

POSITION STATEMENT

on the participation of sub-regional organisations in the management and delivery of EU Structural Funds

June 2006

MOTIVATION

The **SRN – Sub-Regional Network** – is a network co-financed by INTERREG IIIC, the Community Initiative promoting inter-regional cooperation. The network's aim is to help improve management and delivery of European Structural Funds and other regeneration initiatives by sub-regional authorities. The network, led by Bristol City Council, is made up of 12 members from seven European countries¹. The project duration is from November 2004 to May 2007.

The network members share the conviction that the **correct application of the principles of subsidiarity and partnership**, as established in Community Regulations governing the Structural Funds, calls for **active participation by sub-regional authorities throughout programming, management and evaluation processes**.

Similarly, **decentralisation**, with an increased role for local and regional agents, **is one of the three principles behind reform of the Structural Funds for the 2007-2013 period**, along with greater concentration of the funds in more deprived areas in accordance with the priorities established in the Lisbon and Gothenburg agendas, and the simplification of the procedure for action.

With regard to this subject, the network engages in a series of activities aimed at analysing the current situation in participating countries, to share good practices, to identify transferable elements and to promote the results. To date, a preliminary report has been produced and an initial meeting has taken place, as well as five workshops and two public seminars, from which the following conclusions have been drawn:

- Analysis of **the participation of sub-regional organisations in managing and delivering Structural Funds**, in both Objective 1 and Objective 2 areas, shows that such participation generates **added value and that a wide range of good practices exist in this field**. Five SRN members have been delegated responsibility for managing or coordinating programmes in their regions: Bristol City Council, Cumbria County Council, the Province of Modena, the cities of Turku and Tampere and Diputació de Barcelona (in the previous period).

¹ SRN Network: Bristol City Council (United Kingdom), Cumbria County Council (United Kingdom), Diputació de Barcelona (Spain), Santa Cruz de Tenerife Development Agency (Spain), City of Hranice (Czech Republic), Sviluppo Marche RDA (Italy), Province of Modena (Italy), Langhe Montferrato Roero (Italy), Metropolitan Community of Lille (France), City of Tampere (Finland), City of Turku (Finland), Klaipeda Regional Development Agency (Lithuania)

- Local planning and management makes it possible to provide a better response to needs in the territory, addressing European regional, and local strategic priorities. Decision making by those with local knowledge can optimise the impact of structural funds investment, and enable local agents and citizens to take part, making European Union action more visible. Nonetheless, initial results from the project indicate that **it is necessary to identify the most appropriate level of decentralisation for each fund and objective**, taking into account such factors as territorial identity and the relations between different government levels and the national government structures.
- Organisations operating in **sub-regional areas have shown themselves to be capable of managing financial instruments**, responding to the requirements made by Community regulations with regard to such considerations as programme management, project selection, implementation, co-financing and compliance with EU horizontal priorities. It is therefore necessary to **define frameworks of action for programmes flexible enough to enable their management and project management to be adapted to regional and sub-regional circumstances, powers and capacities**.
- **The benefits of sub-regional management are not always recognised** by the national authorities responsible for the Structural Funds, and it is therefore necessary to **identify and disseminate good practice models** and to contribute in this way to improving the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the Structural Funds.

In view of the work achieved to date and taking into account that Community, national and regional authorities are currently drawing up the programme for the Structural Funds over the 2007-2013 period, the SRN network puts forward the following **PROPOSALS**:

1. That sub-regional authorities should be able to play an active role in programming and managing Structural Funds over the new programme period within the objectives of Convergence, Competitiveness and Employment and European Territorial Cooperation.
2. That the new Operational Programmes should identify and designate a significant percentage of funds to urban priorities.
3. That the capacity of sub-regional authorities to help programme and manage Structural Funds should be recognised and fostered.
4. That the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions should draw up reports at regional level on the appropriate participation that sub-regional authorities play in planning and managing Structural Funds.

