources embedded within, available throughout and derived from the

network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit (Kostova & Roth, 2003).

To deeply understand the nature, the functions and the effects of an envisioning process, is important to keep in mind that in the literature, concepts like *vision*, *mission*, *purpose* or *organizational values* have often been interchangeably used with terms having similar or overlapping meanings by different authors.

To make a distinction among these key concepts we categorized visioning constructs in three ways:

- A. “why” the organization exists;
- B. “how” it works, acts, and in a certain way, lives;
- C. “what” it wants to achieve.

Using this conceptual framework, we identified two distinct meanings of *vision*, ideally attributable to the “less scientific”, but more popular works by Collins and Porras (1994, 1996) and Senge (2006).

In Collins and Porras, (1996) view, the *vision* is seen from a broad perspective, one that is able to summarize why the organization exist: how it seeks to live and what it wants to achieve. In this *broad meaning* (Niccolini in Morandi *et al.*, 2012), the vision consists of two main components: the core ideology and the envisioned future. The *core ideology* is the enduring part of the organizational vision and answers the questions previously identified, “why” the organization exists (A) and “how” it wants to act in order to achieve its aim (B). Within the core ideology there are the *core values* (B), essential and enduring “dogmas” that do not require external justification, and the *core purpose* (A) which, instead, represents the ultimate aim of the organization and is the most general of the organizational actions. Collins and Porras (1996), describe the *envisioned future* as a function of answering the question regarding “what” the organization wants to achieve (C). For these authors, in fact, the envisioned future



involves being able to visualize the desired future and describing big, challenging, and audacious targets (they use the acronym BHAG: Big, Hairy, Audacious Goals). In summary, for Collins and Porras the concept of *vision* sums all three essential visioning questions (A + B + C) described above.

Stam, Van Kipperberg and Wisse (2010, p. 500) describe visions as “ideals of the future that concern norms and values” (B). In a narrower perspective, Senge (2006) defines *vision* as providing the answer only to the precise question “what do we want to create?” (Senge, 2006, p. 192), that is, to the question (C) regarding organizational achievement. In this context vision defines what the organization wants to achieve, the future reality that could be created and expanded through the collective action of its members and seems to correspond to the envisioned future as described by Collins and Porras. Within this perspective, Thomas and Greenberger (1995) have described vision as “a cognitive image of the future,” while Kouzes and Posner (2009) have identified vision as an “ideal and unique image of the future” (as cited in Pearce and Ensley, 2004, p. 260).

Apart from the vision, for Senge, the *mission*, instead, is the reason why (A) an organization exists. Still distinctly, the *core values* give a clearer idea of “how” (B), in pursuing its mission, the organization intends to create the reality described by the vision.

In other words, these authors define separately the “What” (C), the “Why” (A), and the “How” (B) of an organization’s actions respectively as vision, mission and core values, respectively. For Senge (2006, p. 207-208) vision (C), mission (A) and core values (B) together constitute the “governing ideas” in the organization.

In sum, the following table (Table 1) compares and highlights some important differences between the viewpoints put forth by these authors.

**Table 1** - *Senge (I) vs. Collins & Porras (II) positions on the ontological questions of organizational action and the respective meanings given to the concept of vision*

<i>Ontological Questions</i>	<i>I) Narrow meaning (Senge)</i>	<i>II) Broad Meaning (Collins &amp; Porras)</i>
<i>A) Why</i>	<i>Mission</i>	<i>Core purpose</i>
<i>B) How</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Core values</i>
<i>C) What</i>	<i>Vision</i>	<i>Envisioned future</i>
<i>A+B+C)</i>	<i>Governing Ideas</i>	<i>Vision</i>

In spite of these ontological differences, the authors agree that the core values (B), the purpose/mission (A) and the envisioned future/vision (C) create an integrated system of factors that can increase knowledge, abilities and empower people and their relationships, thus stimulating human and social capital growth.

For the purposes of this research we have chosen the second (II) broader perspective of vision.

### **Vision, networks, social and human capital**

The key concepts of vision and network, have deep and relevant logical connections with concept of human capital.

#### **Human capital and vision**

The concept of vision is intrinsically and deeply interconnected with the notion of human capital (hereinafter also HC). Human Capital is defined as the “a unit-level resource that is created from the emergence of individuals’ Knowledge, Skills, Abilities, and Other characteristics (KSAOs)...” (Ployhart & Moliterno, 2011, p.128).

According to the literature HC “refers to the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) embodied in people” (Coff, 2002, cited by Crook, Todd, Combs, Woehr, Ketchen, 2011,

p. 444) and “it includes not just factual, how-to KSAs that can be made explicit but also tacit KSAs, which can often be difficult to articulate” (Polanyi, 1966, cited by Crook et al 2011, p. 444). From these definitions we can understand how human capital is important part of organizational dynamics and performance.

Accordingly, the human capital definition we used in our work, we see HC as “a resource of the organization which collectively emerges from individual KSAOs...” (Ployhart & Moliterno, 2011, p. 131).

The popular work by Senge (2006) evidenced, people that are truly involved in identifying and creating a shared vision, experience a sort of “creative tension” that continuously improves the level of their Knowledge, Skills, Abilities, and other characteristics that constitute human capital. Similarly, more scientific research (Stam et al., 2014) has pointed out how the vision - and the correct communication of the same - can have deep effects on motivation and (Bass, 1985; Bryman, 1992; Burns, 1978; Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Shamir et al., 1994) and on the abilities and performances of subjects that are involved in vision identification and pursuit.

Following these considerations, argue that all KSAOs elements could reinforced by well-structured envisioning processes. In other words, processes of envisioning, could facilitate the exchange of knowledge, fostering convergence towards a shared perspective. Similarly, the Skills and Abilities of participants in envisioning processes could be strengthened through collaboration toward organizational systemic goals.

### **Social capital and networks**

As an organization’s external environment becomes more complex and dynamic, inter-organizational relationships are moving toward a more relational, network-oriented structure where factors of mutuality and interdependence are playing an increasingly prominent role (Andriof & Waddock, 2002; Harrison & St. John, 1996).

Scholars (Entwhistle, Bristow, Hines, Donaldson, & Martin, 2007; Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998; Nohria & Eccles 1992; O'Toole, 1997; O'Toole & Meier, 2001; Provan & Kenis, 2007; Provan & Milward, 1995) have focused on networks at both the individual and organizational levels. At the individual level the focus has been on the examination of dyadic relationships, or social networks involving individuals (human capital) in different organizations with a focus on issues such as reciprocity and frequency of communication. Other researchers have focused on the organizational network itself, looking at structure, density and configurations of the network. According to Provan and Kenis (2007, p. 231), networks are comprised of autonomous organizations and are essentially cooperative endeavors. Agranoff and McGuire (2003) have identified these collaborative arrangements as processes that operate "in multi-institutional arrangements to solve problems that cannot be solved or solved easily by a single organization" (p.4). According to Teisman and Klijn (2002), partnerships are seen as the best way, in the end, to govern the complex relations and interactions in a modern network society (p. 190), From a strategic perspective, organizations in a trust-filled collaborative network have an advantage in the sharing of risks, benefits, and resources (Dawes & Prefontaine, 2003), in synergy creation, and, we believe, in advancing a common vision. Human capital is at the heart of these networks.

We assert that human capital is at the core building capacity, resources and is an intangible driving force, for any process of responsible development.

**Building human capital and responsible development vision: the key role of  
education and awareness raising processes**

In this view, the synergic relationships between envisioning processes, human and social capital building are evident. According to Kouzes and Posner (2009, p. 21), for example, to create and maintain the connection among people becomes a necessary

condition for developing a shared vision that can lead them in the creation of a future. A truly shared vision incorporates the aspirations and objectives (including those of responsible development) of both the organization's and the community's members. Sharing also helps the community to see the potential value of the exchange and pooling of resources. On the network level in particular, "the vision can [...] become a driving factor capable of generating creative tension that helps individual organizations to develop their own *core competences* and to coordinate them with those of their partners, creating a distinctive macro-competence with a value greater than the sum of its parts" (Niccolini, 2008, p. 170).

According to Krieg and Clancy and (2001) having a vision is clearly helpful in defining systemic objectives (such as responsible development). In this sense, it is essential to invest in human capital and building the social capital to create a sort of "common spirit". This common spirit grounded in trust creates the platform for shared objectives, vision and higher levels of performance. Such an approach is also essential for setting realistic and ambitious responsible development objectives.

In this perspective of necessary interaction between envisioning and human and social capital building processes, the responsible development orientation calls for the ongoing interaction of human capital (individual actors) as central figures in value creation and ultimately shared expectations and vision. Education is and continues to be fundamental in promoting sustainable development and improving the capability of people to confront environmental and developmental problems" (United Nations, 1992). Responsible development will be a logical extension of this focus and educational process.

### **Research Methodology and field of application**

In the above-mentioned perspective, we conducted a research study aimed at showing how different organizations can cooperate in identifying a common vision<sup>3</sup> for responsible development.

The aim of this research was to test a methodology and a practical instrument that can initiate a process to foster the development of a shared strategic vision. Moreover, through the envisioning process seen in the case study, it is possible to observe knowledge management practices that not only stimulate diffusion, but create values in countries which differ in cultures, environment and customs but are united by the same desire for responsible development in their region.

### **Research Area and Subjects**

The research first started in 2011 and ran until 2014 as a cross-country study. Several countries, in the zone known as South East Europe (SEE), promoted and activated a transnational and cooperative project financed by the EU aimed at sharing knowledge and developing a common model for the management of responsible development.

In 2014, the Project was selected as one of the 20 best practice projects in the field of sustainable tourism developments by the E.N.T.E.R. network (European Network for Transfer and Exploitation of EU-Project Results) appointed by the European Commission to implement the Leonardo da Vinci project “PESTO – Promotion and Network of EU Projects on Sustainable Tourism”.

The aim of the EU project (formally named “A sustainable development model for green mountain areas”) was to preserve, protect, and incentivize rural mountain areas, increasing their human capital, particularly through knowledge sharing and

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<sup>3</sup> Having chosen the broader meaning of the vision, it also includes the concepts of purpose and values.

collaboration among several institutions, such as local, provincial, and regional authorities, protected areas, national forestry administrations, and environmental agencies in different countries.

Within this scope, a major goal of the project was “to develop transnational partnerships on matters of strategic importance, in order to improve territorial, economic and social integration processes and to contribute to the cohesion, stability and competitiveness of the SEE region”.

The distinctive feature of the project was the effort to build responsible development vision through a process which oriented human capital in the participating organizations to develop a shared vision by exchanging knowledge, interchanging competences and communicating values. The process was solution-focused on responsible development for the region. The desired outcome was to forge a better path towards responsible development for each country, based on a common sense of belonging and some shared objectives.

A key general objective of the Project was to find ways to develop a systemic strategy for training purposes and ways to increase awareness while respecting the value of natural and cultural resources in the area of interest. Participants worked to find systemic processes oriented towards stimulating the growth of human capital capable of interpreting and taking ownership of values related to the natural and cultural resources of mountain areas and to express sensitivity and commitment to, responsibility for, and interest and active participation in their conservation.

To carry out such an ambitious mission, three essential synergistic phases (information, training, and awareness-raising constitute) in a systemic process called “Education for Responsible Development” (ERD), was developed as a long term educational learning process. In order for ERD to be adopted as an instrument for training and disseminating information and vector for increasing the awareness of the project members in a

responsible development orientation, it was necessary to consider strategies that vision focused with specific targets.

For this reason, a Working Group (WG) was created. The WG task was to identify and provide guidelines specifically designed to implement an educational system aimed at informing, training, and raising awareness for responsible development, i.e., to implement ERD. The WG was a pilot program tasked with providing concrete models that could be replicated to each partner/territory.

The specific project aim was to have a solid, realistic, and clear guide to follow which pursued the objectives of responsible development using an envisioning process.

The envisioning process model was then empirically tested with the participation of ten organizations from eight different nations [Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Montenegro, Romania, and Slovenia, shown in the table below (Table, 2)]. The envisioning process model was implemented and replicated by the researchers. See Table 2 below for model cross-country replications.

**Table 2** – *Organizations involved in the Envisioning Process*

	<i>Organization</i>	<i>Nation</i>
<i>A</i>	Province of Macerata	Italy
<i>B</i>	Monti Sibillini National Park	Italy
<i>C</i>	Municipality of Pljevlja	Montenegro
<i>D</i>	Bulgaria - Regional Administration Smolyan	Bulgaria
<i>E</i>	Kőszeg Micro-Region	Hungary
<i>F</i>	National Forestry Administration-Romsilva	Romania
<i>G</i>	Slovak Environmental Agency	Slovakia
<i>H</i>	AREC Raumberg-Gumpenstein	Austria
<i>I</i>	Soelktaeler Nature Park	Austria
<i>J</i>	Region of Epirus	Greece



*A Mixed Methods Approach: qualitative and quantitative research techniques.*

“Participatory Action Research” was used from a qualitative applications standpoint (others have acknowledged concerns about its effectiveness and reliability especially about the possible generalization of the findings). The literature though agrees that this approach works best and produces good results when applied to the study of cases (McKay & Marshall, 2001; Brydon-Miller *et al.*, 2003). One of the researchers was a key actor/ agent of the envisioning process, experiencing and leading it in the Green Mountain European Project. The other three researchers were involved post application evaluating data outcomes and examining the data for common themes, in order to include cross-indexed perspectives in an effort to provide a more refined and more objective assessment of the process and the outcomes. As a result, the work became an exemplar case study (Leonard-Barton, 1990) on the application of a process based envisioning model of responsible development yielding higher levels of participation of human capital and greater growth of social capital as a result.

In the social sciences the assessment of multi-dimensional concept such as vision cannot be examined by quantitative instruments alone, but required a mixed method approach toward the understanding of such complex concepts. The investigation requires both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. This research required a research framework that integrated the use of quantitative tools, able to yield more objective and comparable data, and which integrates qualitative tools.

Quantitative techniques make it possible to obtain measures which provide finite-value results by studying variables that are not commonly dealt with in numerical studies; while qualitative methods, and the use of ethnographic techniques. These qualitative tools, seek to focus on and to understand the present and future meanings of the interactions between/among subjects, whether they are individuals or organizations, depending upon the context in which the research is applied. The data for this research

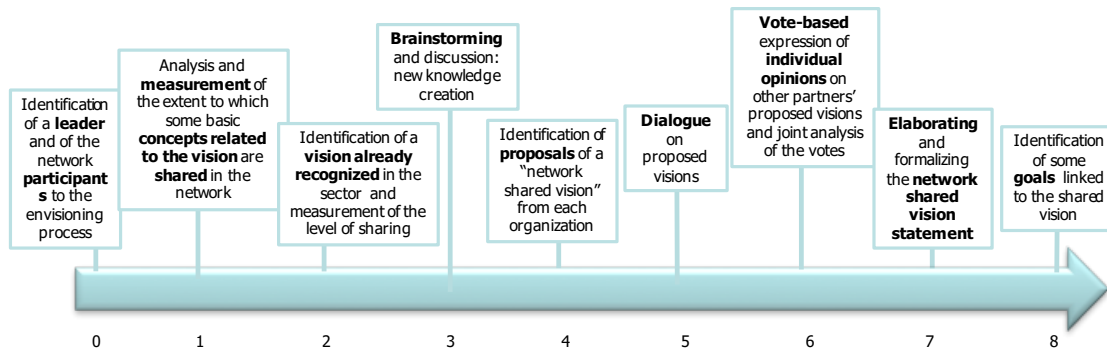
was analysed for common themes and findings included qualitative “data”, outcomes. Qualitative data aggregated results included personal and group statements, observation notes, exchanges of opinion, interviews from the envisioning process.

***The Process Model for the Envisioning Process: Phases, Characteristics and Outcomes***

The process model applied to creating the envisioning process, can be seen in Figure 4 below. During the initial phase was essential that members be conscious of their own personal visions, which can be associated explicitly with the expectations and aspirations of the other community members (Westley & Mintzberg, 1989). Collaborators realized how important their own explicit and/or implicit contributions in this process were, especially if they talked about them, clarifying eventual differences and dispelling doubts, which generated enthusiasm and fuelled greater involvement. This process helped members/actors involved in achieving the vision and to enhance their commitment, whether individual or inter-organizational (Senge, 2006, p. 23). In this way, according to Kotter (1995), vision becomes something that enables a transformation characterized by enthusiasm and commitment.

Specifically, the method of envisioning tested in the EU project built several phases, that were layered phases using- a holistic perspective – a gradual process which yields a high level of effectiveness for the identification and ultimately creating a shared vision. The Process model for Envisioning s has eight different phases (see Figure 2 below). Each of these phases and their description are outlined in the following pages.

**Figure 2 – Envisioning Process: phases**



**0) Identification of leader is an essential preliminary phase in envisioning process.**

Leadership, particularly the charismatic and transformational, plays a fundamental role in vision identification and development (Bryson, 2011). According to (Sashkin, 1988; Nanus, 1992; Conger & Kanungo, 1987; O'Connell *et al.*, 2011), Vision content and leadership, even considered as distinct elements, are deeply interconnected in envisioning processes (Westley & Mintzberg, 1989).

As preliminary formal step in the Project, leaders and members of the community were identified and nominated, based on their competence and willingness to participated in the envisioning process. Leaders were identified by more formal positions in organizations.

**1) Analysis and measurement of the extent to which the concept of sustainable development is shared in the network**

In every envisioning process a useful shared future will only be developed if people share some core purpose and values (Bass, 1991; Senge, 2006). Moreover, the sharing of this core ideology enables and facilitates the process of social capital building and growth within the network.

In order to evaluate the extent to which the basic concept of sustainable development is shared by project participants, participants were first asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement used internationally to define the concept of sustainable development. The question, aimed at measuring opinions using the Likert scale<sup>4</sup>, was formulated as follows:

*“To what extent do you think that applying Bruntland’s definition of sustainable development can really lead to an improvement in social conditions?”*

The results are reported in Table 3 that follows:

**Table 3– Level of agreement with the official definition of sustainable development**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>J</b>	<b>Average</b>
<b>Score</b>	3	3	5	5	3	5	2	4	5	4	<b>3.8</b>

The findings show that the organizations differ widely in the extent to which they agree with the definition of sustainable development used at the international level. However, all of the organizations declared their appreciation of the positive aspect of the Bruntland’s definition, particularly for the attention paid to future generations and saw this as a strong point in the definition.

After an open dialogue the WG chose to substitute the definition of the concept of sustainable development with the more proactive one of *“Responsible and integrated development”* as *“a dynamic process that envisions, plans and provides a system of economic, social, ecological, cultural and even spiritual values for present and future generations.”*

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<sup>4</sup> A Likert scale evaluation scale was used for the questions asked and the five possible responses given, to which a numerical value was associated varying from “a) to a very great extent = 5 to e) not at all = 1”.

**Box 1** - *The shared concept of “responsible and integrated development according to the participants*

**Responsible and integrated development** is a dynamic process that envisions, plans and provides a system of economic, social, ecological, cultural and even spiritual values for present and future generations

Moreover, a responsible and integrated development includes a wide-ranging and aware citizen participation in preserving the natural and cultural heritage values of an area.

**2) Identification of a “responsible development vision” already widespread and recognized on the international level and measurement of the level of sharing of this vision.**

The level of sharing of a vision, was examined through the lens of common core values and purpose. The vision in this process application was “*to build a citizenship committed to preserving its heritage and its home on the earth*”. This vision was used because it was used by an organization considered a benchmark reality in the field of responsible development (U.S. National Park Service).

Measuring the extent to which the former vision is shared among the organizations that constitute the working group was accomplished by asking participants to respond to this benchmark statement and question their degree of agreement:

*“The United States National Park Service formalized for the 21st century an ambitious long-term vision of ‘raising awareness on responsible and integrated development’: ‘to build a citizenship committed to preserving its heritage and its home on the earth.’ To what extent do you agree with this vision?”*

The following responses (see Table 4 below) were given:

**Table 4 – Level of sharing of the international recognized vision**

Organization	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	Average
Score	3	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	3	5	4.5

The results collected indicate, on average, how important it is for these organizations to feel aligned with the internationally recognized vision of education for responsible development. In fact, on a scale of 1 to 5, the average is 4.50.

This type of data allows the numerical representation of an attitude and an inclination towards a highly intangible variable, like vision.

the numerical results obtained, the organization’s level of agreement with a vision that is highly “appreciated”. This tool allows for a measure of this degree of agreement.

**3. Brainstorming: new knowledge creation**

In this and subsequent phases, the use of working groups, focus groups, and especially brainstorming (Morgan, 1996; Creswell, 2013) is reinforced. In phase 4, an initial process of new knowledge building occurs through the well-supported comparison and sharing of good practice and the guidance of the leader/mentor (Swap et al., 2001).

Hickman and Silva (1984) identify the ability to recognize the vision as an essential part of the envisioning process. Once the members of the working group recognized a vision’s ability to become useful and potentially effective, that is, seemingly audacious yet perceived as achievable (Collins & Porras, 1996). Correspondingly participants expressed their alignment with the proposed vision statement (US National Park Service Vision Statement), they were very inclined to start the process of defining a vision that could serve as a starting point for the work ahead for the group. Then, they were ready to direct their efforts toward creating a new vision.

**4 Identification and creation of proposals for a network shared vision from each organization.**

This phase, activated the so-called *Dialoguing Ba*, forming the basis for converting individual participants’ tacit knowledge into implicit knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995: 66). Westley and Mintzberg’s (1989) perspective is particularly useful in this phase. Here *envisioning* is a process of creating a vision in three phases: a) visualizing the image of the desired future, b) describing and communicating it to the collaborators, c) collaborators becoming aware that they are the main actors and recipients of the vision.

The actors (organization) were asked to individually expressed their own ideas of a vision. Participants presented their own visions after a brainstorming session. A summary table of those individual visions are below in Table 5:

**Table 5 – Visions of single participant organizations**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Proposed visions</b>
<b>A &amp; B</b>	The future of mountain areas is ensured through the conservation of mountain culture and knowledge of territories and populations, and so, their development as well as lifestyles and vocations will become sustainable.
<b>C</b>	Improved education at all levels and in all its forms is seen as a vital tool for addressing all problems relevant to the sustainable development of mountain areas, in particular to improve the living environment for the local population and to diversify the ecological, cultural and economic potential of the SEE region.
<b>D</b>	Coming together to promote the uniqueness of the mountains of South East Europe as an attractive, protected, and prosperous region, to support sustainable development and improve the quality of life in the SEE mountain regions.
<b>E</b>	Mountain areas should be calm regions, characterized by well-structured and creative architecture and infrastructure with high-tech IT features and renewable innovations.
<b>F</b>	Increase knowledge regarding the distinguishing features and values that are characteristic to the mountain area and responsibility for the implemented actions regarding the management objectives of a certain zone.
<b>G</b>	Raise awareness through a target group to work on Sustainable Development issues and on specific SEE mountain areas thus leading to increased value and improved quality of life in mountainous regions.
<b>H</b>	Education on sustainable development needs not only to highlight environmental issues, but should also serve to discover and strengthen the soft skills of all

	affected persons in order to guarantee a respectful attitude and behaviour towards them and their environment.
<b>I</b>	The South East Europe Green Mountain Areas (δ SEEGMA) provide a perfect example to follow for practicing a comfortable, productive, sustainable lifestyle.
<b>J</b>	The development of sustainable consciences and the adoption of a sustainable “lifestyle”. The realization that the sustainable development is the only right path for future development, especially for sensitive areas.

**5. Dialogue regarding the proposed visions.**

In this phase, every member’s awareness of the others’ visions enabled the entire group to understand past, present, and future decisions. This allowed each collaborator to act independently, but in a manner consistent with the essence of the entire organization’s decision (Amason, 1996). Communication, in fact, allowed collaborators to become promoters and contextual recipients of the vision, which allowed for true sharing.

**6. Shared vision identification: vote-based expression of individual opinions on other partners’ proposed visions and joint analysis of the votes.**

The importance attributed to communication in the formation of the shared vision is confirmed by Pearce and Ensley (2004) and by Stam *et al* (2014) and other authors (Klimoski & Mohammed, 1994). They describe a “shared vision” as a team process in which the same individuals form and create the vision.

In the voting procedure, each participant chose another participant’s proposed vision (see Table 6 below) and highlighted the concept which, in their opinion, was most important in connection with the vision they voted.

**Table 6 – Proposed visions voted on and key words highlighted by each single participant**

Organization	Vision	Key words highlighted in the vision voted
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	<b>voted</b>	
<b>A</b>	G	Awareness
<b>B</b>	G	Awareness
<b>C</b>	H	Soft skills
<b>D</b>	G	Raising awareness
<b>E</b>	H	Wide Perspective and Complexity
<b>F</b>	H	Enthusiasm. Local people, Motivation
<b>G</b>	F	Knowledge based, Responsibility
<b>H</b>	F	Increasing knowledge, Responsibility
<b>I</b>	F	Responsibility, Skills, Values, Preservation, Knowledge

Vision sharing, appears to lead to greater human capital engagement and increases social capital in the process. People become more skilled at understanding how they can help each other and eliminate confusion in the communication process. The process clarifies intentions and renders interaction easier among the parties. It leads to an atmosphere of greater trust where members are more inclined to share their knowledge. In this perspective, Hambrick (1997) uses the term *corporate coherence* to explain how the shared vision (*collective vision*) forms the basis for proactiveness in an organization as a translated intention and anticipated future action. Katzenbach (1996) posits that teams should be profoundly committed to a goal in order to reach a sense of common direction. resulting in a idea of a *collective vision*

***7. Elaborating and formalizing the network shared vision statement.***

The community reaches this phase of externalization of the vision. Moving from the keywords highlighted in the previous table the shared vision has been formally identified and a statement was drafted. All the community members agreed with this final version of the vision that now represents the future desired by the community as a whole.

Therefore, making explicit the shared vision represents an important step in the envisioning process because, considering the differences among the members of the community and the “experimental” nature of the process, the tangibility of the output makes the process and its result more open to revision and more easily useable by the constituents so that it can become an inspiring message directed at collaborators (Berson et al., 2001).

At the end of the envisioning process, the objective of the process was reached, that is, the elaboration of a vision shared on the network level, which is reported as:

*The vision for raising awareness is that in the South East Europe Mountains Areas a skilled, responsible, and proud community continuously strengthens its knowledge about the peculiarities, potentialities, and values related to its living territory, developing a sustainable consciousness, preserving the natural environment, and improving the quality of life.*

We reiterate not only how important it is that a network of organization work to draft a vision, but especially how defining a process, and therefore a model, a practice to follow, can be innovative. The elaboration, drafting, and sharing of a vision can become a factor shared by all people forming the organizations and promoted by everyone. In this case the chosen vision seemed to display the main features provided by the literature for effective vision (Brevity, Clarity, Abstractness, Challenge, Future orientation and Desirability) (Baum *et al*, 1998; Kantabutra & Avery, 2005).

Obviously the effectiveness and the utility of the vision statement, will be influenced not only by the robust process of envisioning used, but also by the will to apply it in the ordinary life of the organizations. It is well known that statements can become both written sentences, created with fancy words (Levin, 2000) papering the walls of the company (Lipton, 1996), or polar stars able to stimulate the action members of the organization (Kousez & Pozner, 2009).

**8. Identification of some goals linked to the shared vision.**

The same WG that worked on the envisioning process also identified and established four basic strategic objectives relative to the entire vision:

- A) to safeguard natural resources,
- B) to hold traditional values and knowledge in high esteem,
- C) to use innovative ideas to strive for mutual well-being in the members' diversified and fragile habitats, and
- D) to increase knowledge about and, compatibly with a sustainable philosophy and life style, the popularity of the SEE mountain areas (Niccolini et al., 2012).

Aligned with Thoms and Greenberger's (1995) perspective, the case study analysed shows how a vision, even at the inter-organizational level, evolve from a gradual creation process and, that thanks to its bottom-up nature, leads to improvements in human capital among the network of participants. It appears that the envisioning process allows to participants to find their beliefs, their values and their possible selves (Stam et al, 2014) in the vision. This means that the process can enhance their level of involvement and of motivation towards the achievement of the vision developed.

**Conclusions**

This case study shows that a network of organizations can work collectively to change the environment through a more responsible path of development. This echoes scholars (Trist, 1979, 1983; Emery & Trist, 1973) who have emphasized that inter-organizational relationships influence each other and that this co-evolution can be even more effective through collective action.

The network of actors studied in this case adopted an overall philosophy of responsible development, which was jointly developed demonstrating a level of values congruence, mission convergence and shared envisioned future.

Our results in this case study evidenced that actors in collaborative networks may offer a viable approach to dealing with situations presenting high level of complexity in the environment. where organizations are committed to improving responsible development orientation. As environmental complexity rises and uncertainty increases, the solutions to complex problems are being found in knowledge-based network responses.

Most of the literature on values, mission and vision has been aimed at understanding how these variables work at individuals, groups and single-organizational level, not at network one.

Thanks also to the Participatory Action Research approach and the abundant official documentation of the EU project, we were able to discern the importance of the knowledge, skills and the abilities of participants and their organizations needed to solve responsible development issues and how this envisioning process improved the network level capabilities. The process also confirmed the importance of human capital engagement (see Ployhart & Moliterno, 2011), and its positive impact on social capital development.

We believe that the innovative process model described when applied improves both social and human capital outcomes not only at the organizational but also at the network level. Sharing and creating overlapping core values and purpose while working to identify a joint realistic, stimulating, and audacious envisioned future offers a motivating opportunity to raise people's awareness. Working on a formal envisioning process makes it possible to draft a vision statement in which network or community participants become active players in a bottom up more participatory process.

Providing a method for the envisioning process, as described above, could therefore represent an important model aimed at developing networked human and social capital at the strategic level producing shared objectives that are intended to promote responsible development through the creation of value through the network's organization.

So far, little is known about not only the effectiveness of "responsible networks", but also network effectiveness in general. We believe that a key to understanding network success is tied to the understanding of how values, mission and envisioned future are identified and diffused at the network level. It seems that the capacity of leaders to establish the conditions that make it possible to identify and to "share" these elements across organizations in a collaborative way can increase human and social capital at network level and can create effective outcomes for the network. For these reasons, future research should aim to develop a deeper understanding of the function and the effectiveness of "responsible networks", while highlighting the role of values, mission and vision.

### **Limitations and Challenges**

The limitations of the proposed approach can primarily be discerned in the topic investigated and in the nature of the research method chosen. There is insufficient academic evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of the responsible network.

Moreover, qualitative research presents some risks. The subjectivity of the data collected, which cannot be strictly generalized, must be noted. Nevertheless, although qualitative research entails limitations in itself, it is an important instrument for

revealing and measuring variables that cannot be completely investigated quantitatively.

Additionally, the differences in the cultural backgrounds of the representatives of the different organizations involved simultaneously represented both a difficulty and an opportunity.

Another limitation was the non-homogeneous, and in some cases weak, knowledge of the concept of “vision” among the representatives. (Hickman and Silva, 1984). It is therefore not necessary that the people coming together to draft a vision statement, have an expert knowledge and definitive understanding of what vision means. Technicians follow a series of instructions; they are not pushed to “create” something that goes beyond the instructions received. Hickman and Silva (1984), discuss that “artisans” instead, have an idea of what should be obtained from their work: they use tools and materials to give shape to the product, always keeping the aspect and the effect of their work in mind. The challenge in the envisioning process is therefore to make beginners progress to the point where they can become technicians who can then instil an artisan’s passion in themselves and in the organization.

The figure of a leader, central in the facilitation and guidance of the envisioning process, may not be so easily replicated. One real concern is the real need for such a figure (facilitator) of the envisioning process. In other words, can self-organizing and self-motivated groups achieve the same outcome with the benefit of an official facilitator? This question opens the door to another line of research and line of inquiry.

The findings in this work can lead to the validation of the envisioning process through additional application and replication of the model. The use of the proposed methodology made it possible, in fact, to observe, collect and compile data regarding the potential effectiveness of this model and its ability to facilitate an explicit shared vision with an increasing level of participation from all members of the network.

Finally, we observe how the envisioning process may provide useful insights for those private companies that are committed to pursuing responsible development visions. To achieve these ambitious goals no company, in fact, can act individually, but must necessarily act collaboratively in public-private partnerships and/or networks. where actors having responsible development as a core purpose of their mission (e.g. the Hewlett Packard that is pursuing the “2020 Zero-Deforestation” goal for its products, cooperating with the Forest Stewardship Council and the World Wide Fund) work together.

The envisioning process model that we propose relies on inter-organizational collaboration, may provide a mechanism and approach that leads a network of organizations to effectively identify and develop shared visions and, at the same time, strengthen the processes of human capital development among participants.

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