

## **SRN THEMATIC WORKSHOPS – THE TERRITORIAL DIMENSION KLAIPEDA, LITHUANIA 15 JUNE 2006**

### **GOOD PRACTICE IN THE MANAGEMENT AND DELIVERY OF FUNDING PROGRAMMES IN URBAN AND RURAL AREAS**

The aims of this workshop were to explore issues and identify examples of good practice from sub-regional organisations in the management and delivery of Structural Funds and other regeneration programmes in different types of territory, with a particular focus on urban and rural areas.

#### **Delivery of programmes in urban areas**

**Paul Owens**, from **Bristol** City Council, introduced the urban dimension with a brief review of some characteristics of European urban areas and the main EU programmes designed to support sustainable urban development, stressing the increased scope for delegation of Structural Funds programme implementation to city authorities from 2007. He set the context for urban policy in England, raising issues such as the uncertainties about how central government's recent emphasis on city-regions fits with the expanding role of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) in the delivery of regeneration programmes.

Bristol City Council manages an ERDF URBAN II CIP and devolved urban elements of the South West Objective 2 programme. The presentation highlighted some of the arrangements in place in Bristol to ensure effective delivery of the Objective 2 funds. Examples include an active Local Strategic Partnership and generally close working relationships with the local community and service providers, enabling the special needs of urban populations to be identified and met; the alignment of projects with Neighbourhood Action Plans; employment of a project development worker; use of a two-stage application process for local organisations and a common application form for both EU and domestic regeneration funds; and support for networking amongst approved Objective 2 projects.

**Xavier Tiana Casablanca** provided further urban evidence from the **Diputació de Barcelona**, mentioning the Neighbourhood Programme for Catalunya as a possible good practice example. He referred to the role of the provincial government as an intermediary body at the level of the city-region, for example as an advocate for the smaller urban areas within its boundaries. In particular, the province is seeking some decentralised delivery for EU funds from 2007, using the experience of Bristol as a possible model. Examples of recent activities include preparation of a declaration adopted by the Catalan Federation of Municipalities seeking greater involvement of local authorities in the programming process; with Arco Latino, preparation of a Position Paper on Cohesion Policy and Cities; meetings with the European Commissioner for regional policy; and participation in the conference 'Regions and Cities: Partners for Growth and Jobs' held in Barcelona on 1-2 June.

#### **Regeneration in predominantly rural areas**

**Gillian Elliot** considered regeneration challenges in rural and peripheral areas, focusing on Cumbria in the North West of England where GDP is still only 77 percent of the EU average. Contrasts between the urban/industrial and rural parts of the county, and the distances between communities, make the integrated delivery of regeneration programmes difficult. The County accesses a range of domestic and EU budgets. Transnational cooperation is extensive, especially on the topic of the rural knowledge base.

Good practice lessons from current programmes include:

- Developing a territorial strategy focussing on knowledge rather than infrastructure, people and not projects, and collaboration rather than competition.
- The importance of making links with other EU regions so as to exchange ideas and talent, develop a collaborative approach to problem solving and pursue business opportunities and trade links.

Issues in the delivery of mainstream Structural Funds and domestic programmes include a perceived lack of democratic accountability in the current structure (despite the existence of a range of different partnerships and strategies) and the need for better integration of the various organisations and budgets.

Steps towards a more integrated approach in Cumbria include the development of a sub-regional strategy bringing urban and rural work together and the planned merger of the two existing regeneration companies to form 'Cumbria Vision' which will deliver all relevant budgets in all parts of the county, probably via a Service Level Agreement with the RDA. In the meantime, in the absence of one delivery body, the County Council's modest Regeneration Support Team (funded through ERDF/ESF technical assistance and by Cumbria partners) is the Accountable Body for Structural Funds implementation and undertakes common management of various budgets. Key features of this team's work are delivery of services to project development bodies across the whole county, reducing red tape; training; liaison with the RDA and regeneration companies; appraisal of project applications; dealing with grant claims and payments to projects; maintaining a database; and scrutinising all running projects. RST also has an awareness-raising function, working with the County's Brussels office and promoting EU opportunities within the region.

### Shorter interventions illustrating further points

- **Lucie Humplikova** from **Hranice** presented examples of the use of Structural Funds – mainly the Czech Republic's Joint Regional Operational Programme - to build capacity for further engagement in EU-funded projects in a largely rural area. The project 'Partnership for development of the Olomouc Region' funds several 'urban development managers' who provide project development support to groups of small villages lacking the personnel and financial capacity to do this work alone, thus helping to build partnership between villages and larger urban areas. Support for a series of Professional Service Centres is provided via the INTERREG IIIC RFO INNOREF, in which the Voluntary Association of Municipalities of the 'Hranicko Region (including Hranice) is a partner. In discussion, comparisons were drawn between these arrangements and the coordination and support provided by Barcelona province and Cumbria County Council to smaller local authorities within their territories.
- **Mikis Moselt** from **SVIM** in the Marche region of Italy described a LEADER+ initiative to support the development of a network of common services, in this case supporting a large number of museums and boosting the region's 'cultural offer'. Key features of this initiative are common advertising, a common ticket giving opportunities for discounts, and the development and use of a minimum quality standard for museum management.

### Conclusions/transferable lessons

The presentations covered a good range of practice from different areas and showed up some rural/urban contrasts. They highlighted :

- the role of SRN partners as intermediary bodies, supporting project development, reducing paperwork and establishing different ways to integrate the various budgets available;

- the relevance of territorial cooperation as a means to support delivery of mainstream programmes;
- the need to build capacity for participation in EU-funded regeneration programmes at regional and local level;
- continuing concern about the involvement of sub-regional partners and treatment of urban issues in the future EU programmes.

Particular 'good practices' of interest to other partners were:

- In **Bristol**, the employment of project development workers, use of a common application form for EU and domestic funds, the support for community engagement, and support for networking meetings of Objective 2 projects allowing exchange of experience and cross-referrals for beneficiaries.
- In **Cumbria**, the common management arrangements for appraisal, monitoring and claims/finance for projects - for both urban and rural areas and funded from both EU and domestic funds, with the work of the integrated Regeneration Support Team (which supports Objective 2, Objective 3, Leader+ and regional funds) viewed as enhancing local integration and synergy, as well as enabling projects to avoid bureaucracy and get on with delivery.