

SRN WORKSHOP – THE PARTNERSHIP DIMENSION

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GOOD PRACTICE IN ‘HORIZONTAL PARTNERSHIP’ : WORKING WITH STAKEHOLDERS AND CITIZENS

In this workshop SRN partners explored the complementary role of sub-regional organisations in working with stakeholders and citizens in the management and delivery of Structural Funds and other regeneration programmes. They identified some good practices, some barriers to effective working and some transferable elements. Potential application of good practice in horizontal partnership in the new EU funding period was also considered.

Working with stakeholders and citizens in Langhe Monferrato Roero

Marta Ferrero introduced the topic by reference to published work on how to identify and classify (or ‘map’) relevant stakeholders, especially in the context of EU and other funding programmes. Stakeholders are broadly defined as groups of people or individuals, institutions or government bodies that may have a relationship with a project and/or a programme. They differ in their roles and responsibilities, access to and control over resources, and the part they play in decision-making. Some stakeholders are well-represented by associations like Chambers of Commerce; others may lack an obvious reference group.

SRN partners commented on the distinctions between stakeholders and ‘partners’ in the world of public funding, and requirements in different funding programmes for collaborative working with different types of participant. It was also important to consider when (at what point in a programme or project) and by what method to involve them. Early involvement is generally recommended.

Two practical examples from Langhe, both led by the agency, were presented to illustrate different levels of stakeholder involvement.

The Territorial Pact Valbormida Alta Langa is a locally-financed strategy for sustainable endogenous economic development prepared for a mountainous rural area suffering depopulation and environmental degradation. Although the area has a small population, the collaborative work to prepare the strategy and subsequent development projects has involved many institutions, SMEs from various sectors and nearly 60 municipalities. The strategy capitalises on local resources, focusing on local products, the promotion of social and cultural identity and protection of the environment and natural heritage. Priority has been given to projects creating employment, fostering integration between different production sectors and promoting environmental and economic sustainability.

The Literary and landscape park example demonstrates how local resources can be organised in a joint project to create economic and social development in an area. Key objectives were greater coherence in cultural tourism activities, and the creation of new development opportunities. Local operators needed to develop a common approach to the promotion of the area. Infrastructure investments had to be planned in a more integrated way and linked to end uses. An INTERREG IIIB project supported work with, for example, local decision makers, enterprises and cultural associations to collect suggestions and create a local network. Different techniques were used to involve them. For many, this was the first opportunity to speak about a common problem and possible ways to solve it. The main output was a common action plan containing priorities for new infrastructure and for planning the ‘tourism offer’ and boosting its quality, together with tasks allocated according to the competences and experience of different stakeholders. Responsibilities for implementation were formally adopted in a signed agreement between all participants.

Involvement of stakeholders and the public in local development in Microregion Hranicko

Olga Trčková outlined regional policies in the Czech Republic and conditions in the Hranicko Microregion, a voluntary association of municipalities centred on the town of Hranice. The Secretariat of Microregion Hranicko has been active in building up stakeholder networks in the area, supporting delivery of the Regional Development Strategy 2007-2013 (an agreement between local government and the private sector setting out priorities on, for example, enterprise development and employment, housing, landscape and transport, water and energy infrastructure), developing an information and communications strategy and preparing and implementing projects. An inter-sectoral network of development actors, the Development Partnership of Region Hranicko, is a forum for exchange of information and cooperation with various EU projects. This work has been strengthened since 2004/5 through the INTERREG IIIC Regional Framework Operation INNOREF, described at the Klaipeda meeting of SRN.

Two 'good practices' relating to horizontal partnership were described.

The Euroteam is a small team with expertise in project development, based on the Secretariat, working to build capacity for participation in EU-funded projects in the villages of the Microregion. The well-targeted Communications strategy of Olomouc Region contributes to transparency. The Intention is to maximise the use of Structural Funds in line with the priorities in the Regional Development Strategy for 2007-2013.

The view from the Czech Republic is that well-founded regional cooperation by municipalities and other partners brings added value, networking helps to support synergies between projects, and development actors are a productive resource for implementation of the regional strategy.

Contributions from other partners and discussion

Orinta Minalgaite commented on the lack of day to day links between Klaipeda Regional Development Agency and the local authority and private sector organisations, though there is collaboration on projects, for example with TACIS funding. Some of the paid activities of the agency include work similar to that of the Euroteam. The agency may be a consultee but is not active in policy development.

Paul Owens provided further explanation of government-required Local Strategic Partnerships, mentioned by both Bristol and Cumbria at previous SRN meetings, and raised questions about their effectiveness. In **Bristol** partnerships are now the norm. With a limited pool of stakeholders on multiple partnerships, the 'usual suspects' run a wide range of boards and regeneration programmes and it can be difficult to get appropriate private sector and local community representatives on board. 'Partnership fatigue' is becoming an issue.

In discussion, comparisons were drawn between locally-determined and relatively informal, action-based partnerships in Finland, the Programme Conference model established in Italy (which is not determined at state level but actually subject to formal requirements through regional law) and the extensive but, perhaps less well considered, use of partnerships in the UK. UK partners commented on the increasing trend for decisions about public spending to be made by private sector representatives, though the current government expects more community involvement. In the UK, too, partnerships are rarely used for delivery, in contrast to the situation in Finland.

Partners discussed various issues in stakeholder involvement, including how to improve the participation of particular groups such as young people, for example by providing mentoring or other training; how to avoid raising unrealistic expectations; and how best to communicate with participants having very different knowledge, for example of European programmes. Specialist staff may be needed to focus on communication and information-giving.

Good practice exchange

SRN partners were asked to identify aspects of the presentations given in the workshop which they consider to be good practice and which might be transferred to their own situations.

The complementary use of different EU funding programmes to progress local objectives was a feature of the examples from Hranice and Langhe. Cumbria commented on the potential for this in the UK and on the barriers created by a failure on the part of those responsible for local delivery to take transnational work seriously, including as a means to improve implementation of the mainstream Structural Funds programmes.

Several partners were impressed with Hranice's EuroTeam, seen as a good example of a new Member State finding a practical way to increase its capacity to use EU money while at the same time adding value to day to day functions. The team intervenes in the project development process at an earlier stage than comparable bodies in Finland, such as the Linkki project.

The Territorial Pact Valbormida Alta Langa, with 59 municipalities working together to create a development strategy, was appealing to both Tenerife and Bristol.

The voluntary association of municipalities in Hranice and the arrangements for joint working in Langhe are comparable. They provide ideas for joint working by parish councils in England, for example.

The Communication strategies of Hranice and Langhe were also seen as useful, for example by Tampere. They clearly set out which groups to involve, why, when and how, and help to avoid conflicts of interest.

Some general lessons for horizontal partnership

- Do involve stakeholders and citizens.
- Developing a strategy for communication with stakeholders and citizens is useful to organise and improve cooperation.
- Effective horizontal working needs commitment (political will).
- To do this properly needs people with the right skills.
- It is easier if a dedicated organisation exists. Intermediary organisations taking a leading role in horizontal partnership need to be recognised as legitimate by the region above and municipalities below.
- Horizontal working is most likely to be effective where there is also good vertical partnership.
- It is not possible to be too prescriptive about the cooperation structure – 'horses for courses'.
- Use the EU system well. For example, rural areas may be able to use lessons in local partnership from Leader+ using the new Rural Development funding?