

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT AND PARTNERSHIP

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Introduction

Local development is a priority for Croatia as the country recovers from the war following the break-up of Yugoslavia but still confronts many issues, from regional disparities to the inclusion of minority groups and the achievement of social cohesion in the wake of wartime conflicts.

Across OECD countries, partnership has become a fundamental feature of local governance and local development policy and practice. Through partnership it is possible to create a shared vision and strategy for local development, and joined up arrangements for local governance which assist in implementing the strategy. Effective partnerships enable the pooling of ideas and expertise; maximising resources; sharing risks; and provide a stronger voice for localities in national policy debates (OECD 2001, 2004, 2007¹).

Local partnership is already becoming recognised as a key vehicle for local development, through programmes such as CARDS², County Development Partnerships and the preparation of ROPs³; Local Partnerships for Employment⁴, and County Economic and Social Councils⁵, as well as some more locally-driven initiatives. As the country enters the pre-accession phase prior to EU membership, the importance of partnership frameworks related to access to EU funds is becoming a key driver.

However, if local partnerships are to function effectively and deliver added value, a number of conditions must be satisfied. The membership of the partnership must include all the key players, and must be inclusive while at the same time having efficient decision making processes. Partnership structures must be robust and enable all partners to make their contributions. Attention must be paid to ensuring that the partnership culture is one of trust and collaboration. Leadership is important – but in a partnership leadership needs to be shared, and must rely more on building consensus than on the exercise of authority.

¹ OECD (2001): Local Partnerships for better governance; OECD (2004): New forms of governance for economic development; OECD (2007): Baltic Partnerships: Integration, growth and local governance in the Baltic Sea region.

² Ecorys (2004): Strategy and Capacity Building for Regional Development (CARDS 2002 Programme for Croatia), downloadable at [http://www.mmtpr.hr/UserDocsImages/CARDS_2002%20\(D\)/documents.html](http://www.mmtpr.hr/UserDocsImages/CARDS_2002%20(D)/documents.html).

³ County (Development) Partnerships derive from the County and Wider Regional Development Programme (CWRDP) which in turn relates to the National Strategy for Regional Development of the Ministry of Sea, Tourism, Transport and Development. The first partnerships at county level were established in war-torn areas eligible for CARDS. Their experience in designing ROPs (Regional Operational Programmes) has then been mainstreamed.

⁴ The Local Partnerships for Employment Programme addresses the human resource and employment issues involved in the promotion of national economic and social cohesion in Croatia. For more information on the Local Partnerships for Employment, see the website of the Croatian Employment Service at <http://www.hzz.hr/lpe/>.

⁵ Social and Economic Councils have been established in each region, coordinated by the Office for Social Partnership.

The working practice of the partnership must include arrangements for performance management and evaluation. Partnerships need to be supported by adequate resources – sufficient funding to meet their operating costs, and a staff team which possesses the skills and knowledge to support the activities of partners and assist them in the design and delivery of the local development strategy. Only if these conditions are met is it likely that partnerships will be ‘fit for purpose’ and add value to local development activity and to the work of local partners.

The Review undertaken in April showed that in Croatia there are important strengths which can be built on in developing effective partnership at the local level, but also barriers which need to be overcome. The Review included interviews at national level, but focussed on two areas – Vukovar-Sirmium and Varazdin. These two areas exhibit major differences in terms of the impact of the war, economic progress and prospects and social conditions and the following analysis recognises these at relevant points. Despite these differences however many of the issues and policy implications are similar in the two locations.

Strengths and weaknesses

Further development of partnership working for local development can build on several important strengths which were evident from the Review. There is a broad recognition of the need for partnership working at local level – to aid the process of reconstruction in Vukovar, to meet the challenges and maximise the opportunities of EU accession in both localities. This recognition is apparent in the partnerships which have developed around the ROPs/County Strategies in both Varazhdin and Vukovar-Sirmium (although the current arrangements are different in the two localities).

ROPs and County Partnerships

Partnership working associated with the development of the Regional Operational Programmes (ROPs) has enabled important initial steps to be taken in setting up local strategic partnership arrangements at the County level in the form of County Development Partnerships.

In both Vukovar-Sirmium and Varazdin, consultations about the development of the ROP drew in large numbers of partners. In Varazdin, over 100 individuals were involved, drawn from all sectors – public agencies, civil society, business, agriculture. Partners are still meeting every six months in a Partnership Committee of 90 members which enjoys a parallel status to the County assembly in terms of ROP implementation. Members have been sent questionnaires to get their views on the process. In Vukovar-Srijem County, similarly large numbers of partners were involved in consultation processes, but as the ROP is being transformed into the County development strategy the county partnership has been restructured to include 21 members (7 each from the public administration, business and civil society). The partnership, which is now seen as the ‘umbrella’ local partnership, will be responsible for monitoring strategy implementation in co-operation with the County. The national policy guidelines for County Partnerships⁶ define their role as a platform for constructive dialogue between the County and the range of other stakeholders in the area, to enhance developmental capacity and consensus at the local level, pool resources to finance projects, and oversee the delivery of the County Development Strategy. Understandably, the emerging county-level partnerships in Vukovar-Sirmium and Varazhdin are still at this point mostly at the stage of consolidating membership and ensuring the conditions for real dialogue.

⁶ Ministry of the Sea, Tourism, Transport and Development (2005): "Guidelines for National Policy", Annex VI, Action Plan, draft National Strategy for Regional Development, downloadable at [http://www.mmtpr.hr/UserDocsImages/CARDS_2002%20\(D\)/action_plan_annexes/annex6.doc](http://www.mmtpr.hr/UserDocsImages/CARDS_2002%20(D)/action_plan_annexes/annex6.doc).

In both Varazdin and Vukovar, there is a shared identification of key goals (such as reconstruction and tackling unemployment in Vukovar, access to funding and promotion of inward investment in Varazdin) and very active practical collaboration and often informal partnership at project level and around specific sectoral issues. The Local Employment Partnership in Vukovar-Sirmium and the E-Vukovar project are good examples.

E-Vukovar

E-Vukovar is a joint initiative of Vukovar, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and private businesses, including IBM and Microsoft, to expand information, communications, and technology applications. The purpose of the programme is to improve government services, business productivity, and access to education and training.

USAID's e-government system is helping the City of Vukovar to improve work performance within their local government. It also provides real-time on-line services to citizens and businesses and enables interactive communication between the local government and citizens. Currently over 2 million citizens use the USAID-designed e-government system in over 100 local governments throughout Croatia. This system has been expanded in Vukovar to include all public companies.

E-Vukovar has the further potential to provide networking, information sharing and dissemination support to partnership working in the Vukovar area, if the programme can be expanded so that it is actively utilised and 'owned' by all key partners – local governments at County and city/municipality level, other public agencies, and NGOs and citizens.

In Varazdin, political collaboration between parties and entrepreneurial local leadership provides an impetus towards partnership. This is apparent, for example, in the establishment of the Development Agency North (DAN) by Varazdin with three other towns and a County administration.

Political leadership in Varazdin

In the Varazdin area political leadership has been a key factor in promoting strategic local partnership working. In Varazdin City, a strong mayor and cross-party collaboration has promoted active partnership relations with business (for example through a City Economic Council which functions as a 'growth coalition' promoting developments such as the Varazdin Free Zone and inward investment activity). The political leadership in Varazdin has also taken the innovative step of linking with three local cities to set up a development agency, DAN (see following box). Active political involvement (for example through brainstorming strategy sessions) remains an important feature of DAN's operation.

The Development Agency North (DAN)

The Development Agency North (DAN) has been active in promoting a partnership-based approach to local development in the Varazdin area. Its approach is significant in at least three ways. In the first place, the partnership between a group of like-minded cities represents a local, bottom-up approach which aims to build on local strengths and compatibilities in promoting local development. Secondly, DAN works closely with parallel agencies in Slovenia and Hungary, recognising the importance of cross-border issues. Thirdly, DAN actively promotes partnership working at the project level, not only with business interests but with civil society organisations on projects concerned with employment and social inclusion. It must be noted however that, because DAN only includes certain local administrations, there is a danger which must be avoided of unnecessary competition between DAN and the parallel County development Agency, AZRA.

These strengths reflect the capacity for innovation, leadership and collaboration which are apparent in some institutions and among some actors in Vukovar-Sirmium and Varazdin. These strengths are however paralleled by several weaknesses and barriers to fuller partnership working for local development, reflecting the persistence of traditional ‘silo’ ways of working within government (both nationally and locally) and political tensions, as well as resource constraints.

Much of the current and recent partnership working has been limited to a specific theme (*e.g.* local labour market and employment issues) or linked to a specific task or funding source (such as the preparation of ROPs). There is now a need – as is recognised - to move on from these experiences to embed local partnership working on a more broadly based and permanent basis.

The existence of several partnerships (the ROP partnership, Local Employment Partnership, county Economic and Social Council) reflects the rather *ad hoc* way in which partnership working has developed around a number of policy issues. However there is now a need to review such partnerships in the context of broader local development needs.

There are currently very limited resources to sustain partnerships. This applies to many aspects of partnership work (for example the small numbers of staff supporting initiatives such as DAN and AZRA, the Varazdin County Development Agency, excellent though these individuals may be), but especially to functions of monitoring, evaluation and performance management, which are seriously underdeveloped.

Partnership working can be inhibited by political tensions both within and between local authorities. Healthy competition between local governments can be a positive stimulus but it is not clear that the existence of two local development agencies in the Varazdin area is helpful: for example it may hinder attempts to reduce socio-economic disparities between urban and rural areas. Similarly in Vukovar-Sirmium political tensions between the municipality and other agencies was identified as a barrier to partnership.

Local actors require more support from the national level. Local development requires more prompt, proactive and joined up support for local initiative from national ministries and more effective partnership working ‘vertically’ between national government and local agencies as well as ‘horizontal’ partnership among local actors.

The County partnerships in Vukovar-Sirmium and Varazdin are now beginning to consider the requirements for performance management and evaluation as they move towards the implementation of the ROPs/County strategies. However, much more remains to be done in this respect and it is important that evaluation is not regarded as an afterthought or add-on but as an integral part of local development strategy and partnership working.

Policy implications and recommendations

A strategic and sustained approach to local partnership and local development

The basis has been laid in Croatia for effective local development partnership. However, if partnerships for local development are to become more firmly embedded as a key element in local governance institutions and processes, and address the conditions discussed above which will determine whether they add value, a more strategic and sustained approach to local partnership will need to be constructed on this basis. This has a number of specific policy implications:

1. There should be one ‘umbrella’ local strategic partnership, with one joined up local development strategy. This will make the most of funding streams and help secure better linkage between strategy and projects. Building on recent experience such as the ROPs and local employment

partnerships, this should involve all key players, and provide the context within which the institutional corporate strategies of partners relate positively with each other. Themed partnerships (on issues such as employment) should be nested under this umbrella. Civil society institutions and NGOs should be equal partners with public agencies and businesses in this partnership. One of the learning models described later in this report is the Devon Strategic Partnership, which illustrates good practice in establishing a strategic partnership at County level in England.

2. A common problem in many countries is whether such a local strategic partnership should be located at the county or municipal level. The primary principle in addressing this issue is that the partnership should be both strategic (operating at a level appropriate to influence key actors and strategic development issues) and local (in touch with local society and grassroots issues). If the solution is seen to require such partnerships at both county and municipality levels, protocols or guidance for effective collaboration and clear definition of respective remits are essential. One of the learning models at the end of this report describes how an action learning process was used by local strategic partnerships in England to help develop guidance on two tier working.
3. Related to issues about two tier working, it is important that there is not duplication of agencies unless the benefits of this are very clear and outweigh the costs. Thus in the case of the DAN and AZRA agencies, the potential for additional costs and harmful competition needs to be set against any tangible benefits in considering what are the most effective and 'joined up' future institutional arrangements.
4. There is a need to widen and deepen partnership working, in a transition from what has been primarily reactive partnership driven by top down requirements and external consultants, towards proactive and sustained partnerships with more locally-driven agendas. An important factor in deepening partnership in this way will be the development of 'distributed leadership' in which several important actors jointly exercise leadership of partnership agendas, rather than leadership being seen as the responsibility of a single individual. At the same time, some partner agencies which currently have only limited ownership of local partnership agendas should become more proactive.
5. Effective local partnerships needs adequately resourced support structures, for example a partnership team which has the capacity, skills and expertise to perform a number of functions, ranging from high level negotiation and strategy development to performance management and evaluation. The willingness of partners to contribute to such a support infrastructure is often a litmus test of commitment to partnership working.
6. A second litmus test is the willingness of all partners to bring their own strategic plans 'to the partnership table' to ensure that they are consistent with agreed local strategic priorities.
7. An active programme of public consultation and engagement will be important to ensure that partnerships are transparent and democratically accountable.

If this kind of partnership framework is in place, it will make it much easier to produce and implement a strong local development strategy which has clear strategic objectives which are shared and owned by local partners; combines economic, social and environmental aspects of local development and minimises the tensions between them; translates into an action plan with robust targets and associated performance indicators; dovetails with national and European strategic priorities and programmes, and helps to ensure that these are implemented at the local level in a way which respects local needs and opportunities.

The Coventry Community Plan

The Coventry Community Plan is the strategic plan of the Coventry Partnership in England. As such, it provides overall local strategic guidelines for the strategic and corporate plans of all key organisations and sectors in the city which are members of the local strategic partnership.

The plan has two overriding goals – ‘raising our game’ (improving services in the city) and ‘closing the gap’ (reducing inequality and poverty). These goals are reflected in the key themes of the strategy – housing, health, employment, learning and training and neighbourhoods. For each of these, the plan defines priority outcomes and performance indicators, many of which are related to national public service targets and indicators. The Coventry Partnership then supports activities which help to achieve strategic plan outcomes, and works to ensure that successful projects are sustained permanently by mainstream funding. Accountability mechanisms are regarded as crucial by the partnership and mechanisms exist to ensure accountability to partners, to citizens and to government. In particular, an annual citizen quality of life survey is undertaken which both provides feedback on progress and influences evolving priorities.

For further information see www.coventrypartnership.com

Implications for local government – capacity building for partnership working.

Local government has a key role to play in local development partnerships. In many countries, local government will be *primus inter pares* among agencies involved in local partnerships, and will take the lead among local players in resourcing and supporting them. However, there is an ever-present danger that this role will result in undue domination of partnership agendas, alienating other partners, while working in partnership implies organisational and cultural change for many within local government. This has important implications for leadership, organisational development and capacity building activity. At the same, local government will look to national government for effective support for its partnership role.

Counties and some municipalities are already important players in local partnerships in Croatia, but if those already active are to continue to play this role, and others are to become more active, it will be important to build the capacity of local government. Capacity building programmes, which may be able to utilise the infrastructure created by the USAID Local Government Reform Programme, should include several elements:

1. Support for leading actors in local partnerships. Leadership in partnerships may come from a number of quarters – local politicians, senior officials, active individuals from civil society and NGOs. But leadership in a partnership context poses new challenges compared to leadership of a traditional organisation (such as the importance of consensus building rather than the exercise of authority) and experience elsewhere shows that support programmes for local leaders may be important in underpinning adaptation to new circumstances.

The Community Empowerment Fund

In England it is recognised that civil society organisations have a key role in local partnerships, but by their nature they tend to have inadequate resources to enable them to take leading roles. The Community Empowerment Fund provides such resources to support community engagement in local strategic partnerships. In particular, the Fund helps to enable local Community Networks to be set up, bringing together key individuals from the local voluntary and community sectors to ensure strong, representative and accountable involvement of the sector on LSPs.

For further information see
www.renewal.net/Documents/RNET/Overview/Neighbourhood%20Renewal/Communityempowermentfund.doc

2. Technical support for partnerships. Councils and municipalities (along with other partners) will need to ensure that partnerships have access to the capacity and the range of skills and expertise necessary in a local partnership support team.
3. Organisational and cultural change. Partnership working can prove to be a major challenge for local politicians in leadership positions in a partnership because it requires a very different leadership style. It is also, though, a challenge for many officials, senior and junior, who need to adapt to a more collaborative way of working rather than the traditional hierarchies of local government. Partnership requires both managers and front-line workers to work more closely with both partner agencies and with citizens, and programmes of organisational and cultural change and development may be needed to assist this.

The Leadership Academy

The Leadership Academy is a national programme in England supporting local councillors in adapting and updating their skills and knowledge as local government is modernised. Senior councillors can opt in to the programme which provides a structured framework for learning over a period of a year or more. As the title of the programme suggests, leadership is regarded as the core competence of a senior councillor, including leadership within the context of partnership working which is a major component of the modernisation of local government. The programme mixes inputs from academics, policy makers and practitioners with sessions addressing the specific problems and issues faced by participating councillors.

For further information see www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=1700429

4. Enhanced capacity for performance management, monitoring and evaluation is a specific need for which partnerships are likely to look towards partners such as counties and municipalities.

Implications for national government

National government has a crucial role to play in providing a context in which local partnership can flourish. This role will include legislation and policy guidance to establish the framework for local partnership, such as the national guidelines for County Partnerships, and arrangements to manage and monitor local partnership performance. But the national government role also commonly includes resourcing and other forms of support for local partnerships. Just as effective partnership implies close collaboration between agencies and interests at local level, so national government must ensure that there is effective coordination of ministries in relation to local partnerships and development. In the Croatian case, these principles lead to the following recommendations:

1. A more coordinated approach between those Ministries whose local offices and agencies are partners at the local level, along with a commitment to flexibility in the implementation of policies and programmes so that local agencies are able to contribute to shared local priorities as well as national targets.
2. Local partnerships are looking to national government for clearer guidance and support, for example by the establishment of training and development programmes to enhance skills and capacity at the local level. National government also has an important role to play in facilitating the exchange and dissemination of good practice by local partnerships, for example through peer review processes.

Renewal.net

Renewal.net is an online guide for those involved in local regeneration in England. It is a resource for the many local partnerships involved in local development.

Renewal.net offers a range of free services, including:

- Toolkits to help deliver local development. These range from toolkits to improve partnership working and performance management, to guidance on more specific aspects of local development.
- Research reports and summaries
- News of national policy developments and local good practice
- Discussion forums and notices of events.

For further information see www.renewal.net

3. In some other countries, these roles of co-ordination and support are provided not directly by Ministries but by an intermediary agency which has specific responsibility for managing and supporting local partnerships. This is a model which can be very effective as long as the agency has sufficient status within government to be able to negotiate with Ministries as required. The Irish agency Pobal is an example of an intermediary agency which both manages and supports local partnerships and represents the perspectives of local partnerships in policy debates.

Pobal

Pobal is the Irish agency which serves as an intermediary body between national government departments and the many local partnerships in Ireland. As an intermediary, it balances top-down managerial requirements with the understanding and skills necessary to support partnership at the local level. Pobal manages the delivery of a number of partnership-based programmes in a range of fields from local development to post-conflict peace and reconciliation, from service improvement to rural development and from the integration of immigrants to social economy and enterprise.

As part of its role, Pobal provides developmental and strategic support to local partnerships. This includes provision of guidelines and models of best practice; capacity building for partners, training on a wide range of local development issues, and constructive review and challenge. In addition, Pobal is responsible to government for the management and monitoring of partnership finance and performance, while on the other hand influencing national policy development, reflecting the grassroots views from local partnerships into the policy process.

For further information see www.pobal.ie

Performance management, monitoring and evaluation

Effective arrangements for performance management, monitoring and evaluation are essential for local partnerships to assess the progress of their local development strategies and adapt their implementation programmes in the light of ongoing experience. The preparation of the ROPs/County Strategies has highlighted the importance of monitoring and evaluation – in Varazdin County it is intended to set up an evaluation committee selected by the Partnership Committee and AZRA. The implementation of effective arrangements has implications for both local partners and national government.

National government (for example through an intermediary agency as suggested above) should establish guidelines for local partnerships on performance management, monitoring and evaluation:

provide support and training for local actors; monitor and manage local performance; and identify and disseminate good practice. Performance management and evaluation arrangements for local strategic partnerships in England are discussed in a learning model at the end of this report.

Local partnerships, with local partners and within national guidelines, should ensure that they have suitable local arrangements and the necessary local capacity, and that performance management, evaluation and learning are central to the partnership's operation with commitment from lead partners. Local performance management arrangements should provide management information on both the progress of the local development strategy, and on the effectiveness of partnership arrangements, and ensure that action plans are drawn up to follow up issues identified. Performance management will depend on robust monitoring and information systems, backed up by objective evaluation. Capacity for these functions may be located within a partner support team, provided by a lead local partner such as the county or municipality, or contracted from external consultants.

Experience across OECD countries confirms that objective evaluation makes an essential contribution to the work of a local development partnership. Evaluation can help both policy makers and practitioners at the local level, and those in national government responsible for the development and management of programmes delivered through local development projects and programmes.

The benefits of evaluation include:

- Accounting for how resources have been used and demonstrating value for money, including the added value from partnership working
- Identifying what works, how and why in delivering local development strategies, thus helping to improve effectiveness
- Involving partners, funders, politicians and citizens, through both participation in evaluation and in discussing the results.

To be effective, evaluation must take place on an ongoing basis, not merely at the end of a project or programme. Thus prior assessment of strategic options should lead to formative evaluation taking place throughout the delivery of programmes, and to summarise evaluation at the end.

International learning models

Devon Strategic Partnership, UK

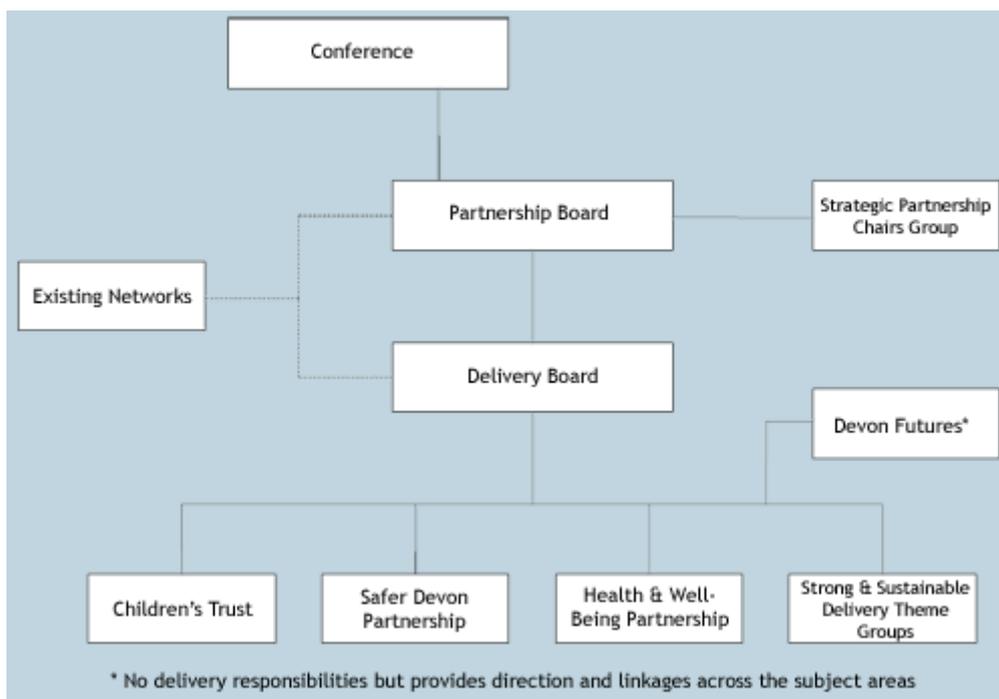
Description of the approach

Devon is a predominantly rural County in England, and the Devon Strategic Partnership is the local strategic partnership for the area. The Devon Strategic Partnership comprises public, private, voluntary and community sector organisations, all working together to improve the quality of life for those who live, work in and visit Devon. Their focus is on delivering real improvements to the issues that matter most to the people of Devon; working towards a joint aim to be "a County with safe, healthy and inclusive communities, a strong and diverse economy and a cherished environment". The partnership is responsible for the development and delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy (the county strategy for the area) and for the Local Area Agreement which is an agreement between local agencies and national government to improve public services in Devon.

The DSP is an established and permanent partnership, with membership from the County Council (politicians and officials), other local public bodies, business, and voluntary and community organisations. As the diagram shows, partnership arrangements have a number of components:

- A Partnership Board with membership of all key partners (meets four times a year). This includes council leaders from the County and Districts.
- A smaller Delivery Board of chief executives and senior officials from key agencies responsible for the delivery of the County Community Strategy (meets monthly)
- A wider conference giving access to a broader group of interests and stakeholders (meets six monthly/annually).
- Themed partnerships for key issues such as services for children, crime and safety, health.
- A ‘think-tank’, the Devon Futures Group

In addition, as Devon has two tiers of local government, a Strategic Partnership Chairs Group comprises the chairpersons of the second tier District partnerships.



Why the approach is relevant to Croatia?

The Devon Strategic Partnership is a well-established, permanent local strategic partnership. Situated at County level, it nevertheless includes membership from District Council political leaders and from district LSPs. The DSP is responsible for the local development strategy, the Sustainable Community Strategy, which sets out the strategic vision for the county. It provides a vehicle for considering and deciding how to address difficult cross-cutting issues such as the economic future of an area, social exclusion and climate change. Building these issues into the community's vision in an integrated way is at

the heart of creating sustainable development at a local level. The Local Area Agreement is the main way of ensuring that all public services contribute to the delivery of the strategy.

Reasons for the success or failure of the approach

The DSP is an example of the Local Strategic Partnerships which exist across England. National legislation and guidance has been important in providing and supporting the application of the concept. Equally important however have been local factors, including political support, growing collaboration between the County and District Councils, and a non-political approach reflected in the fact that the DSP is chaired by the local bishop.

The DSP has developed a sophisticated structure and working arrangements to ensure it is both inclusive and efficient. The current arrangements result from a review of the previous structure in the context of new responsibilities such as the Local Area Agreement. Regular monthly newsletters and an accessible website help to communicate the work of the partnership as widely as possible.

The obstacles that were faced and the quality of the response taken

Devon is a large and diverse area and it is a challenge to develop a strategic plan which recognises the range of needs and opportunities in the area. A review of the previous Community Strategy is being undertaken to learn lessons as the basis for the new Sustainable Community Strategy which will cover the period from 2008.

In an area with two tiers of local government such as Devon it has not always been easy to maintain effective collaboration but the structures of the partnership have been developed to ensure that District views are represented.

Devon is not one of the areas of England with the worst social deprivation where government financial support is available to help run the local strategic partnership, so local agencies, especially the County Council, have had to provide the support.

Considerations for adoption of this type of approach in Croatia

The Devon Strategic Partnership provides a potential model for partnerships in the more rural areas of Croatia. Other LSPs, such as the Coventry Partnership discussed elsewhere in this report, provide a similar model appropriate to larger urban areas.

Contact details and website for further information

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www.devonsp.org.uk

An action learning set on two-tier partnership working, UK

Description of the approach

In two tier local government areas in England, local strategic partnerships have been established at both county and district levels. This has created some uncertainty about the respective roles of county and district based LSPs, their relationships and the arrangements that might be needed to avoid overlap, duplication or competition. As a result, an action learning set was set up, facilitated and supported as part of an action research and evaluation programme sponsored by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

The purpose of the action learning set (ALS) was to learn about existing practice, to understand and clarify the barriers to, and opportunities for, collaborative working, and to consider good practice in relation to two-tier working. Within these broad objectives, the ALS defined its own programme of work, focusing on the issues where members thought their efforts should be concentrated. Thus the agenda – and in particular the actions which might be taken – were set by LSPs themselves rather than being pre-determined by the research team or sponsors. The membership of the ALS was drawn from localities where the county and one district strategic partnership agreed to participate. The ALS met four times over the period of one year and did further work, in their pairs, between meetings. A background paper prepared by the research team helped to stimulate discussion at the first meeting. The programme of work involved sharing views on general issues concerning two-tier working, identifying issues (in pairs of LSPs), developing proposals for action and further developing those locally, sharing experience about progress and developing general lessons.

The action learning set identified the key issues confronting two-tier LSP working as:

- Clarity over the respective roles of LSP at county and district level and the ways in which value is added at each level
- The appropriate geographical scale at which different activities can best be addressed and how LSPs can effectively relate inwards to the locality/neighbourhood and out to the region
- Structures and forms of representation (and cross-representation) for both local government and non-local government partners
- The processes and working arrangements between county and district LSPs (to avoid duplication, minimise bureaucracy and minimise transaction costs).

At the end of its work, the ALS identified a number of conclusions for policy and practice. These included:

- Strong representation of district LSPs (and not necessarily solely local authority representatives) on county LSPs gives greater legitimacy to that LSP to represent and lobby on behalf of county-wide interests
- Agreeing respective strategic priorities for both County and District LSPs removes duplication and focuses on the issues that are most relevant to the level where they are positioned.
- Both county and district LSPs need to identify what can only be delivered at county level and what can add value to district based activity.

- Where there are complementary statutory processes (as in development planning for example), county LSPs should develop systems for aligning strategic/corporate planning and programming with the strategic priorities of district LSPs
- County LSPs have a legitimate interest in identifying small-area priorities (for example, for regeneration, for neighbourhood renewal, for environmental safeguards, or for crime and disorder hot spots). Where they do so, interventions should be planned collaboratively with the relevant district LSP.
- County LSPs should consider what resource support they could offer through partners to district LSPs, and district LSPs should consider what county LSP resources might be needed and how they might best be used.

Why the approach is relevant to Croatia?

A similar action learning set could help to address issues about the relationship between partnership working at county and municipal levels in Croatia.

Reasons for the success or failure of the approach

The conclusions from the action learning set helped in the formulation of government advice to LSPs in two tier areas. However, inevitably, the participants in the ALS were drawn from areas where there was trust between the county and district, and consequently the conclusions presume a willingness to work together. Stronger government guidance may be necessary in areas where collaboration is not taking place.

The obstacles that were faced and the quality of the response taken

The effectiveness of an action learning process depends upon the initial identification of a suitable focus for the work. The task must be relevant and important to the participants and it must be possible to make progress on the issues within the time and resource constraints of the ALS. Considerable effort was thus given at the beginning of the process to identifying this focus through a national workshop.

Considerations for adoption of this type of approach in Croatia

The success of an action learning set depends on a number of factors. These include the quality of the participants and their willingness to undertake work for the set and also the availability of support and facilitation, in this case from the research team. Such support would be necessary in the Croatian context.

Contact details and website for further information

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www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1510478

Performance management and evaluation of English Local Strategic Partnerships, UK

Description of the approach

In England there are national guidelines for performance management by local strategic partnerships. These guidelines cover three main areas: strategy development, strategy delivery and performance management and review.

Performance management and review is a process comprising three main elements: Reviewing delivery; reviewing partnership working; and improvement planning. Review of delivery is concerned to assess progress against targets and provide evidence on whether resources are being best deployed in relation to strategic goals, whether projects contribute to strategic objectives, and whether the partnership strategy is effectively influencing partners' plans and spending programmes. Review of partnership working is designed to ensure that the partnership is strategic, inclusive and efficient. Improvement planning follows on from these review processes to identify resource and implement necessary changes to strategy and delivery programmes. The performance management process undertaken by each local strategic partnership is managed by the regional offices of national government.

Many LSPs also commission evaluation studies alongside the performance management process. These may be of local strategy, specific projects, or of partnership working (for example the review of partnership structure discussed in the Devon Strategic Partnership learning model). In addition, national government recognises the need for independent objective evaluation of the progress of LSPs nationally and has commissioned a long term evaluation programme. The first stage of this programme (2002-2005) was primarily a formative evaluation, intended to provide feedback to LSPs and to government itself. The evaluation, undertaken by a consortium of universities and consultancies, included a number of elements – case studies of nine LSPs, two national surveys of all LSPs, and a programme of action research (see the learning model of an action learning set on two tier issues). Topics covered by the evaluation ranged from 'process' issues such as membership, structures and performance management to 'outcome' issues concerned with the progress of LSPs in developing and implementing their strategic plans. The evaluation has produced a wide range of published reports.⁷ A further stage of the evaluation, of a more summative nature with a greater concern to quantify outcomes, is now under way.

Why the approach is relevant to Croatia?

The approach is relevant both for local partnerships in Croatia and for government. It is important for local partnerships to assess their own progress within a national framework, complemented by an evaluative overview of progress nationally.

Reasons for the success or failure of the approach

In England the national government has invested substantial resources in performance management and evaluation of LSPs to ensure that it has a strong evidence base on the successes and problems of this important policy initiative. This is backed up by a requirement placed on LSPs to adopt robust performance management arrangements.

⁷ A 2003 report on "Evaluation of local strategic partnerships. A Report of a survey of all English LSPs" has been co-commissioned by three research units of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (LRGRU, NRU and RAE) and the Department for Transport. Downloadable copy at http://www.gos.gov.uk/goee/docs/190905/190912/National_Evaluation_of_LSPs.pdf.

The obstacles that were faced and the quality of the response taken

Initially some LSPs were sceptical of performance management and feared that it was a tool for national government control. Most however have now come to recognise its value in convincing partners and stakeholders of the value of the LSP and ensuring that problems are identified and corrected promptly. Some LSPs are sceptical of the value of evaluation. Involvement of many LSPs in the evaluation, especially in the action learning sets within the action research programme, has been one way to counter this perception.

Considerations for adoption of this type of approach in Croatia

The institution of strong performance management systems and a long term national evaluation programme have significant resource casts and require skills development within government, in local partnerships and within the evaluation community. However without performance management and evaluation neither local partnerships nor government will have adequate information to inform policy and practice.

Contact details and website for further information

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Performance management for LSPs:
www.renewal.net/Documents/RNET/Policy%20Guidance/Performancemanagementframework.doc

The national evaluation of English LSPs:
www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1136876E

