



**NEW PARTNERSHIP DYNAMICS IN A  
CHANGING COHESION POLICY CONTEXT**

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## PREFACE

The research for this paper was undertaken in preparation for the 27th IQ-Net meeting held in Åre, Sweden, on 2-4 December 2009. The paper was written by Laura Polverari and Rona Michie.

This paper is the product of desk research and fieldwork visits during Autumn 2009. Fieldwork research has entailed an extensive programme of EU-level and national-level interviews, the full list of which is reported in Annex. The field research team comprised:

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### **Czech Republic**

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### **Denmark**

- Danish Enterprise and Construction Authority

**Finland**

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**Italy**

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**Portugal**

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**Slovenia**

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It should be noted that the content and conclusions of this paper do not necessarily represent the views of individual members of the IQ-Net Consortium.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Partnership is a defining feature of Cohesion policy. It has been one of the fundamental principles underpinning Cohesion policy since its landmark reforms of 1988. Since then, subsequent rounds of reforms have opened up the partnership principle to organisations outwith government. The 1993 regulations included a reference to the need to involve also the economic and social partners in programme design and implementation, whilst the 1999 reform extended partnership to the authorities responsible for the environment and for the promotion of gender equality. The 2006 regulations went even further, by broadening the list of partners to include urban authorities for the first time and by listing the “*appropriate*” partner bodies explicitly (namely, representatives of civil society, environmental partners, non-governmental organisations, and bodies responsible for promoting equality between men and women). As previously, the article on partnership of the current general Regulations (Article 11) requires partnership to cover the various stages of programme design and implementation.

A crucial point is that, beyond the preamble to the regulation and the specific article on the partnership principle, there is very little mention of partners or partnership throughout the operational sections of the regulatory texts. No precise and formally binding instructions or guidance have been provided on how the principle should be applied in practice. This leaves the actual interpretation of how to comply with Article 11 to domestic authorities and thus the implementation of the partnership principle reliant on domestic traditions and practices.

The aim of this paper is to investigate how the partnership principle is being implemented across the EU, with a specific focus on the role of non-governmental partners - socio-economic partners and other non-governmental bodies (such as third sector organisations, universities and R&D&I institutions). The paper will refer to these as SENGOS (Socio-Economic and other Non-Governmental Organisations).

The paper does not argue in favour or against the involvement of SENGOS in Cohesion policy programmes, but aims to take stock of current practice across programmes, in the light of the regulatory provisions, and of the views of Managing Authorities and SENGOS about the usefulness and effectiveness of such involvement.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the research:

- First, that the involvement of SENGOS is largely perceived to have been successful by programme managements. Nonetheless, some fundamental constraints remain and there has been little change compared to 2000-06 in the way in which SENGOS are involved in programme design and delivery.

- Second, that SENGOS are more involved in the stages of programme design than in other stages of programme management, despite widespread consensus on the importance of partnership for the success (and effectiveness) of programmes. Nonetheless, by and large SENGOS representatives interviewed perceived their influence in policy making not to have been significant.
- Third, that the accountability role of partnership is undeveloped.
- Lastly, that the Commission's role in this area seems very limited. DG Regio is regarded by programme managers as having become largely sidelined, at least in most EU15 programmes.

From these conclusions a number of questions arise as regards the rationale and scope of SENGOS inclusion in programme management; the adequacy of regulatory provisions; and the reform of Cohesion policy for the period 2014+.



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Partnership in different rounds of Cohesion policy reforms

Partnership is a defining feature of Cohesion policy. It has been one of the fundamental principles underpinning Cohesion policy since its landmark reforms of 1988<sup>1</sup>, along with multi-annual programming, additionality and concentration. At that time, partnership was intended to ensure the involvement of relevant regional and local authorities in programme formulation and implementation<sup>2</sup> and defined as “*close consultation between the Commission, the Member State concerned and the competent authorities designated by the latter at national, regional, local or other level, with each party acting as a partner in pursuit of a common goal.*” Partnership at that stage was essentially vertical, i.e. between public authorities at different levels of government.

Since then, subsequent rounds of reforms have opened up the partnership principle to organisations outwith government. The 1993 regulations included a reference to the need to involve also the economic and social partners (as identified in the framework of national rules and practice) in programme design and implementation, whilst the 1999 reform extended partnership to the authorities responsible for the environment and for the promotion of gender equality, in line with Community priorities (1999 reforms). The 2006 regulations went even further, by broadening the list of partners to include urban authorities for the first time and by listing the “*appropriate*” partner bodies explicitly (namely, representatives of civil society, environmental partners, non-governmental organisations, and bodies responsible for promoting equality between men and women).

As previously, the article on partnership of the current Regulations (Article 11) requires partnership to cover the various stages of programme design and delivery: from the preparation, to the implementation (instead of ‘financing’ as previously), monitoring and evaluation of Operational Programmes (and makes a new reference to involving “*particularly the regions*”). The current regulations strengthen partnership further by introducing a shift in the definition of partnership from “*close consultation*” to “*close cooperation*”, applying to the relations between the Commission and the Member States as well as the relationships between authorities and bodies within Member States.

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<sup>1</sup> The package of regulations were approved through Council Regulations (EEC) No. 4253/88 to 4256/88, of 19 December 1988 (OJ L374/31, 31 December 1988).

<sup>2</sup> Article 4(1) of the framework regulation (2052/88) under the heading of ‘complementarity, partnership, technical assistance.’

A crucial point is that, beyond the preamble to the regulation and the specific article on the partnership principle, there is very little mention of partners or partnership throughout the operational sections of the regulatory texts. No precise and formally binding instructions or guidance have been provided on how the principle should be applied in practice at different stages or functional tasks of the policy process, aside from the loose references to the need for partners to be consulted on the NSRF and for OPs to be drawn up in coordination with partners. This leaves the actual interpretation of how to comply with Article 11 to domestic authorities and thus the implementation of the partnership principle reliant on domestic traditions and practices.

### **Rationale and focus of the paper**

The aim of this paper is to investigate how the partnership principle is being implemented across the EU, with a specific focus on the role of non-governmental partners - socio-economic partners and other non-governmental bodies (such as third sector organisations, universities and R&D&I institutions). The paper will refer to these as SENGOS (Socio-Economic and other Non-Governmental Organisations).

The main research questions for the paper are:

- How is the regulatory obligation of partnership interpreted in different countries and regions, with reference to the involvement of socio-economic partners and other non-governmental bodies?
- What factors explain the degree to which SENGOS are involved? What are the constraints and facilitators determining their involvement?
- What is the evidence for the influence of SENGOS on programme management - in areas such as strategic direction, effectiveness and accountability?
- What are the lessons of current experience with SENGOS for the debate on the future of Cohesion policy?

The main concern of this paper is with the horizontal dimension of partnership, i.e. “the active involvement of organised socioeconomic groups in the various phases of programming and delivery of interventions” (Profeti 2006, 70).<sup>3</sup> As above noted, over time, the types of horizontal partners to be involved in Cohesion policy programme design and delivery have been extended to include, for instance, environmental associations, equal opportunities bodies and NGOs, third sector organisations operating in the social and cultural fields, universities and

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<sup>3</sup> Although horizontal partnership also includes actors across government, such as different ministries, departments and agencies than those involved in the management of the programmes (e.g. the Equal Opportunity Commission, the Environmental Authorities), and government authorities involved in the programmes as Implementing Bodies or beneficiaries, where there isn't a clear vertical hierarchy between these and the Managing Authority.

other research providers. However, in the context of regulatory provisions that are vague and open as to their interpretations, the focus has often been on identifying which organisations should be involved rather than considering how they should be involved and to which effect.

A number of reasons have led to the choice of focus on the horizontal partnership and, in particular, on the role of SENGOS in Cohesion policy programme design and delivery:

- First, much of the academic and policy research on Cohesion policy has focused on vertical, rather than horizontal partnership.<sup>4</sup> The involvement of non-governmental stakeholders in the design and delivery of Structural Funds programmes - such as business representations, trade unions, NGOs, universities and others - has been much less debated.
- Second, involvement of SENGOS in public policy is relatively novel in a number of Member States (and certainly within Cohesion policy) and thus they have not been the subject of explicit and extensive analysis. The vagueness of the regulatory provisions and lack of clear guidance on how SENGOS should be included in the different stages of programme design and implementation, and the ensuing diversity of responses across the EU, strengthen the need for such reflection.
- Third, the current generation of programmes differs markedly from previous programmes. The 2007-13 programmes have a more strategic focus, anchored in the priorities outlined in the Community Strategic Guidelines and, thus, in the Lisbon and Gothenburg agendas. Moreover, Regional Competitiveness & Employment (RCE) programmes also display a new, all-region scope and more limited financial envelopes, in many cases. Programmes are now mono-fund where they had not been so previously. These factors could arguably lead to a change in the composition of partnerships of programmes and to different dynamics between SENGOS and programme authorities, and the paper aims to explore whether this is actually the case.

The paper does not argue in favour or against the involvement of SENGOS in Cohesion policy programmes, but aims to take stock of current practice across programmes, in the light of the regulatory provisions, and of the views of Managing Authorities and SENGOS about the usefulness and effectiveness of such involvement.

The research is based on an extensive programme of secondary source research and EU-level and national-level interviews, based on standardised, semi-structured questionnaires. EU-level interviews involved discussions with representatives from the European Commission (DG Regio), the Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee, Businesseurope,

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<sup>4</sup> See for example the abundant literature on multi-level governance (MLG), pioneered by authors such as Gary Marks and Lisbeth Hooghe. For example, Marks G., (1992), "Structural Policy in the European Community", in Sbragia A., (ed.) *Europolitics. Institutions and policymaking in the new European Community*, Brookings Institute, Washington DC. Hooghe L., (ed.) *Cohesion Policy and European Integration: Building Multilevel Governance*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, and the European Citizens Action Service (ECAS). National-level fieldwork involved interviews with Managing Authorities, Implementing Bodies and national coordination administrations in 15 Member States, and interviews with SENGGO representatives and other programme partners (e.g. local authorities) in 13. The full list of interviewees is provided in an annex, where a description of SENGGO organisations interviewed can also be found. Given the nature of the topic under discussion, an explicit commitment was given during interviews that confidentiality would be respected and sensitive material or comments would not be attributed to particular respondents or institutions. This is ensured through a system of anonymised coding throughout the text.

Following this introduction, the remainder of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides an overview of partnership in the 2000-06 period, based on existing studies, first and foremost the recently concluded ex post evaluation of management and implementation systems. Section 3 discusses the constraints on the inclusion of SENGGOs in programme management and delivery. Section 4 to follow reviews some of the actions taken by programme managements to support effective partnership, before Section 5 reviews current practice of SENGGO involvement across the programme management processes. After a brief commentary of the role of the European Commission in promoting effective horizontal partnership (Section 6), some conclusions and questions for discussion are presented in Section 7.

## 2. TAKING STOCK OF THE PAST: HORIZONTAL PARTNERSHIP IN THE 2000-06 PROGRAMME PERIOD

The starting point for the research is to assess what is currently known about horizontal partnership, the involvement of SENGOS and the perceived effectiveness of their involvement. Several recent studies, summarised in Table 1, provide insights into the situation during the 2000-06 period and contain some interesting recommendations. These comprise the ex post evaluation of Cohesion policy management and implementation systems in 2000-06, a European Parliament study (Bachtler *et al* 2009), the so called “Barca report” (Barca 2009), a recent working paper by the European Citizens Action Service (ECAS 2009), a 2008 European Parliament Resolution on governance and partnership in regional policy (European Parliament 2008), a 2008 study on the role of NGOs in Cohesion policy in the EU10 (SF Team 2008), a 2007 BusinessEurope (BusinessEurope 2007) survey and, lastly, a DG Regio discussion paper on partnership in 2000-06 (DG Regio 2005).

The first conclusion to be drawn from this research is the **variability of horizontal partnership** across Member States during the 2000-06 period. As noted above, successive Structural Funds regulations have gradually broadened the list of partners to be included in programme processes. The ex post evaluation of 2000-06 found evidence that horizontal partnership had increased during the period, while differing considerably across EU25. The regulatory requirements ensured wide partnership representation, and the Programme Monitoring Committees were the most important platform for this formal partnership-working. However, the programme design process tended to be dominated by major actors such as central and regional government authorities, and the involvement of other partners at this stage was most commonly carried out through events and public consultation exercises. The programme implementation stage was again often dominated by those public sector actors directly involved in the delivery/funding of the programmes. The ex post evaluation found that two sets of factors influenced the extent of partnership working: the existing formal administrative practices and traditions, and the experience of regional and socio-economic partners (see Box 1 below for more detail). Nonetheless, the evaluation concluded that partnership-working increased in the 2000-06 period (Bachtler *et al* 2009, 43-45).

**Box 1: Factors influencing partnership in 2000-06**

The ex post evaluation of 2000-06 ERDF programmes management and implementation systems found that two sets of factors influenced the extent of partnership working, as this extract from the evaluation reports illustrates.

First, formal administrative practices and traditions were important. Federal countries such as Austria and Germany have long-standing formal mechanisms for cooperation, at least between national and sub-national levels and often including other socio-economic partners also. Other countries, like Denmark, Ireland and the Netherlands, have a history of social partnership or consensus-based policymaking which provided a basis for cooperative working on Cohesion policy. In Sweden, EU partnerships could build on partnership processes for domestic regional strategies; the same applied in some UK regions. Conversely, in EU15 Member States with historically centralised administrative structures and policy-making approaches (Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Portugal), a partnership approach was rather novel, having been introduced progressively through Cohesion policy in previous programme periods and was still evolving in 2000-06. These constraints applied still more to the EU10, which were implementing the partnership principle for the first time in 2004-06. Most had a tradition of highly centralised government; new ministries, agencies and committees had been created (sometimes with frequently changing areas of responsibility, as in Hungary); and regional-level authorities were generally new, weak or non-existent.

Second, the effectiveness of partnership-working depended on the experience/capacity of regional and socio-economic partners. EU10 Member States, and EU15 countries with centralised Cohesion policy management, sometimes had difficulties in identifying appropriate organisations or individuals to participate in partnership groups, especially in smaller Member States (Estonia, Latvia) and particularly affecting the involvement of regional-level bodies and socio-economic partners such as trades unions, business associations and chambers of commerce (Hungary). Newly formed regional authorities also found themselves at a disadvantage in working with more experienced national ministries and sectoral organisation counterparts (Czech Republic). This problem was less pronounced in Member States where partners had gained experience through domestic policy consultation fora. In Malta, for example, the Council of Economic and Social Development had provided a forum for consultation and social dialogue since 2001 and played a significant role in programming. Similarly in Poland, a Structural Funds Working Group was established within the existing Tripartite Commission for Socio-Economic Issues, involving representatives of government, trades unions and employers, to support the implementation of the Cohesion policy programmes.

Source: extract from J. Bachtler, L. Polverari, H. Oraže, C. Klement and H. Tödtling-Schönhofer (2009) Ex post evaluation of Cohesion policy programmes 2000-2006 co-financed by the ERDF (Objective 1 and 2). Work package 11: management and implementation systems for Cohesion policy. Final Report to the European Commission, Final Synthesis Report, EPRC, 7 July 2009.

The experience of horizontal partnership within the IQ-Net partner programmes during the 2000-06 period very much reflects the findings of the ex post evaluation. Programme authorities reported a range of experiences of partnership-working, which is unsurprising given the very different starting points for the inclusion of socio-economic partners within policy making and implementation. When reflecting on how horizontal partnership had operated in 2000-06, many Managing Authorities (MAs) described partnership as having worked well (or as well as could be expected) in terms of formal compliance with the regulations. However, it was almost invariably acknowledged that the role of socio-economic partners could have been taken further. This was strongly seconded by many of the socio-economic partners interviewed for this paper. The inclusion of partners tended to be strongest at programme design phase, but somewhat weaker in other stages of the programming cycle, again reflecting the findings of the ex post evaluation.

Where traditions of consensual and collaborative policy making are embedded, cross-overs from the domestic arena to Cohesion policy management or vice versa continued (for example, in Denmark, Austria, Germany, Sweden). Only a few MAs described a widening or deepening of partnership having taken place during the period (Finland, Slovenia). Several commented on the intense learning process that took place during 2004-06 (Czech Republic, Poland), while providing the caveat that this experience of partnership working had been important, but still somewhat limited.

A second conclusion from the studies in Table 1 and the fieldwork research for this paper is the perceived **need for greater involvement of SENGOS in the 2007-13 programmes**. Along similar lines, the interviews carried out with several programme authorities identified an ambition to strengthen the role of the socio-economic partners in the 2007-13 programmes (for instance in Finland, France, Nordrhein Westfalen and Sweden). This was mainly operationalised through wide-ranging consultation activities at programme drafting stage. In addition, several programmes made explicit efforts to examine how partnership had worked during 2000-06, with a view to feeding any lessons learned into the 2007-13 programmes. In Wales, the ex ante evaluation of the 2007-13 programmes included a report on ‘lessons learned’ including on partnership, and which fed directly into the development of the new programmes (Welsh European Funding Office 2006). In Norte (Portugal), a programme of stakeholders’ consultations based on experts’ studies was carried out to define the content of the new programme, including on the topic of partnership.

Further, a number of programme authorities identified restrictions on effective partnership working during 2000-06 that needed to be addressed. These included lack of capacity, experience and expertise among NGOs and socio-economic partners (particularly in the EU10), and limited opportunities for real influence. The steps taken by programmes to tackle these in 2007-13 are discussed in Section 4.

However, many of the changes which have occurred in partnership structures for the 2007-13 period are as a result of external factors. For example, the changed territorial and thematic nature of the 2007-13 programmes (especially the RCE programmes) provided an opportunity

for some of the problems experienced with partnership working during 2000-06 to be addressed by MAs through the consolidation of Programme Monitoring Committees (Wales, North East England, Scotland) and eased communication channels for the partners (Lombardia).

The experiences of IQ-Net programmes echo the findings of other EU-level, evaluations and studies (see Table 1). These relay similar messages: that genuine efforts have been made in many cases to improve the incorporation of horizontal partners into programme processes, and improvements can be identified. For example, a 2007 survey by BusinessEurope of their national member federations reported a significant improvement from the 2000-06 programme period in terms of implementation of the partnership principle, due to greater experience among MA and social partners in dealing with Cohesion policy programmes, increased transparency in discussions and better organised consultation and implementation procedures. Involvement in the preparation of NSRFs was high, but more problematic at Operational Programme level. However, involvement of business representatives was uneven, even in Member States with long-standing experience of Structural Funds (BusinessEurope 2007).

The studies broadly agree that, although progress has been made, the partnership principle is not yet widely applied, that the limited experience of NGOs and socio-economic partners has constrained their ability to participate, and that the SENG partners faced numerous barriers to their participation that were not being addressed.



Table 1: Summary of research findings and recommendations relating to horizontal partnership (covering experience in 2000-06)

<b>Ex post evaluation of management and implementation 2000-06 (2009)</b>	<p>Evidence that partnership working increased during the period. Involvement of local and NGO actors remains weak in many countries and the regional level is not yet a serious partner in some Member States. Implementation tended to be dominated by public sector actors. Limited experience or capacity of local or NGO partners constrained ability to participate.</p> <p><b>Recommendations:</b> A process of capacity building aimed specifically at local and NGO partners should be undertaken in the second half of 2007-13 to allow fuller participation in the design of the next generation of programmes. Strengthening partnership in the EU10 requires: (i) Action to clarify roles and procedures. The interpretation of partnership should be defined more clearly, specifying which organisations are regarded as partners, the expectations and aims of their contributions, and the ways in which they are to be involved at each stage of management and implementation. (ii) Engagement of partners in fora or procedures which are relevant to them and where their views can influence decisions, to avoid a focus on lobbying or 'wish lists'. (iii) Capacity building in partner organisations, including basic training on Cohesion policy and the programme cycle.</p>
<b>An agenda for a reformed Cohesion Policy (Barca report) (2009)</b>	<p><b>Recommendations:</b> Member States to describe how the partnership principle has been applied in the development of the strategy and decisions on the allocation of EU funding, as well as how this will be applied in the implementation of the proposed contract between Commission and Member State (or Member State and region). Particular emphasis would be placed on how Managing Authorities plan to promote local level experimentalism and mobilisation, and to create the appropriate balance between encouraging local actors' commitment and discouraging rent-seeking. Nonetheless, the amount of information required on partnership would be related to the size of the financial allocations. Promotion of public debates on targets and progress achieved. Encouragement of creation of special purpose bodies (e.g. territorial pacts among different local authorities and private partners, networks, local agencies) to incentivise local actors to share information, risk and invest.</p>
<b>ECAS Working Paper (2009)</b>	<p><b>Recommendations:</b> There should be initiatives to apply the partnership principle in a more balanced and consistent way across the Funds, e.g. using the way guidelines have been mainstreamed in the ESF through a community of practice. The Commission could take the lead by targeting civil society more deliberately when it consults on Cohesion policy and its development after 2013. The EU should put the onus on a decentralised approach to enforcement, requiring Member States and regions to apply the regulations and demonstrate that they have done so. The Commission should propose a new framework for multilevel governance and partnership; the Commission should bring together local leaders in participatory democracy. Member States should draw up an information, consultation and participation plan covering all stages of Cohesion policy operation, which should be published, with outcomes evaluated. Capacity building for partners should take place, perhaps using TA. A community of practice on partnership in European regional policy should be established.</p>
<b>European Parliament resolution (2008)</b>	<p>Partnership principle not yet widely enough applied. In most regions, the public did not participate to sufficient degree in the preparations for the 2007-13 period.</p> <p><b>Recommendations:</b> The Commission should undertake an assessment of the implementation of the partnership principle by Member States in drafting the NSRFs and OPs, identifying the factors behind successful and unsuccessful governance. The Commission should draw up a guide containing clear definition and assessment criteria as well as setting out instruments, tools and good practices (among others for the selection of partners) to facilitate the implementation of effective partnership. MAs should use TA for training, building up social capital and professionalising partnership activities. The Commission should also identify good practice for improving public involvement ahead of 2013+. Member States and MAs should involve partners more closely at an early stage in all the phases of Structural Funds programme design and implementation, and to encourage closer cooperation through the use of public-private partnerships.</p>
<b>SF Team (2008)</b>	<p>The small administrative capacity is a major problem for NGOs participating in decision-making processes in CEE countries and it is the main</p>

<b>(NGOs in EU10)</b>	<p>obstacle to equal partnership between NGOs and decision-makers. (There is) low political support for partnership....(and a) lack of lobby-power and negotiation ability (among) civil society delegates.</p> <p><b>Recommendations:</b> Non-profit organisations need to educate their experts and managers, make use of consultants, utilise IT in order to communicate effectively and for faster cooperation when drafting, discussing or commenting on documents concerning the non-profit sector. Non-profit organisations need equal access to technical assistance that is devoted to this purpose.</p>
<b>Businesseurope (2007)</b>	<p>EU level consultations remain formal exercises failing to deliver clear action points for future work. Participation of social partners is weak and not systematic; it is uneven, both across programming stages and across Member States. Involvement at regional level is particularly weak. Active participation can be due to a partner's tenacity rather than formal partnership mechanisms. Obstacles to effective participation remain: too short consultation process; lack of transparent and coherent participation mechanisms; lack of feedback from the consultation process, or reasons given for changes to draft proposals; lack of experience, knowledge and expertise of social partners in Cohesion policy compared to public institutions; lack of formalised partnership arrangements, particularly at regional level; lack of interest in involving social partners by government; consultation through conferences where no real debate is possible; ex-post consultation at a late stage in the drafting process. PPP role not optimised due to lack of clear definition of projects, badly applied public procurement rules, lack of public administration capacity with regard to public procurement.</p> <p><b>Recommendations:</b> Involve business representation, especially in areas such as employment, human capital, entrepreneurship, cluster development and support for SMEs. Consult private sector before setting priorities for PPPs and apply public procurement rules better. Use TA to train staff dealing with public procurement, especially in new Member States where turnover of public admin staff is up to 30 percent.</p>
<b>DG Regio discussion paper on partnership in 2000-06 (2005)</b>	<p>There have been efforts (during 2000-06) to improve the functioning of partnership. A wider range of partners than ever before is involved in cohesion policy. The involvement of partners at different stages (...) is not considered as equally necessary and sometimes is even seen as causing an additional burden on time and resources. It is not always clear whether the selection of partners is based on their specific expertise or on political preference.</p> <p><b>Recommendations:</b> Member States themselves could decide to organise a seminar at the start of the next programme period to discuss the envisaged partnership arrangements with the partners. Member States could provide more information during the negotiations on the content of the OPs on how they intend to implement the partnership principle. Managing Authorities could decide to appoint a representative as a one-stop-shop responsible for relations with the partners.</p>

### 3. CONSTRAINTS ON THE INCLUSION OF HORIZONTAL PARTNERS IN COHESION POLICY PROGRAMMES

Experience during 2000-06 showed that some progress had been made in applying the partnership principle in Cohesion policy programmes, and that horizontal partners were being increasingly involved (Bachtler *et al* 2009, ISMERI Europa 2008a). However, as external studies confirmed (Bachtler *et al* 2009, ECAS 2009), a number of obstacles to the inclusion of SENGOS in programming processes remained. These constraints may continue because past problems have not been addressed, or because the actions put in place to address such problems have not been effective enough. In some cases, where efforts were made to introduce better procedures or mechanisms for partners' inclusion, the partial progress achieved is generating frustration and a sense of confusion on what should be done next.<sup>5</sup> Thus, as noted by the Commission's Regional Policy Director General in a recent speech, "a lot remains to be done, in order to have a real and active partnership (...) the partnership principle must be strengthened also in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the operational programmes" (Ahner 2009, p. 4).

The constraints to partners inclusion identified in the research for this paper can be categorised in three groups: general constraints, relating for instance to the nature of the regulatory provisions and the conceptualisation of the partnership principle; programme-specific constraints, relating to the internal working procedures of programmes; and partners' constraints, pertaining to the way the SENGOS themselves work and engage with the programmes. Each of these constraints is discussed in turn in the following sections.

#### 3.1 General constraints on horizontal partnership

The scope for partner involvement in Cohesion policy programmes is determined significantly by the regulatory requirements at EU and Member State levels, most of which do not oblige Managing Authorities to involve partners in any prescribed manner. Article 11 of the EU regulation covers the inclusion of tiers of government and socio-economic partners, as well as "any other organisations any other appropriate body representing civil society, environmental partners, non-governmental organisations, and bodies responsible for promoting equality between men and women".

There appears still to be a lack of agreement amongst the Managing Authorities, Implementing Bodies and amongst SENGOS themselves over the exact purpose (and usefulness) of SENGOS involvement in the different stages of programming, and on which roles partners should play in these. The regulations are vague in this respect, allowing scope for national traditions, but this

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<sup>5</sup> For instance, one MA interviewee noted that "whilst a number of steps have been taken to address partners' sense of dissatisfaction, the impact of these steps has been limited" and neither the Managing Authority nor the partners interviewed were sure about what further specific steps could be taken to improve partnership in practice. (PRG12)

openness has not gone hand-in-hand in the Member States with an explicit reflection on “what partners feel they can contribute and what the programme authorities feel that they would benefit from partners involvement” (PRT20). This lack of specificity is considered to be detrimental because: (i) it confines partnership engagement to a small group of actors who are particularly ‘aware’ of what their role can be; (ii) it reduces their impact where MAs/IBs do not share the same level of awareness; (iii) it ties partnership working strongly to ‘policy-entrepreneurs’, i.e. actors who in their own right, are active in promoting a certain understanding of partnership (because of personal interest, passion and motivations); and because (iv) it ends up reinforcing partnership in contexts where it is already established, and where there is therefore an implicit, tacit acceptance of partnership purpose and usefulness (whilst, conversely, weakening contexts where such practice lacks) (PRT19). As noted by one of the programme authorities interviewed, “partners can bring significant contributions only when a Managing Authority or other body in the implementation structure specify in detail in what way partners should contribute” (NAT3), yet this clarity of purpose is often lacking in practice.

A second general constraint, and one over which no consensus has emerged, relates to the non sufficiently binding nature of the rules on partnership. The fact that the regulations do not spell out the specific extent and modalities according to which partners should be involved in the different processes of programming and, in particular, the lack of required targets and associated penalties or reward mechanisms on these, are seen by some as detrimental because they contribute to relegating partnership to a secondary position compared to aspects of programme management where such targets, rewards or penalties exist. The N+2 rule was cited as the most distortive mechanisms in this respect: “as the only cogency (through sanction) is the one which relates to spending, i.e. the N+2 rule, and as no such cogency exists on other aspects of implementation, everything which is not spending falls off the agenda” (NAT13).

However, the question of whether more stringent rules and controls on partnership should be imposed on Member States and Managing Authorities brought different reactions from the study’s interviewees (irrespective of whether they were programme authorities or SENG representative). Arguably, the current, not-so-stringent regulatory framework allows room for a more effective transition to practices that are not innate to certain domestic contexts. At the same time, some interviewees felt that encouraging both SENGs and programme authorities to effectively realise the partnership principle would be more successful than imposing targets and obligations. This would imply a need to pay more explicit attention to raising awareness on the purpose and usefulness of partnership in the first place, as discussed above (PRT20).

### 3.2 Programme-level arrangements

In addition to the above, there are a number of constraints that can be considered to be programme-specific. The **degree to which a Managing Authority considers partnership as “strategic” (or not) for programme implementation** is clearly one of them. The situation among different programmes (sometimes even within the same country) varies in this respect.

Although a majority of Managing Authorities continue to regard partnership as an important dimension of Cohesion policy programme management - with some even going as far as stating that “the Managing Authority could not operate the OP without the involvement of socio-economic partners” (PRG11) and that “partnership is crucial for the success of the programme” (PRT33) - there appears to be a not negligible minority of programmes where partnership is not considered strategic or strategic enough. This is particularly the case in countries lacking a domestic tradition or previous experience with the engagement with socio-economic interests and civic society (as in the Central and Eastern European countries, Greece, Portugal and Spain), and where partnership is associated with a negative meaning, be it because of the perception of a degree of partisanship of partners organisations (partners try to “take water towards their mills” (NAT14) or because of the equation of partnership with lobbying (in the negative sense) and clientelism (NAT3, PRT4, PRT5).

A second type of constraint relates to **the mechanisms through which partners are involved in programme design and delivery and the complexity, technicality and timetable of the procedures through which programmes are implemented**. These may hamper the potential of SENGOS to intervene in the processes of programming and, at the same time, when partners do intervene, can cause frustration given the poor influence that partners’ activities are perceived to have. There are a number of facets to these constraints which are discussed below.

**The limited or sporadic involvement of SENGOS in programme implementation** (as opposed to ongoing involvement) is one such constraint. The Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC) is often the only forum in which partners are called to participate in programme implementation (after the stages of programme drafting) and, as it meets only twice a year at best<sup>6</sup>, it cannot be a real decision-making locus (whilst at the same time, and outwith some notable exceptions, this is not compensated for by the existence of alternative means/fora of discussion and partners engagement). For this reason, partners often participate in meetings purely or mostly to “take-stock” of progress (as in the Italian OP Research & Competitiveness and Steiermark) and in reactive mode, rather than proactively (e.g. in Denmark and Slovenia).

**The way PMCs are organised and operate** can also be a barrier for effective partner inclusion in decision-making. Size is one factor; in some cases, committees can include a considerable number of participants, making it impossible for everyone to have a real say. PMCs are sometimes just occasions to formalise decisions which have already been taken by the ‘key’ actors. Even where they have voting rights, partners may be careful not to vote against what is proposed by the Managing Authority (PRT31), or simply do not re-propose issues that they have

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<sup>6</sup> In a number of current programmes, the PMC now only meets only once a year (e.g. OP Research & Competitiveness, Italy). The reduction in frequency of meetings (which in the case of the OP Research & Competitiveness was formalised in the internal regulation of the body) indicates not just that this body is not a real decision-making, management body in these cases, but it also represents a decline of this body’s role in this respect compared to the past period.

discussed informally, but unsuccessfully, with the Managing Authority (PRT18). In some cases, SENGOS participate in PMC meetings only in advisory capacity (see Table 4 below).

More generally, SENGOS representatives can be discouraged by the lack of consideration given to their inputs during PMC meetings (“where you want to do something different to the MA you have no chance” – PRT36). Achieving the right balance between policy/strategic and operational discussions within PMC meetings is also a difficult task: where PMCs focus too heavily on the bureaucratic tasks associated with programme delivery, this is felt to limit *de facto* the scope of partners’ engagement and the potential to involve the senior-level officials from partners’ organisations (PRT36); on the contrary, where discussions in PMC meetings deal with general or strategic issues, socio-economic representatives find it more difficult to intervene than if discussions focused on measures and instruments (PRG12).

**Table 2: Voting rights of socio-economic and other non-governmental organisations at PMC meetings in IQ-Net programmes**

Country	Voting rights in 2000-06 (2004-06)	Voting rights in 2007-13	Change from 2000-06 (2004-06)
Austria	Socio-economic partners had voting rights, NGOs did not.	Socio-economic partners have voting rights, but decisions are generally taken by consensus. NGOs do not have voting rights.	No.
Flanders	Advisory role only.	Advisory role only.	No.
Czech Republic	Partners had voting rights (Joint Regional OP)	Partners have voting rights (IOP).	No.
Denmark	Partners had voting rights. NGOs not on PMCs.	Partners have voting rights. NGOs not on the PMCs.	No.
Finland	Partners had voting rights.	Partners have voting rights.	No.
France	Some partners had voting rights (the share of partners with voting rights varied across regions/programmes).	Some partners have voting rights (the share of partners with voting rights varies across regions/programmes).	No.
Germany	Voting rights in some <i>Länder</i> , but generally confined to partners financially responsible for components of the programme.	Partners have voting rights, except in the case of decisions affecting the financial plan.	Yes.

**Table 3: Voting rights of socio-economic and other non-governmental organisations at PMC meetings in IQ-Net programmes (continued)**

Country	Voting rights in 2000-06 (2004-06)	Voting rights in 2007-13	Change from 2000-06 (2004-06)
Greece	Partners had voting rights.	Partners have voting rights.	No.
Italy	Partners had voting rights for the ROP in Lombardia, however, advisory role only for the OP LED (where decisions were taken in principle by consensus).	Advisory role only both for the ROP Lombardia and OP Research & Competitiveness. Deliberations are taken based on consensus in both cases.	Yes, in Lombardia no more voting rights.
Poland	Partners had voting rights.	Partners have voting rights.	No.
Portugal	Partners had voting rights.	Partners have voting rights.	No.
Slovenia	Partners had voting rights.	Partners have voting rights.	No.
Spain	Decision-making by consensus. Partners had advisory role.	Decision-making by consensus. Partners have advisory role	No.
Sweden	Partners had voting rights, however decisions usually taken by consensus.	Partners have voting rights, however decisions are usually taken by consensus.	No.
UK	Decision-making by consensus. In the event of disagreement, PMC Chairs would broker resolution. Partners had voting rights in the exceptional case that voting was required.	Decision-making by consensus. In the event of disagreement, PMC Chairs brokers resolution. Partners have voting rights in the exceptional case that voting is required.	No.

Source: EPRC fieldwork interviews and internal regulations of PMCs.

More generally, major and composite programmes, with a large number of organisations and individuals in charge of programme delivery (often with diverse organisational and personal attitudes towards partnership), are found unconducive to SENGGO engagement, as the **necessity to interact with such a diverse range of bodies and individuals can be confusing**, time-consuming and resource-intensive (PRG12).

The way information on programmes is transmitted to partners and back is not always conducive to effective partnership either. In some cases, there is ‘**information overload**’ where programme authorities overwhelm SENGGOs organisations with information which they do not have the resources or knowledge adequately to digest (PRG12); in others, communication

can be considered deficient, because it is only one-way, top-down and dissemination rather than discussion-orientated.

The **complexity and opacity of the legal framework in which Structural Funds programmes operate** is also a barrier for SENGOS and one which was noted up by a large number of interviewees. This places SENGOS in a weaker position compared to the Managing Authorities and the institutional partners, and *de facto* marginalises smaller organisations which lack the resources to devote staff specifically to Cohesion policy.

In some cases, particularly for multi-regional OPs (OP Research & Competitiveness, Italy) or where there has been a rationalisation of the PMCs from regional to national (e.g. Austria) or supra-regional (e.g. Sweden), the **lack of territorial proximity and need to keep participation in PMC or other bodies manageable** has meant that it is difficult to engage with stakeholders at the appropriate territorial level (although in some cases, as in Austria, some alternative working groups with similar functions to the PMC were set up).

The **timetable of programme management and implementation** is also not always conducive to effective partnership engagement. The need to draft some national programmes quickly has meant that partners' involvement in the final stages of OP preparation has been limited - for example, in Portugal, although there was wide and extensive consultation process on the NSRF. Similarly, in Finland, where partners were involved in the process of programme design through their participation in the Regional Management Committees (which discussed the programme drafts in each region), partners did not have a chance to feed back on the last round of revisions made towards the end of the preparations, at the request of the different Ministries or the Commission.

In other cases, as in the Italian OP Research & Competitiveness and in the Czech Republic, the involvement of partners in the stages of programme preparation and implementation has been hampered by **institutional and political instability**. Political uncertainty, staff vacancies and turnover caused important delays, which in turn damaged partnership by focusing the work of MA on the most urgent task of spending. More broadly, **senior staff turnover and/or electoral change**, which have been frequent in some countries/regions (Czech Republic, Italy, Poland), have hindered the potential for partnership inclusion: one key requisite for effective partnership is trust, and building lasting relations based on trust takes time. When there is a "change of guard", partners and administrators "have to start from scratch" to build such relationships (PRT18).

There is also a **cultural barrier where programme administrators do not fully understand the nature and roles of certain types of partner organisations** (and what they can contribute), for instance the Chambers of Commerce (with their hybrid public-but-serving-the-private status) (PRT19) or NGOs, as reported in the Czech Republic.

Lastly, it was noted that partnership has both an institutional/political dimension, as well as a technical dimension. The latter is perceived to be very important, given the complexity of



Structural Funds rules (PRT9). However, this same level of technicality can be responsible for a disengagement of the political/institutional actors, causing, in some cases, **discrepancies between technical and political leaderships** within the administrations in charge of programmes and within the SENGOS themselves (e.g. NAT13, NAT14, PRT19): where the political levels are not on-board and sensitive to the issue of partnership, it is difficult to create initiatives to support the effective engagement of SENGOS in the processes of programme design and implementation.

### 3.3 Constraints internal to the partner organisations

There are also a number of barriers that derive from the nature, endowment and working methods of SENGOS organisations themselves, and that are therefore not directly attributable to the Cohesion policy framework, but which Cohesion policy should arguably aim to address in order to be able to comply with the requirements of Article 11 on the partnership principle.

The most important of these is the **institutional culture of SENGOS**. In some cases, a certain lack of ‘civic sense’ was noted by programme authorities and partners themselves, for instance in Portugal and the South of Italy. In some cases, SENGOS are perceived as not understanding the ‘bigger picture’, beyond the specific interests of their constituents and/or to be uninterested or unwilling to cooperate with other organisations and the administrations in charge of programmes. One of the SENGOS interviewed even noted differences in the ‘civic sense’ displayed by different territorial constituencies of their own organisation: whereby in certain parts of the country the interviewee reported a propensity to cooperate with other units/members of the organisation and with external bodies, in others this cooperative spirit is considered wholly lacking, with a predominance of parochialism and a false sense of competition (PRT19).

A second constraint has to do with the **financial and human resources that partner organisations can mobilise**. In many cases, SENGOS lack the resources to be able to develop expertise and devote permanent attention to the programmes (i.e. with dedicated staff) (PRG12, PRG14, PRG38). This is particularly the case for smaller organisations (e.g. in Finland) and voluntary sector bodies (e.g. in Austria and Slovenia). The lack of resources impacts on the capacity of organisations to affect the programming processes because of a deficiency in expertise and because of the impossibility of systematically engaging with programmes. With an on-off engagement in programme implementation, partners cannot fully develop an understanding of programme content and requirements and adequately mobilise their constituents to identify and pursue agreed actions. This can result in a passive attitude, as noted above, but it also leads to inappropriate requests as when, for instance, partners confuse the plans of EU and domestic policies (NAT13, NAT14). In more than one case, the need to remunerate SENGOS representatives who participate in PMC meetings was raised, for instance in the Czech Republic, where this is a recurring theme.

It is not just the lack of resources, however, that informs the way SENGOS organisations organise their work on Cohesion policy: in some cases this is also the result of a **lack of awareness and**

**understanding on the part of the political/institutional representations** directing the associations (as opposed to the staff involved) who fail to see the value of engaging with the programmes or with Cohesion policy more generally (PRT19) (an example is the debate on the future of Cohesion policy which they see as far in the future and thus not a priority).

More broadly, and linked to the above, partners have **different capacities**. In one case, it was noted that certain SENG0 representatives lack the skills that are necessary to intervene in policy processes, such as the capacity effectively to present opinions and put forward proposals, and this hampers programmes, not just because it means that even ‘good ideas’ are not taken on board, but also because it weakens the potential for collaboration and reinforces a feeling of subordination of certain partners *vis-à-vis* the programme authorities (NAT3). In some EU12 Member States, there seems to be an urban-rural divide in this respect too, where partners from urban contexts/capital cities are more endowed than partners from rural areas which tend to be more restrained and submissive. The disparities in capacities and resources available to different types of partners, and the ensuing differences in the modalities of engagement with programme authorities, are clearly detrimental to the programmes, not least because they generate a disparity of treatment between different organisations. Larger organisations are “stronger” (PRT20, NAT13, PRG5), whilst others are just information recipients.

Lastly, as regards the attitudes of SENG0 organisations towards Cohesion policy programme management, in some contexts where Cohesion policy has operated for a number of programme periods, a **sense of disenfranchisement, disillusion and frustration** was detected among SENG0s (e.g. PRG16, PRG9), due to the increasingly acute awareness of the lack of impact of their work on decision-making. In some cases, there is also a perception of a move backwards compared to previous periods, particularly compared to 1994-99 when PMCs were considered to be more decision-making orientated and partner engagement in them - though more restricted than at present - was perceived as more effective (NAT12). The perception by partners that their presence and inputs are not valued - one went as far to say that the Managing Authority considers them as “annoying insects” (PRT4) - is clearly a disincentive to engagement. The other side of the coin, however, is that programme authorities feel frustrated by a perceived lack of interest by partners regarding certain aspects of programme delivery, in particular those which are not aimed at influencing resource allocations. As noted by one programme-level interviewee “at completion of the 2000-06 programme, not one partner has asked for information on what has been achieved, on the use that was made of the funds, which would be a legitimate question given that there has been a considerable use of coherent projects ... in one case, a PMC (for the 2000-06 programme) had to be cancelled because of lack of [attendance by the required] legal number, which gives an indication of the level of interest on these issues” (NAT13).

## 4. ACTIONS SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP DYNAMICS

Notwithstanding the large number and widespread constraints that hinder effective horizontal partnership working, the research has uncovered a number of instances where partnership with SENGOS is indeed perceived to be working well. Consolidated experiences of ongoing interaction between administrations and SENGOS organisations, efforts paid over progressive programme periods to improve partnership and the very nature of civil society organisations in some cases, all contribute to strengthening partnership both outwith and within Cohesion policy. In the view of the programme authorities interviewed for this paper, the involvement of SENGOS is perceived to be working well, for instance in countries such as Austria, Finland, Germany, Italy (at the NSRF level and in certain, predominantly Centre-Northern, regions), Sweden, the UK and also in Denmark, where partnership in the economic development field is now enshrined in the domestic framework, through the establishment, in 2007, of the Regional Growth Agreements.

The present research has also uncovered a few examples of cases where measures were put in place to improve the way partnership is working, indicating a certain awareness of the constraints that effective partnership is currently facing. Most of these involve addressing the limitations of the PMC as the main forum of interaction between programme management and partners; the provision of more or more targeted information to SENGOS; and the strengthening of SENGOS capacities and resources. All in all, however, these experiences are limited to a few programmes, rather than common practice. There are many programmes - in Belgium (Vlaanderen), Greece, Portugal and Spain - where partnership continues to be dominated by the public sector.

### 4.1 Addressing the shortcomings of PMC as the main partnership forum

Monitoring Committee meetings are the focus of formal partnership working under most programmes. However, as has been seen, the PMCs do not always allow for effective interaction between programme Managing Authorities and SENGOS, for instance because of the limited frequency and formal character of meetings, or because of the territorial scale at which meetings take place which do not allow PMCs to be as inclusive and effective in their operation as desired. Some measures are being implemented in the programmes reviewed to address these shortcomings.

The first type of measures introduced for this purpose is the **creation of additional discussion environments for a more ongoing exchange of information between programme management and partners**: this is the case of the Welsh ‘workstreams’, the ‘Programme Executive Group’ in North East England, and the enlarged evaluation steering group in the Italian OP Research & Competitiveness (discussed in more detail in Box 2 to follow).

**Box 2: More ongoing interaction through PMC-type bodies**

**Wales** - One of the five ‘workstreams’ set up to take forward the planning and preparation for the 2007-13 OPs still continues, with a remit of examining implementation issues. The group almost functions as an informal version of the PMC, with a wider range of partnership. The more informal and less ‘pressured’ environment allows more interaction between WEFO and SENGOS, enabling the group to function ‘closer to the ground’ and as ‘more of a sounding board’ than the high level PMC. All the guidance documentation produced by WEFO (e.g. on procurement rules, State aids etc.) goes to the workstream group, and then becomes ‘owned’ by a much broader stakeholder group than WEFO and the PMC.

**North East England** - A Programme Executive Group (PEG) has been put in place to operate below the PMC. The group includes representatives from the SENGOS (including the voluntary and community sector, and higher education institutions) and from local authorities. It meets monthly and supports the programme secretariat in day-to-day management of the programme. The more frequent meetings and narrower agenda allow more intensive and effective interaction between MA/secretariat and the programme partners.

**Italy** - Under the OP Research & Competitiveness, an ongoing engagement of SEPs is being targeted by setting up an ‘enlarged evaluation steering group’. The enlarged SG, which so far has met only once, is intended to act as an interface with civil society and to allow socio-economic organisations to interact with programme authorities with respect to the identification of evaluation themes, proposal of evaluative questions, accountability on the evaluation activities undertaken each year, and discussion of evaluation results. The group is set to meet at least twice a year, and members of the group can also interact on an ongoing basis via a dedicated intranet site. In the complex context in which the OP currently operates (resulting from the merger of two previously separate OPs and the ensuing need for coordination between two leading national administrations), the considerable delays met with implementation, and the fact that the PMC only meets once per year, the activities of the enlarged steering group are seen as potentially filling a gap with respect to partner information and involvement in programme management processes, beyond the sphere of evaluation. There are also plans to introduce other thematic committees and working group, with the aim of making the contribution of partners more ongoing, but nothing as such has been introduced as yet.

A second set of measures is the **establishment (or rather continuation) of regional-level PMC-type bodies where the 2007-13 period has entailed a rationalisation of the previous PMC system (as in Austria).**

In Austria, one of the main developments in the transition from the past to the current programme period, which affects the potential for partner participation in programme management processes, has been the centralisation of the former eight ERDF Objective 2 OPs PMCs into a single, federal level PMC for all RCE operational programmes. This has meant that SENG0 organisations are now represented in the PMC only through their federal and not *Land*-level representations. To compensate for this, as well as for operational reasons, the programmes of Steiermark and Niederösterreich continue to implement PMC-type bodies at Land level. In Steiermark this is done through a formalised body, disciplined in the OP's programme complement (also a legacy from the past programme period), which meets at least once a year to prepare for the federal PMC meetings. The meetings are only open to partners who also act as Implementing Bodies, however (which does not cover the universe of Styrian SENG0s). Nonetheless, the fact that the meetings take place at Land level allows for a wider representation than as is allowed through the federal PMC, where not all Styrian Implementing Bodies are represented. In Niederösterreich, on the other hand, the involvement of partners in the programme process is ensured through a programme Steering Group whose main purpose is to exchange information amongst participants. The group, which was set up on the request of the programme's Implementing Bodies, includes representatives of socio-economic partners (even those which are not Implementing Bodies).

At a more strategic level, partnership working in Portugal has been given a higher profile with the introduction of Strategic Advisory Committees in each mainland region. The committees include representation from higher education institutions, business associations and trade unions. Reporting to the Inter-ministerial Coordination Committee, the committees do not have management functions, but they can comment on the regional implementation of the NSRF, monitor the implementation of the ROPs and can make recommendations in relation to the activities of the ROP's Managing Authority.

## 4.2 More and better targeted information

The provision of better targeted or more regular information to partner organisations is also an area where some programmes have strengthened efforts or even introduced some innovations. There are three main facets to this: first, efforts paid to inform partners adequately to allow them to participate actively in the programming processes; second, the creation of dedicated information platforms for a more ongoing and interactive provision of information; and, third, the upgrading of the information to the public, as a way of keeping the SENG0s informed also.

As regards the first aspect, a number of programme authorities emphasised during fieldwork interviews that they make **strenuous efforts to keep their partners informed** as a means for partnership to work effectively, providing them ongoing support in acknowledgement of the fact that “even though members are sectoral and thematic representatives, they have all bought into the concept that their responsibility is for the regional delivery of the programme, and they take this seriously” (PRG27). For example, in North East England, the development agency ONE North East: circulates papers early to allow for consultation; prepares notes on key issues to brief partners before the meetings; holds bilateral briefings when needed; and

distributes a summary of key points afterwards (prepared by one of the partners), to help members report back to their constituents. In Slovenia, the MA plans to hold a 'round table' with all partners as a 'one-off' event, to inform them more in detail about the scope of the programmes and to exchange different point of views.

In some cases, efforts to inform partners better have taken the shape of **establishing dedicated information platforms for horizontal partners**. This is particularly the case in Austria, where, building on a similar experience during 2000-06, ÖROK has introduced the STRAT.AT plus process. It consists of two series of events, '*Foren*' organised by ÖROK and '*Strategien*' organised by others, mainly the Federal Chancellery and the nine *Länder*. STRAT.AT plus does not have any formalised structure or any clear membership basis, as the events are targeted at all bodies and individuals involved in Cohesion policy and (domestic) regional policy. The activities are formalised in annual programmes. STRAT.AT plus events have so far covered a variety of themes, including: the launch of the Structural Funds period 2007-13; 12 years of Structural Funds in Austria; the Seventh Framework Programme; EU Cohesion Policy post 2013; the governance of regional development; and strategic reporting. In the Czech Republic, moreover, a permanent platform for informing NGO partners is represented by the Governmental Council for non-governmental non-profit organisations, which organises regular meetings of those NGOs representatives involved in the PMCs where challenges and problematic issues are identified and discussed. The Board meets generally twice a year and as most members of the Board are also members of the various PMCs of Czech programmes, this provides a platform to raise issues which need to be solved particularly at governmental or inter-ministerial level (with limited impact, however, according to the interviews undertaken).

A large number of programme authorities also consider that their efforts to communicate to the public are conducive to partnership working and represent adequate measures for informing the partners. For the most part, however, even where there has been a strengthening or upgrading of programme communication and publicity activities, compared to the previous period, this has not been explicitly linked to **better targeting of information for the purpose of informing specifically the SENGOS and their potential to influence the programming process**. There are some exceptions to this. One is the inclusion of a regular feature on the ERDF OP in a monthly business publication in País Vasco (so as to inform economic and social partners about the programme strategy, objectives and progress); another is Lombardia ERDF OP's newsletter which reserves a section for features on partners. Similarly, in Portugal, strategic reporting to the public and all other stakeholders has been significantly strengthened, including *inter alia*: the publication of quarterly reports and annual reports on NSRF implementation and the holding of conferences. In most cases, however, communication about the programme has largely remained broadly targeted, and its actual impact on partnership working can be questioned.

### 4.3 Capacity building

Efforts to improve SENGOS' potential to intervene in the programme management process have also entailed the **strengthening of partners' capacities and resources through targeted**

**initiatives**, focusing in some cases in particular on weaker types of partners, such as NGOs and voluntary sector organisations.

In Sachsen-Anhalt and other German programmes (e.g. Berlin and Niedersachsen), for instance, the programmes are funding a socio-economic partner (SEP) **support centre** (*Kompetenzzentrum*) from Technical Assistance resources. In Sachsen-Anhalt, the idea came about because the SEP said that they lacked the capacity to deal effectively with Structural Funds due to the volume and complexity of information, and a partner suggested that the OP should pay for a full-time member of staff to help them engage with the OP. Instead of supporting each SEP separately, however, it was decided to set up an SEP support centre with two full-time members of staff who provide support to all SEPs. The centre organises events, workshops on various themes on behalf of the SEP and their members. It also prepares summaries of EU documents and provides ready access to information on its website. The centre is found to be very useful, while still facing problems with regard to the complexity of Structural Funds information.

Similarly, in Wales, a **Third Sector European Team (3-SET)**, has been set up, co-ordinated by Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) at national level and providing services tailored to the interests of third sector organisations across the Welsh programme areas. The 3-SET team provides dedicated expertise at a national level to enable third sector organisations to contribute to the delivery of the Structural Funds programmes. This is in addition to four regional Spatial European Teams (SETs) which involve Welsh Assembly Government departments and the local authorities, also funded through Technical Assistance. The regional SETs provide advice, support and partnership facilitation at local and regional level.

Along similar lines, in Slovenia the lack of capacity amongst NGOs which was noticed in 2004-06, led to the creation of a **specific priority in the ESF-OP HRD to develop NGOs**. Around €13 million has been allocated to improving the management, organisation and development capacities of NGOs working with vulnerable groups. This led to CNVOS, the Centre for Information Service, Co-operation and Development of NGOs, being selected to support NGOs in their engagement in the Structural Funds programmes (see Box 3 below).

### **Box 3: Support to NGOs in Slovenia through CNVOS**

The Centre for Information Service, Co-operation and Development of NGOs (CNVOS) was established in early 2001 as an independent, non-profit and non-governmental organisation. The aim of CNVOS' 27 founding organisations was to empower NGOs in Slovenia, to promote their role as an important part of civil society, and ensure the realisation of their objectives. Since its establishment, over 200 organisations have joined CNVOS whose main objectives are to:

- encourage networking within the NGO sector and support established networks;
- ensure communication between the Government and NGOs at the national, regional and local level;

- foster cooperation among NGOs at the local, national and international level ;
- collect and spread relevant information for NGOs;
- increase public awareness about the significance of NGOs and civil society in Slovenia; and
- ensure effective lobbying and improve the legal, financial and societal position of NGOs in Slovenia.

CNVOS launched its role in Structural Funds partnership working after successfully applying for a public call under Priority axis 5 of the ESF-OP. CNVOS supports NGOs in their engagement in the Structural Funds and selects NGO representatives not only to participate in Structural Fund Monitoring Committees, but also in other policy contexts beyond EU affairs.

In some cases, as in Finland, rather than dedicated resource or capacity building initiatives, SENGOS are given the opportunity to take part in **training events** organised for programme managers/delivery bodies. In others, as in Lombardia, capacity-building activities targeted at the programme partners are implemented based on demand, i.e. when specific needs emerge (and mainly to support delivery).

Beyond the two examples discussed above (in Germany and Wales), the **use of Technical Assistance (TA) to support partnership is very rare**. In many programmes, TA is considered to be earmarked for use mostly by the MA or other public bodies. In some cases, the use of TA resources to support particular partners has been explicitly discouraged for being a form of positive discrimination (NAT3).

An interesting initiative put in place to support horizontal partnership through use of Technical Assistance has been found in Italy, albeit in the latter part of the 2000-06 programme period, when a project was undertaken under the Objective 1 2000-06 TA programme with the aim to strengthen the role of the SEPs in the phases of implementation and monitoring of programmes (see Box 4).



**Box 4: Supporting SEPs capacities through TA resources in Italy: TA to the socio-economic partners in the Objective 1 regions**

The project entailed a range of activities targeting: the improvement of SEP capacities to interact with regional and other territorial institutions; increased SEP competences relating to the Structural Funds; improvement of the quality of the interaction between different SEPs; and consolidation of a ‘culture of partnership’. It was launched after CNEL<sup>7</sup> issued in 2003 a report analysing the implementation of the partnership principle in 2000-06 programmes and highlighted three principal shortcomings: a) the lack of a partnership culture, both within the SEPs and the administrations in charge of programmes; b) a non-uniform level of competence on the Structural Funds amongst the different SEPs and among different regions; and c) a difficult interchange of information between SEPs and administrations, due not least to an insufficient articulation of the information flows (Sabatini 2008).

The coordination of the project was contracted out to a consultancy and was overseen by a Steering Group where the SEPs were represented and active, and which was chaired by a member of the SEPs. It was implemented in each region and nationally through six-monthly plans approved by the Steering Group. The actions carried out include: seminars and workshops on specific topics of Structural Funds programming; meetings between the partners and with representatives from the MAs to discuss specific issues; the preparation by the consultant of *vademecums* on issues selected by the partners (e.g. State aids rules, the Lisbon agenda, the 2007-13 Cohesion policy framework, the 2007-13 service target agreements etc.); the publication of a quarterly newsletter; the creation of a dedicated project website ([www.partenariato.org](http://www.partenariato.org)), and others. The project had a concrete impact: it generated a protocol of understanding between the SEPs (in total there were around 30 signatories, including the Forum of the third sector) and the Ministry for Economic Development on the role of SEPs in the 2007-13 NSRF.

**4.4 Initiatives put in place by SENGOS themselves**

Efforts to mobilise partners and maintain their engagement with the Structural Funds programmes may come not just from the Managing Authorities but also from the partners themselves. In many regions, the nature of civil society or the domestic policy set-up (also based on partners’ involvement in public policy) support information-sharing between programme partners.

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<sup>7</sup> National Committee for Economy and Labour.

In Austria, for example, there is **‘continuous contact’ among the social and economic partners outside the Structural Funds**. Similar contacts take place in Scotland, where the same people are members of ‘101 meetings’ (PRG25) of different committees in the economic development context. The socio-economic partners who are engaged in the OP Research & Competitiveness meet not just in the PMC, but also on a range of other occasions (consultation meetings, conferences, informal bilateral meetings) with respect to domestic policy. These consolidated relationships allow a bond to develop, which creates a cooperative spirit, so that “if an issue emerges, one of the partners would alert the others, so as to form a joint action”. Key to this is the fact that these relationships are “relationships that have been built over time” (PRT21).

Beyond this informal networking, some partners have established specific **capacity-building activities**. For example, seminars led by the EAPN (European Network for the Fight Against Poverty) and the Luis Vives Foundation<sup>8</sup> were held for third sector organisations across the Spanish regions at programme design stage, with the aim of discussing the options for increasing and improving the participation of NGOs in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of ESF programmes.

More generally, many SENGOS have **well-established procedures for gathering views from their constituents and for disseminating programme-related information back to them**. Umbrella organisations tend to have consolidated systems in place to this purpose. These encompass: oral reports and discussions in internal thematic groups; the circulation of memoranda and written reports to members on what is happening with the OPs; the inclusion of features on the programmes in organisational newsletters; encouraging members to attend conferences and best practice events organised by the Managing Authorities; and inviting speakers from the Managing Authorities, Implementing Bodies and evaluators to make presentations on specific issues relating to the programmes (and Cohesion policy more generally). One Italian organisation reported the arrangement of seminars on the Barca report (with Dr Barca himself presenting it) and on the ex post evaluations undertaken for the Commission (with representatives from one of the evaluators who had been involved in the process). This testifies to an active engagement of the organisation in Cohesion policy further than the pure aspects of programme design and resource allocation, but also on broader, prospective policy issues, beyond the implementation of the current programmes. (PRT20)

In some cases, the **modalities of informing members among SENGOS are more informal than formal**. In the case of one Italian organisation, for example, there are no explicit dissemination initiatives on the programme specifically or general arrangements for collating views. There are specific initiatives to present calls for tenders, but beyond this it is the staff of the organisation who, through their regular contacts with their stakeholders (e.g.

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<sup>8</sup> The Luis Vives Foundation is an independent organisation working to develop and empower the Spanish Social Action Third Sector (voluntary and community groups, social enterprises, charities, cooperatives and mutuals). See: <http://www.fundacionluisvives.org/corporativo/en/index.html>.

through phone calls, meetings with entrepreneurs) keep a ‘finger on the pulse’ of their members’ needs. Monthly meetings of provincial referents allow discussion of the issues emerging from across the regional territory which informs the organisation’s positions on the programme (and which is discussed in turn both formally and informally with the Managing Authority and the Regional Authority more broadly).

Table 4: Summary of barriers to partnership and supporting actions taken

	Barriers	Initiatives taken to improve partnership
Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of understanding of purpose and utility</li> <li>• Openness and vagueness of regulations (on purpose and role of partners in different processes of programme implementation)</li> <li>• Rules on partnership not sufficiently binding and distortive effect of conflicting rules (e.g. N+2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No action reported</li> <li>• No action reported</li> <li>• No action reported</li> </ul>
Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programme authorities not always considering partnership as strategic (e.g. because of lack of tradition or because of associated negative meaning, e.g. lobbying, corruption)</li> <li>• Complex, burdensome and technical Structural Funds procedures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complexity and opacity of legal framework</li> <li>• PMC main forum of involvement and not organised to ensure active, effective and ongoing engagement of SENGOS (ratification rather than decision-making; too many members; discussions too high or too operational; meet only once/twice a year)</li> <li>• PMCs at higher than regional level (whether because of consolidated practice or because of rationalisation, no fora for regional bodies to be involved)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Too many organisations involved in programme delivery</li> <li>• Ineffective information (e.g. one-way) and/or information overload</li> <li>• Timetable of procedures not always allowing scope for partner involvement</li> <li>• Frequent turnover of senior staff and political leadership</li> <li>• Difficulty for programme administrators to understand nature and roles of certain types of organisations</li> <li>• Discrepancy between political and technical levels within the administrations in charge of programmes in their understanding of partnership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No action reported → who should take it if there is a lack of awareness?</li> <li>• Establishment of fora for more informal and ongoing exchanges</li> <li>• Establishment of PMC-type groups in the regions (where these are supra-regional or national)</li> <li>• No action reported</li> <li>• Efforts to better inform partners, e.g. more ongoing information provision and direct involvement of partners</li> <li>• Improved communication and publicity</li> <li>• Establishment of dedicated information platforms for SENGOS partners</li> <li>• No action reported</li> <li>• No action reported</li> <li>• No action reported</li> <li>• No action reported</li> </ul>

	Barriers	Initiatives taken to improve partnership
SETPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of civil society representations</li> <li>• Lack of civic sense and cooperative spirit (dominance of parochialism and partisanship)</li> <li>• Lack of financial and human resources (and ensuing shortage of competences/skills and on-and-off engagement), particularly in small/third sector organisations</li> <li>• Lack of commitment amongst political/institutional leadership</li> <li>• Disparate levels of capacities (in some cases basic skills missing)</li> <li>• Disenfranchisement, disillusion and frustration when lack of impact (and even sense of regression compared to past)</li> <li>• Lack of interest to engage beyond resource allocation decisions, e.g. on programme impacts and achievements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No action reported</li> <li>• No action reported</li> <li>• Use of TA to support economic and social partners</li> <li>• Funding of Centre assisting SENGOS with TA resources</li> <li>• Appointment of support team for SENGOS(funded with TA)</li> <li>• Horizontal partners' own initiatives, e.g. seminars and events</li> <li>• No action reported</li> <li>• Appointment of support team for SENGOS (funded with TA)</li> <li>• Funding with ESF of body to support NGOs to intervene in Structural Funds programmes</li> <li>• Inclusion of socio-economic partners in training events organised for programme managers/delivery bodies</li> <li>• No specific action reported</li> <li>• Enlarged evaluation steering group</li> </ul>

Source: EPRC fieldwork research.



## 5. PARTNERSHIP DYNAMICS IN THE 2007-13 PROGRAMMES

Partnership and, in particular, the involvement of SENGOS in the programming process of Cohesion policy can serve a range of functions. First, it can improve the responsiveness of programmes, by better aligning strategies with policy needs. Second, it can increase the effectiveness of programmes by allowing Managing Authorities to access knowledge which is used to improve the targeting of interventions, consequently improving funding up-take and project quality. And third, it can contribute to improved accountability, insofar as the partners, as organised representations of interests, act as a transmitter and multipliers of programme information to their constituencies (thus increasing transparency and information) and hold programme authorities to account for the action taken and the results achieved.

The following sections (5.1 to 5.3) explore each of these three dimensions of partnership, investigating whether the experience of involving SENGOS in the current generation of programmes is fulfilling these three functions of responsiveness, effectiveness and accountability, and in what ways. Thereafter, section 5.4 discusses the extent of the changes detected in the way partnership is involved, organised and managed in the current programmes compared to the previous. Lastly, the perceived influence of SENGOS is assessed with respect to the processes of programme design and implementation, based on the views of managing authorities and SENGOS.

### 5.1 Partnership for responsiveness

The participation of SENGOS in the programme management process can increase the responsiveness of programmes, by better aligning strategies with policy needs and stakeholders' aspirations. The role of partnership is particularly important in this respect as regards two phases of programme management: programme design and project selection.

By participating in the stages of programme design, partners can present their views as to the appropriate development strategy and goals that the programme should pursue. The involvement of SENGOS is generally considered to have been strong in the preparation of the current generation of programmes, and this is often in line with the practices developed already during the preparation of 2000-06 programmes.

Programme partners have generally been involved in programme design through various means including:

- **thematic workshops and seminars** (with partners' participation targeting specific groups of partners, based on thematic specialisation and interests, e.g. in Nordrhein-Westfalen, Norte and Scotland, for OP development, and in Italy, Portugal and Greece, for NSRF preparation);
- **development conferences** at both regional and national level (e.g. in Greece, Portugal, Sachsen-Anhalt and Sweden);

- **written consultations**, such as the submission of written proposals or feedback on programme drafts, as in Scotland, Finland, Nordrhein-Westfalen and in Slaskie, (where the IT platform PARTNER II was utilised to this purpose), as well as in Sweden (where any member of the public could contribute views via the government's website);
- **working or expert groups**, as in the Czech IOP and in Satakunta (Finland) - where the final programme draft was produced in a specific expert group consisting of representatives of the Higher Education Institutes, Technology Centre, Chamber of Commerce, business service agencies, association of entrepreneurs etc.); and
- **direct requests to contribute feedback** made to selected groups or types of partners, as in some Finnish regions.

An example of particularly structured, inclusive and, according to the MA, effective inclusion of SEPs in programme design is provided by the German *Land* of Nordrhein-Westfalen, where the extensive process of consultation on programme content led to many of the responses and suggestions formulated by the SEPs being included in the programme (see Box 5 to follow).

#### **Box 5: SEPs involvement in programme design in Nordrhein-Westfalen**

In NRW, there was an extensive consultation process with the SEP in the run-up to the 2007-13 period. The *Land* cabinet agreed a strategic paper in January 2006 on the goals of the OP (based on a political agreement among all *Land* Ministries), and this was sent out to over 500 organisations and individuals, asking them to provide ideas for future OP content and instruments. Over 100 responses were received. The MA staff assessed and summarised the written contributions, and results were presented at a conference in August 2006 where a draft OP was also presented. In addition, MA staff visited over 70 organisations throughout the Land to provide presentations and engage in discussions about the new draft OP.

According to the MA, a large number of the ideas submitted by SEPs were taken on board in the final OP. The MA tried to find ways of incorporating partner inputs into the OP as much as possible. However, some suggestions were not taken on board because they did not fit, either within the Structural Funds eligibility rules or within the strategic approach agreed by the *Land* cabinet. Nonetheless, the only really controversial issue was the question of the geographical coverage of the OP i.e. whether it should cover the entire *Land* or only the structurally weaker areas; whether/how much funds should be earmarked for the structurally weaker areas; and how any structurally weaker areas should be identified/designated. In the view of the Managing Authority, the consultation process was generally very constructive.

In two cases, North East England and Scotland, **selected partners have also been actively involved in negotiations with the Commission**, in order to provide tangible evidence to DG Regio of the inclusiveness and cohesiveness of the partnership supporting the programme drafting process. In some cases, special efforts were paid to ensure equal representation of men and women in the consultations (e.g. in Sweden, where partnership structures included an equal number of men and women) and adequate representation of ethnic minorities (e.g. in the Swedish OPs of Övre Norrland and Mellersta Norrland, the two



northernmost programmes, where partnership structures included also Sami representatives, and in the Czech Republic where a special working group was set up under the IOP to address the integration of the needs of Roma communities).

**Partners can also inform the choice of projects** in cases where the programmes pre-identify some of these (as in Portugal, Spain). By getting involved in the early stages of project selection, for instance advising Managing Authorities or Implementing Bodies on eligibility and selection criteria, partners can support the targeting of calls for tenders to encourage the effective take-up capacity and needs of the target recipients, thus strengthening the programmes' ability to reach expenditure and outcome goals. **SENGO representatives have been involved in providing their views on, and helping to refine, the eligibility conditions, selection criteria and commissioning documents in a number of cases**, including in Austria, Sachsen-Anhalt, Slovenia, Spain, Lombardia and North East England. In other cases, partner representatives are asked simply to approve the project selection criteria drafted by the MA. The MA may 'test' ideas with partners either within or outside the PMC before issuing bids (e.g. Lombardia). Similarly, in Poland, the MA contacted city authorities informally when developing some calls for tender.

The research undertaken for this paper shows that practices of SENGO involvement, especially in programme design but project selection also to a certain extent, represent broad continuity with the practice of the past programme period. Already in 2000-06, SENGOs (particularly the socio-economic partners) were involved in the processes of programme design in virtually every programme. While the PMC continues to be responsible for approving selection criteria in all Structural Funds programmes, the research reveals active engagement of socio-economic partners only in the refinement of selection criteria in some cases. In Italy, programme partners - particularly representations of entrepreneurs - contributed to the refinement of criteria for the selection of projects under the Integrated Aids Package for Environment of the Objective 1 OP LED and also for "a large number of interventions in the regional OPs, such as regional-level aid schemes or extremely complicated financial engineering instruments" (PRT20), making the procedures for firms to access these measures to be more realistic and targeted.

This said, there have been several developments regarding the involvement of SENGOs (largely seen as positive in the interview research) in the preparation of the current generation of programmes.

First, there has been a **broadening of the scope of partnership in programme design** in some cases. In Poland, the regionalisation of programme management and the expansion of the ROP and the Human Capital OP in terms of budget and thematic scope had a significant impact on the input of partners into programme design. The consultation process for these programmes was much broader and more thorough, drawing in universities, cities, housing associations, SMEs (now eligible for funding under a broader range of activities, including tourism, culture and regeneration).<sup>9</sup> Partner inclusion in the design process also intensified

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<sup>9</sup> However, it is worth mentioning the caveat that given the weakness of partnership-working traditions, 'consultation' with smaller, less influential or less experienced partners was more likely to

in Greece, where it was perceived to have significantly improved compared to the previous periods, and Wales, in both cases thanks to a more structured process pivoting, in Greece, around ‘development conferences’ at national and regional level (in Greece) and, in Wales, around thematic ‘workstreams’.

Second, there has been an **intensification of the involvement of SENGOS due to the addition of another layer of participation, represented by the NSRF**. In a number of countries, such as Greece, Italy and Portugal, comprehensive consultations were carried out on the national-level development priorities that should inform the NSRF, involving actively socio-economic partners and representatives from civil society and the voluntary sector. This was a marked difference in cases where there was previously no comprehensive national regional development strategy (for instance, where there was no CSF or this covered only a part of the national territory). In some cases, the NSRFs were prepared with a mixture of bottom-up and top-down processes, whereby NSRF drafts were prepared based on regional strategic documents which had been subject to consultation regionally, before these drafts themselves and the OPs descending from them, would be consulted in their turn (Polverari *et al* 2006).

Third, **consultations have been reported to have been more wide-ranging or thorough with respect to specific themes in some cases**, for instance in Wales with respect to the topics of the environment and equality, where community groups (that had never before been involved) were engaged in the process, and where “many groups were pleased to be asked, as they had never been asked before” (PRG23). For the first time, SENGOS were involved not just in the discussion of the content of programmes and budget allocations, but also in the discussion of the governance arrangements for the programmes. This applies particularly to Italy, where the drafting of parts of the governance section of the NSRF was carried out with the direct involvement of SENGOS.

Fourth, as the programmes are increasingly subsumed under broader development strategies - as in England, Denmark, Portugal, Spain and Italy - or linked more explicitly to other strategies - as in France, where OPs are being more closely integrated with the Regional Innovation Strategies - **partnership in programme design has been extended beyond the scope of the OPs** to embrace these policies or strategies also. In North East England, the ERDF programme took into account a number of existing strategies which had also been developed in partnership or were in fact the strategies of partners. In Denmark, the direct involvement of partners in Structural Funds programming specifically was less intensive than previously, but in most regions was indirectly both wider and deeper than on previous occasions because of the new institutional set-up for economic development in the country, based on partnership-informed Growth Economic Fora. This also applies also to Spain, where partnership working has consolidated over time across most domestic economic development strategies (which inform the content of the Structural Funds programmes), although no new institutions have been created. In France, the development of the RIS is an example of a novel approach to partnership working. It led to the

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involve the presentation of plans to a passive audience rather than an exchange of views that produced concrete changes to the OP.

emergence of new dynamics between State and regional actors and the involvement of new socio-economic actors (e.g. social partners, Chambers of Commerce and Industry) in the process.

Fifth, **some types of actors were reported to be less involved this time around** compared to the previous period (e.g. NGOs in Austria, social actors in Madeira - “they are less interested because the new programme themes are of less interest to them” (PRG21); **whilst others were reported to be more actively involved** (e.g. universities, research institutions, firms in Lombardia) because of the changed scope of programmes. A different territorial scale of the partners involved in the process was also noted in some cases, notably responding to the shift of the programme from catching-up to competitiveness-oriented, allowed for by the lack of area designation (notably in Lombardia).

In two cases in the United Kingdom (Scotland and Wales), the involvement of partners took a markedly different shape than in 2000-06, in both cases with a stronger steering role of the respective territorial governments (Welsh Assembly Government and Scottish Government), in line with the advancing devolution process in the two countries (which was still in its formative stages during the preparation of the 2000-06 programmes). In Scotland, for instance, instead of being led by the partners themselves (through partnerships assisted by drafting teams made up of consultants), the programmes were drafted by internal Scottish Government teams, albeit in consultation with the partners (via workshops and formal consultations). This process, introduced to streamline an approach which had previously been very protracted, proved controversial at the time. In fact, however, programme authorities argue that partners continued to have a substantial input, as “there were some things, like the number of priorities, what should be funded under the priorities, how much money you give them [on which the Scottish Government] was genuinely open”.<sup>10</sup>

The degree of (perceived) impact by SENGOS on the design of programme documents has been variable across programmes, ranging from modest or limited, as in Sachsen-Anhalt (according to the views of SEP interviewees) and Spain, to significant, as in the United Kingdom. In some cases, the satisfactory extent of inclusion of partners in the NSRF and national OPs was not matched by an equal inclusiveness of the ROP drafting process (e.g. in the Czech Republic).

**There is evidence of SENGOS influence on the design of programmes** quoted by the interviewees. For instance, in Slovenia, one NGO stated that its intervention in programme design had been “crucial for the introduction of an NGO-specific measure in the ESF-OP” (PRT29) (despite a more general assessment that the role of NGOs more generally in the definition of the programme ‘could have been better’). In Italy, the inclusion of both R&D and aids to firms for innovation into a single Convergence OP (as opposed to two as had been the case hitherto) was considered by one of the SEPs interviewed as having been influenced by their views; “the unification of the two previous NOPs was requested by our organisation, based on the conviction that the policies for research and innovation have to be combined even if in Italy they are administered by two different Ministries” (PRT21). In

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<sup>10</sup> This quote comes from an interview undertaken as part of separate research by one of the authors.

Scotland, e-skills measures were introduced to the ESF Lowland & Upland Scotland OP based on suggestions formulated by partners during the consultation workshops which were held when the programme was being drafted.<sup>11</sup>

However, **the active involvement of SENGOS in the processes of programme design (and the translation of their views into the programme documents) does not necessarily result in the operationalisation of what was agreed.** The case of the implementation procedures established for the Italian NSRF is a striking example of this. The overall architecture of support of the NSRF, which had been achieved through a comprehensive and open process of consultations and discussions, was effectively abandoned following a change of government. The ensuing implementation delays have meant that the agreed procedures for partner involvement - which had been defined with the 'hands-on' involvement of SEPs - is also stalling. As noted by an interviewee, "we intervened in drafting a part of the rules of the National Strategic Document, those relating to the involvement of the partnership. This work has capitalised on the outcomes of a project carried out through the Technical Assistance OP of the 2000-06 CSF and has involved all social and economic parts. The rules for the involvement of the partnership were drafted and so was a protocol of agreement with the SEPs. All this has happened based on a shared process; the problem now is that this whole mechanism is stalling because the implementation of the programmes is slow and is paying for the various modifications which have since been made to the use of the national resources of the NSD, the elimination of the domestic national programmes and a general slowness in the activation of the co-financed OPs. The National table for the coordination of the NSD, foreseen in the NSD, has never met as yet." (PRT20).

This indicates that **there may be a trade-off (and perhaps even incongruity) between the principles of partnership and of political accountability in the traditional sense** (i.e. that based on the electoral process), where the latter will always, and perhaps justly so, prevail. Notwithstanding this, however, in the preparation of the 2007-13 NSRF and OPs, the involvement of SENGOS has indeed served the purpose of better responsiveness - even, as reported in the Czech Republic - because of the more transparent approach of Managing Authorities in making explicit what, of the proposals formulated by the SENGOS, had been taken on board and what had not, and on how comments had been addressed in the programme documents.

## **5.2 Partnership for effectiveness**

Partnership can in theory contribute to better programme effectiveness by allowing Managing Authorities to access knowledge which is used to improve the targeting of interventions, consequently improving funding take-up and project quality. More generally, the need and usefulness of involving horizontal partners in the processes of programme design and implementation is implicitly acknowledged by the 'place-based' rationale for policy which underlies an approach that "ultimately relies on the capacity of external interventions to promote (in the target places/regions) a process for eliciting the

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<sup>11</sup> This quote comes from an interview undertaken as part of separate research by one of the authors.

knowledge and preferences of individuals, facilitating innovative actors and new ideas, and designing projects for the production of public goods and services” (Barca 2009, 178). The involvement of horizontal partners can clearly support this process of eliciting the knowledge and preference of individuals, which in turns makes policy not just more responsive but also more effective.

Partner involvement in project animation, through information and dissemination activities among their networks/sectors with regard to programme measures that are potentially of interest, helps the programme as it raises awareness and interest and the engagement of that sector with the programme. This can contribute to increasing the quantity and quality of project applications submitted, and it may help to ensure that they fit better with programme goals. When partners are involved in the project appraisal and selection process, they have the opportunity to bring different views ‘to the table’, and to help ensure that the projects chosen are the best ones to achieve the agreed programme strategy. Partner involvement in the process can also raise awareness among their sector/constituents on the opportunities offered by programme and its wider strategic objectives.

Involving partners in project animation activities can stimulate and improve applications from particular sectors. This seems to be quite widespread among programmes. Where programme authorities would like to focus a part of the strategy on a particular group, sector, location or type of organisation, **some Managing Authorities have found it useful to sub-divide part of the OP to be run by a programme partner or group of partners.** This can allow specific and direct project animation to take place between the partner organisation and their constituents/the potential beneficiaries. These ‘special programme measures’ - such as the PIA in Lombardia<sup>12</sup>, the global grants in France, the ‘collective efficiency strategies’ in Portugal<sup>13</sup> and the two percent of the ESF OP earmarked for projects proposed (and selected) by SEP in Sachsen-Anhalt - can give partners a strong role in project generation (and selection too, in some cases).

One reason for sub-dividing programmes into parcels’ or ‘packages’ can be the desire to achieve an adequate project scale. In the context of programmes with increasingly limited resources, the scale of projects is becoming strategically more important, with a number of

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<sup>12</sup> Implemented under Priority 4 of the Lombard ERDF programme, the priority devoted to the region’s lagging/mountainous areas, the PIA (Integrated Area Projects) reproduce the modalities of project generation and selection of the PISL (Local Development Integrated Projects) of the 2000-06 period, in which partners - particularly public sector partners and private non-for-profit partners who operate in the areas of environmental, cultural, social spheres - have a strong role in terms of project generation and selection (and also put own resources in the package). The measure is meeting significant success: in the first tender issued, demand exceeded the available resources tenfold, showing not just interest but also a degree of capacity within the proponent organisations, built not least through the PISL experience in the past period.

<sup>13</sup> A key priority for EU programme authorities in the 2007-13 period in Portugal is to support “collective efficiency strategies” where partnership, particularly with private sector actors, underpins the rationale and *modus operandi* for intervention. Two different types are distinguished in the NSRF: clusters, including Competitiveness and Technology Centres (PCT) and other clusters; and territorially-based strategies for low-population density areas (Programmes for the Economic Enhancement of Endogenous Resources - PROVERE) and for urban regeneration and development (Urban Regeneration and Development Actions - ARDU).

OPs opting to implement fewer but larger projects, in order to maximise impacts. This is in some cases leading to a more extensive involvement of horizontal partners at local level, notably in Portugal where in line with the NSRF “projects must involve more territories and partners” (PRG20), implemented by “multi-actor partnerships, often formalised in formal consortia” (PRG19). A number of such types of composite projects can be found in Algarve, for instance: (i) the PROVERE initiative -Programme for the Economic Enhancement of Endogenous Resources<sup>14</sup>; (ii) PERU - *Parcerias para a Regeneração Urbana* (Urban regeneration partnerships): involving municipalities and local actors (private and not-for-profit) for the regeneration of urban centres; (iii) RUCI - *Redes Urbanas para a Competitividade e a Inovação Algarve Central*: an initiative involving municipalities and local actors (private, not-for-profit and 3rd sector) for the joint management of networks between cities; (iv) the Sea cluster action plan which mobilises local actors (public and private), regional actors and science and technology institutions; and, (v) the so-called ‘Strategic Plans’ which mobilise local actors (public and private), regional actors, science and technology providers, and NGOs to define sub-regional strategies in specific areas (e.g. those for the areas of the Arade and Guadiana rivers).

**The use of Intermediate Bodies which are also programme partners could be viewed in a similar way.** For example, four not-for profit bodies operate as IBs under the País Vasco ESF OP, and the Champagne-Ardenne programme in France foresee delegating support measures on a case-by-case basis to IBs which may include chambers of commerce, representatives of the business sector, territorial actors, nature parks and associations. A further example of the involvement of SENGOS in project generation includes the establishment of *ad hoc* working groups, like the Working Group for Roma projects in Czech Republic IOP, which includes partners from relevant NGOs (see Box 6 below).

**Box 6: Working Group for Roma projects in the Czech Republic**

The Working Group for Roma projects established by the MA of the IOP is considered to be one of the few working groups which “makes sense and [works with] substantial drive to change... things”. The WG is made up of relevant ministries’ representatives (i.e. Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport), representatives of municipalities, and representatives of the Agency for Social Inclusion and selected NGOs, including fieldworkers. All of them are pro-active and keen to set up and prepare the first round of projects dedicated to regeneration of Roma ghettos, including the social inclusion of Roma people into society. The projects are intended to serve as good practice afterwards. The key challenge is to ensure sustainability of these projects, thus a wide range of partners (both horizontal and vertical) have been asked by the MA of the IOP to join the WG to contribute their experience with respect to Roma issues. The prime objective of the WG is to share experience and expert knowledge. However, the WG has not yet discussed suggestions for project selection criteria and will not be in charge of project selection.

<sup>14</sup> This initiative is specifically targeted on low-density areas (in a broad sense) that have weak development opportunities with the objective of promoting competitiveness and the economic utilisation of territorially-based assets (e.g. of a natural, historical or cultural nature) through integrated development plans and actions that are managed through a partnership. In its annual budgetary plan for 2009, the government highlights the implementation of the first round of PROVERE actions as one of the main activities in the domain of regional development policy.

**SENGOs can also act as a ‘filter’ for the Managing Authority** (for instance in Lombardia and Wales) by helping their members prepare applications and giving advice, thus raising the quality of applications. As noted by an interviewee: “if a member comes forward with a proposal which is not deemed good enough, the advice given to the member is not to progress this forward; this saves time at both ends” (PRT18).

When SENGOs participate in project appraisal and selection procedures (outside any ‘special measures’ set up for their particular sector, field or area), they can bring their specific expertise to the discussion, or they could potentially attempt to influence decision-making in favour of their constituents/members. This second point is perhaps why there is still considerable reticence among programme authorities about allowing partners to be directly involved in the appraisal and approval of projects under the OPs. This helps to explain why **in many programmes, project selection processes remain the exclusive responsibility of the MA** (for example, in Greece and the Czech Republic).<sup>15</sup>

**There are nonetheless some examples of strong partner involvement in the selection process.** SENGOs may be involved in committees assessing projects, while the Managing Authority makes the final decision (in Finland), or in selecting projects from a list of those checked by the Managing Authority for formal correctness (in Sweden). Partners generally have a stronger role in project approval, for instance in Denmark, Scotland and, for large and cross-sectoral projects, in Finland. In Scotland, this greater involvement of partners at an operational level through their role in project approval has been found to help increase their awareness and engagement with the OPs. The strong partner role may only occur for some type of project applications, for instance, under part of the programme in Sachsen-Anhalt where some SEPs are members of the juries that select projects under competitive calls.

**The fear that participation in decisions over project approvals could allow partners to benefit unfairly particularly affects inclusion of the private sector.** In France, an evaluation recommended that the private sector be included in the Regional Programming Committees<sup>16</sup> and PMCs, but this recommendation is facing resistance because of a perception that “their participation would need to be well organised in order to avoid conflicts of interest” (CNASEA 2006). This goes both ways, however, as private sector actors are reported to have a negative perception of these committees, notably because “rejected applicants have never found out why they were rejected” (CNASEA 2006).

**Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) are often suggested as a potential means of increasing the participation of the private sector in economic development initiatives and Cohesion policy programmes more specifically.** However, there is evidence that many difficulties with the setting-up and running of these initiatives still remain. For

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<sup>15</sup> Or it could be because, as observed by an interviewee regarding implementation overall, “the administration is by its nature generally reticent to share this moment which it sees essentially as its own” (PRT20).

<sup>16</sup> These are composed of the regional partnership, and often almost identical to the Monitoring Committee, but full membership is often more limited. Their role is to prepare the final project decision by the MA.

example, PPPs are in some cases seen simply as a financing method rather than a way of targeting specific investments (e.g. in France), or the role of the private sector in PPP projects is perceived as simply to implement them (in Portugal). Many private sector organisations perceive the Structural Funds as bureaucratic and tend to avoid them in favour of other funding sources. For instance, a call for PPP project proposals in September 2009 in the Czech Republic yielded low interest, with potential applicants blaming the complexity of PPP rules and Structural Funds rules. In Greece, PPP are only funded through the domestic budget and not co-financed by Cohesion policy. Notwithstanding these difficulties, there is much interest in their potential, and several Managing Authorities expressed an interest in exploring how PPPs could be used further.

### 5.3 Partnership for accountability

Partnership can contribute to improving accountability, insofar as the programme partners - as organised representations of interests - act to transmit programme information onwards to their constituencies (thus increasing transparency and information dissemination) and hold programme authorities to account for the action taken and the results achieved. The level of participation of partner organisations in monitoring and evaluation activities can indicate how much interest they have in the results being achieved and on whether the programme is on target to reach its strategic objectives.

For the 2007-13 programme period, there has been a significant change to the regulatory context for how evaluation should be carried out under Cohesion policy programmes. A new, flexible and needs-based framework has been introduced, with the intention of making evaluation more strategic and results-oriented. Compared to the past period, where compulsory ex ante, mid-term and ex post evaluations were required, the new regulation implies a significant reduction in the number of evaluations needed, while also allowing Member States to implement evaluations adapted to their needs. While some programmes have decided to maintain a similar approach to evaluation to that taken previously (i.e. contracting out a single evaluator to follow the programme throughout its lifetime, with a series of annual, interim and final reports, for instance in Lombardia), others have decided to carry out a system of on-going needs-based evaluations. In these more flexible circumstances, there is potentially an opportunity for partners to influence evaluation activities to investigate, for example, whether certain sectors are being well served by programme activities.

As recommended by the Commission, most countries have drafted Evaluation Plans, which are generally conceived as 'live documents' to be periodically reviewed and updated to suit emerging needs. **The drafting of the Evaluation Plans was mostly carried out internally by the public administration in charge of the programmes**, regardless of whether the process had been cooperatively nationally-led, nationally-guided or regionally-led (Polverari, Mendez and Gross 2007). The inclusion of partner and stakeholder views did not appear to have been a priority at this stage, arguably as a result of the time pressures under which the Plans were prepared. However, the Plans did tend to be discussed and validated by the Monitoring Committees, with an opportunity for horizontal partners to comment (for example, in Nordrhein-Westfalen). A notable exception was in France, where there has been a marked change in how the evaluation framework was prepared for the



current period, now having been jointly developed with a wider group of involved actors. This development phase was seen as crucial in preparing partners and services and to avoid potential future bottlenecks (Polverari, Mendez and Gross 2007).

**The changing approach to evaluation provides opportunities for the involvement of partners.** Although socio-economic partners and other stakeholders were not widely included in the drafting of Evaluation Plans, in an on-going process of needs-based evaluations there still remains the possibility of future adaptations and revisions to the Plans, potentially involving a wider range of actors than programme managers and evaluation specialists, and also the opportunity for partners to participate in definition of Terms of Reference for specific evaluation contracts.

The evidence gathered for this paper suggest that **it is fairly widespread practice for the SENGOS to have some degree of input into the evaluation work being carried out for the programmes.** It is worth noting, however, that many programmes have not yet commenced specific evaluation activity beyond preparing their evaluation plan, so the discussion of partner involvement in evaluation activity sometimes refers to intentions rather than what has actually happened. It should also be noted that evaluation has remained a predominantly national level-task in a number of countries (e.g. in Denmark and Spain), and is mostly the responsibility of the public actors running the programmes (e.g. in France). However, the concentration of evaluation activity at national level need not exclude representation from SENGOS, as indicated by the experiences of the French National Evaluation Body and of the Finnish ERDF Evaluation Group.

**In a number of cases, input by partners into the evaluation process is more active and intensive** - for example, through representation on specific evaluation steering/advisory groups, set up either to oversee evaluation activity as a whole (for instance in North East England, Wales, Scotland, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Lombardia, the Italian OP Research & Competitiveness, Sachsen-Anhalt, Poland) or even taking part in overseeing the individual evaluations as they take place (as in Scotland and in the Italian OP Research & Competitiveness). The groups which steer the individual evaluations themselves tend to include a narrower range of partners, however, sometimes included for their evaluation expertise rather than their 'representativeness'. Certain types of evaluation may involve partners more intensively the others: the Strategic Environmental Assessments carried out for the 2007-13 programmes were mentioned as being particularly inclusive by interviewees in Portugal and Lombardia for example. As such, evaluation structures have been described as "a useful arena for strengthening partnership participation" (Italy OP Research & Competitiveness). An interesting approach to SENGOS involvement in evaluation is provided by the Enlarged Evaluation Steering Group in the Italian Convergence OP Research & Competitiveness, briefly illustrated in the Box 7 below.

**Box 7: SENG0 involvement in evaluation activities in the Italian OP Research & Competitiveness**

In the OP Research & Competitiveness, inclusion of partners in the evaluation process has been formalised through the creation of an ‘Enlarged Evaluation Steering Group’, plus thematic Steering Groups (including partners) for each evaluation carried out. The enlarged Steering Group is intended to interact with the MA and IB to identify evaluation themes, propose evaluation questions, check on the evaluation activities undertaken each year, and discuss evaluation results.

However, decisions on activities to be undertaken are made by a ‘Restricted Evaluation Steering Group’ (composed of representatives from the Ministry of Economic Development, the National Evaluation Unit, the regional authorities whose territory is covered by the programme, other national ministries and a few selected external experts). The Restricted Steering Group plans and decides the activities for the subsequent year which are then presented and discussed with the enlarged group again. In other words, the partnership makes proposals, these are consolidated in a plan which is then re-discussed with the partners.

The Enlarged Steering Group has only met once so far, but this was a promising start, indicating a pro-active and open engagement of the partners intervened and the true willingness to share information and bring the agenda of programme evaluation forward. The group, which is set to meet at least twice a year, will be able to utilise an intranet platform for more ongoing interaction (e.g. to post proposals, share documents, keep up-to-date with programme developments etc.).

**Where partners are not explicitly represented on evaluation steering groups, this has not always meant that their views or questions have not been taken into account.** For example, in the Czech IOP, a current process evaluation includes evaluation questions based on partner input, obtained through informal channels. The more flexible, needs-based framework also means that partners themselves may trigger evaluation activity through informal channels (as was reported in the Auvergne region of France, for instance).

Lastly, involving partners more actively in discussing the follow-up to evaluation findings can help increase ‘ownership’ of Cohesion policy programmes, raise awareness among partners of strategic programme goals and heighten their engagement with the results and outcomes being achieved. This ultimately can increase the accountability of programme managers to stakeholders. To this end, **a number of programmes disseminate evaluation findings to inform SENG0s, make evaluation a recurrent agenda point for PMC meetings (as in Sweden and Italy) and even utilise evaluation outcomes specifically to stimulate discussion with SENG0s on selected topics (for instance in North East England).**

The level of interest shown by SENG0s evaluation discussions does depend (as in some stages of programme management) on the personal interest of the SENG0 representative. This is likely to be greater where an organisation has a broader strategic interest (or sensitivity) in forecasting future trends and policy options (both aspects which are often linked to the capacities and resources available to the organisation in question). Indeed, interview research suggested that many SENG0s prefer to concentrate

their efforts on the programme design phase, where there is considered to be more opportunity to exert influence.

## **5.4 Changing partnership dynamics?**

There is evidence that the new territorial scope (in non-Convergence regions) and strategic focus of programmes - and thus the different types of final beneficiaries targeted by programmes - have led to some refocusing of partnership work (e.g. in Lombardia, Norte, Denmark). In Lombardia, the fact that the programme area now embraces the whole regional territory and has a new focus on research, innovation and business competitiveness has led to the involvement of different types of partners in the management of the ERDF OP compared to the previous programme. Representation by SME and research institutions is now central to the programme.

Besides this change to the composition of partnership, however, there is no evidence of any widespread radical re-shaping in the way partnership is being operationalised. The involvement of SENGOS representations is taking place essentially in line with experience gained during the 2000-06 period. Also in line with the past period, SENGOS are more involved in programme design than in the various stages of implementation. Partner involvement in programme design is valued across programmes, “not only because it increases the legitimacy and transparency of policies, but also because the content itself can be adjusted to actual needs”, in line with the place-based development paradigm (PRG20). Nonetheless, despite some evidence of involvement of SENGOS in project generation and selection and, to a lesser extent, evaluation, partnership is still largely confined to the stages of programme design. To put it in the words of one interviewee: “Partners are in good hands at the strategic level - and not at the operational level.” (PRG2).

## **5.5 Perceived influence of partnership on programming processes**

The SENGOS interviewed largely converged in agreeing that it is difficult to assess whether they have an influence on programme design and implementation. Some observed that “influence is a strong word” (PRT18), others stated that “there is definitely no influence” (PRT19) or that “no immediate influence” could be detected (PRT9), and a minority was quite positive about the extent to which their positions and proposals had been taken on board by programme authorities (PRT20/21, PRT32). Despite these differences in views, there was some agreement on the fact that the 2007-13 period had introduced a certain “cultural change on the part of both public administrators and stakeholders, which has brought increased awareness on the policy context and to have a ‘real’ exchange of information and communication” (PRT19).

Table 5 below provides an overview of the degree of perceived influence of SENGOS organisations in the processes of programme design and implementation.

**Table 5: Influence of SENG0 partners in programme design and implementation**

<b>Austria</b>	Partners involved at <i>Land</i> level in the drafting of regional OPs. No influence on project selection or evaluation, other than for partners which are also IBs. Some informal influence on the implementation process and indirect influence on the project eligibility criteria through participation in the PMCs.
<b>Flanders</b>	Some influence through participation in the PMC and technical working groups, albeit limited due to the advisory role of SEPs in these bodies. Partnership dominated by public sector actors.
<b>Czech Republic</b>	Growing influence of SENG0s on programme design, but varying across the OPs and regions. Capacity to influence ROP content dependent on the capacity and activity of organisations. Some influence on project selection, either indirectly on eligibility criteria or directly through participation in selection committees (in certain OPs). Growing role of informal consultation of partners to remedy implementation problems, but limited influence on the monitoring process, despite voting rights in PMCs. Very limited influence on the evaluation. Involvement of partners hindered by lack of co-terminosity between NUTS II units and regional boundaries and by lack of knowledge and experience. Partnership dominated by public sector actors.
<b>Denmark</b>	Significant influence on programme drafting, especially at the regional level. SENG0s are involved directly and indirectly from programming to project selection projects through the Regional Growth Fora. Weaker influence on monitoring and evaluation, as these are matters reserved to national authorities (acting with the support of the PMC). SENG0s involved in the PMC, but the representatives of the MA are the proactive drivers within the Committee.
<b>Finland</b>	Influence on programme design. Some influence on implementation, monitoring and evaluation through Regional Management Committees and PMCs. Weaker influence of smaller organisations which lack knowledge and experience. Gradually decreasing activeness of partners who consider that they have little influence or are put off by the bureaucracy associated with SF administration. Growing involvement of the business sector, reflecting the changing thematic focus of the programme. Overall greater influence of SENG0s in the ESF and rural programmes.
<b>France</b>	French centralist culture and lack of partnership tradition with civil society undermine SENG0s influence. However, a growing involvement of SENG0s in consultations for 2007-13 programmes, especially at regional level. Partner influence on project selection and programme monitoring variable across regions from limited to moderate. Limited influence on evaluation.
<b>Germany</b>	Close cooperation between the SEPs and the administration is part of the normal policy process in Germany. Generally, the SEP contribute significantly to the various processes of OPs implementation. However, the SEPs' perceived influence on the programme design varies across the <i>Länder</i> , from effective (NRW) to modest (SA). SEPs have no influence on project selection in some <i>Länder</i> (NRW), while they do in others (SA). Significant influence on the monitoring process due to voting rights in the PMC and participation in the technical steering groups. Influence on the evaluation through the technical steering groups.
<b>Greece</b>	Growing influence of SEPs on the programming process through intensive and broad consultations, but still quite limited, especially beyond the process of programme design. Some indirect influence, in some cases, on project selection through consultation on eligibility criteria. Influence through voting rights in the PMCs. The capacity of SEPs to influence decision-making effectively can be limited by insufficient knowledge of the Funds. Partnership dominated by public sector actors.
<b>Italy</b>	SEPs influence more marked in programme design than in other aspects of programme implementation, but markedly variable across programmes (regional v. national, South v. Centre-North). Some influence on project generation and selection through formal or informal consultations on eligibility and selection criteria. Limited influence on evaluation. Variations between Northern and Southern regions/programmes, due to different 'partnership cultures'. Influencing capacity dependent on organisations' 'size' and relative political weight.

<b>Poland</b>	More partner influence than in 2004-06 through SENGOS participation in OP consultations, PMCs and evaluation steering groups in the wake of introduction of the ROPs and the expansion of the thematic and financial scope of OPs. Nonetheless, non-public sector partners have limited influence on all aspects of programme design and implementation, due to the fact that partnership working is a new practice in the Polish context. Influence of the programmes is dependent on the capacity and 'size' of organisation - only some actors are active. Partnership generally dominated by the public sector.
<b>Portugal</b>	Some influence of SEPs on programme design through consultations in programme drafting and indirectly through input into domestic strategies. Strategic Advisory Committees for mainland ROPs will strengthen SEP involvement in monitoring and implementation, although project selection generally dominated by public bodies. Partnership remains dominated by the public sector.
<b>Spain</b>	Some influence of the SEPs on programme design through programme drafting consultations. Significant indirect influence on certain programme interventions through domestic strategies. Indirect influence on the project eligibility criteria through participation in the PMCs (in advisory capacity). Limited influence on evaluation. Overall, greater influence of SENGOS in the ESF. Partnerships dominated by the public sector actors.
<b>Sweden</b>	Consolidated cooperative culture and partnership tradition are reflected in the overall strong influence of SEPs on all processes. Particularly strong influence on programme design, despite some issues with partners not being taken seriously (NGOs) or lacking interest (trade unions). Significant influence on the decisions concerning project selection. Feedback from partners on the implementation issues. Significant formal and informal influence on programme monitoring and evaluation. Partners' capacity to influence the decision-making, both formally and informally, often dependent on personal networks/experience.
<b>Slovenia</b>	Strong influence of SENGOS on programme design. Some (modest) influence on project selection and programme evaluation through participation in PMC which approves the eligibility criteria for projects and the Evaluation Plan.
<b>UK</b>	Well developed 'partnership culture'. Active involvement of SEPs in programme design and strong influence across all phases of programme management: project generation (especially in Scotland); project selection; programme monitoring. Some influence on evaluation through evaluation steering/advisory groups.

Source: EPRC research.



## 6. THE COMMISSION'S ROLE IN PROMOTING EFFECTIVE HORIZONTAL PARTNERSHIP

As has been noted, Article 11 leaves a considerable degree of flexibility to Member States and regions as regards the interpretation and operationalisation of partnership. Notwithstanding this, programmes have not reported experiencing a strong 'steer' from the Commission as to how they put Article 11 into practice under the current programmes. Several programme authorities were encouraged strongly to foresee greater partner involvement during the programming phase or received requests for more information in the NSRF and OPs on the specifics of how partners had been included. Where there has been a significant degree of change in implementation mechanisms (e.g. in the United Kingdom), there has been more input in terms of the Commission seeking clarification and assurances about the role foreseen for partners in programme implementation. Most of the programme authorities which experienced little scrutiny of partner arrangements seemed happy with this, while welcoming the Commission's 'informal strategy of endorsing partnership'. A minority would have preferred more tailored guidance, for example with regard to good practice on the size and composition of partnership bodies.

Feedback on the Commission's changed role on the PMCs ranges along a spectrum from those who find their participation 'irrelevant', through those who comment that the Commission's role is now largely passive and observational, to those who value the Commission's 'active and structured approach', and informed input into discussions. Strong Commission input/support was particularly welcomed on themes such as equal opportunities and sustainable development, where it was felt that the Commission could be relied upon to take the themes seriously, raising the profile of the issues at meetings and helping ensure that they stay high on the agenda. More widely, several Managing Authorities found it useful to have the Commission present at meetings to help manage partner expectations about what can be done under the programmes, contributing a valuable knowledge of the regulatory requirements (while others found that Commission representatives no longer had a deep enough knowledge of Cohesion policy to make their contributions stand out from other participants). The opportunity to have the Commission's informal comments on proposals is also valued as a way of getting an early indication of how proposed changes would fare on official submission to DG Regio. Other partners expressed a preference for the Commission to return to a more 'authoritative' role in meetings, and found that their 'reduced' role downgraded the role and importance of Monitoring Committee meetings.





## 7. CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this paper has been to investigate how the partnership principle is being implemented across the EU, with a specific focus on the role of non-governmental partners (SENGOs, i.e. socio-economic partners and other non-governmental bodies, such as third sector organisations, universities and R&D&I institutions). The main questions for the paper have been: How is the regulatory obligation of partnership interpreted in different countries and regions, with reference to the involvement of socio-economic partners and other non-governmental bodies? What factors explain the degree to which SENGOs are involved? What are the constraints and facilitators determining their involvement? What is the evidence for the influence of SENGOs on programme design and delivery? What are the lessons of current experience with SENGOs for the debate on the future of Cohesion policy? Several conclusions can be drawn from the research.

**1. The involvement of SENGOs is largely perceived to have been successful by programme managements. Nonetheless, some fundamental constraints remain and there has been little change compared to 2000-06 in the way in which SENGOs are involved in programme design and delivery.**

The first conclusion is that the inclusion of SENGOs in programme design and implementation is considered to be generally successful. This is particularly the case for programmes whose approach to partnership has ‘matured’ over successive programme periods. Effective SENG participation is also greater where Structural Funds are being implemented in countries with a broader tradition of SENG involvement in domestic public policy more generally. Improvements compared to the last period were also noted in some cases.

These successful experiences are not common to all programmes, however. While there may be broad agreement on the usefulness of involving SENGs in programme management, partnership is often dominated by the public sector. Notwithstanding the efforts which have been made to widen or intensify partnership working, there are several weaknesses associated with the inclusion of SENGs in programme management processes. Important barriers remain, either because past problems have not been addressed or because the actions put in place to address problems have not been effective enough. They include:

- a lack of agreement among Managing Authorities, Implementing Bodies and SENGs themselves over the exact purpose (and utility) of partner involvement in the different stages of programme management, and which roles partners should play at various stages;
- the ambiguity in a deliberately vague regulatory framework;
- the varying degree to which Managing Authorities consider partnership as strategic for programme implementation;
- the complexity, technicality and timetable of the procedures through which programmes are implemented;

- the way PMCs are organised and operate (e.g. size, continuity and decision-making procedures);
- the difficulties of dealing with a large number of interlocutors for larger programmes; and
- coping with political or administrative instability.

There are also barriers that derive from the nature, endowment and working methods of SENG0 organisations themselves, and that are therefore not directly attributable to the Cohesion policy framework, but which Cohesion policy should arguably address in order to be able to comply with the partnership provisions of Article 11. They include:

- the corporate culture, resources and capacities available to different types of SENG0s;
- the difficulty of engaging with the political/institutional management of SENG0 organisations (as opposed to the staff involved in programme partnerships); and
- a sense of disillusionment and disenfranchisement experienced amongst SENG0s in certain contexts (or simply a lack of interest amongst certain SENG0s).

Partnership working is often reliant on personal interest and networks, both amongst the programme authorities and SENG0 organisations.

The current generation of programmes differs markedly from the 2000-06 period. The 2007-13 programmes display a more targeted strategic focus, anchored in the priorities outlined in the Community Strategic Guidelines and focusing more on the Lisbon and Gothenburg agendas. RCE programmes, moreover, also display a new geographic scope and more limited financial envelopes. Programmes are now mono-fund also in contexts where they had not been so previously. These factors have led to some changes in the composition of partnerships in some programmes, notably the inclusion of new partners (e.g. with a more predominant role of business representation, but also representations from universities and research providers) and the exclusion of others (e.g. social partners, third sector organisations operating in cultural and social spheres which do not see the programmes anymore relevant to them).

Yet, beyond this change in the composition of partnerships, there have been no fundamental changes with respect to how partnership works in practice at programme level. At the start of the 2007-13 period, SENG0s had a role in programming in many countries and regions, but as in 2000-06 they have a limited involvement in programme implementation (with the significant exceptions discussed in Section 5).

**2. SENG0s are more involved in the stages of programme design than in other stages of programme management, despite widespread consensus on the importance of partnership for the success (and effectiveness) of programmes. Nonetheless, by and large SENG0 representatives interviewed perceived their influence in policy making not to have been significant.**

There is widespread consensus on the importance of partnership for the success of programmes and that partnership (in principle) adds value to the delivery of programmes by allowing Managing Authorities to access knowledge which improves the targeting of interventions, consequently improving funding take-up and project quality. However, there is less clear-cut evidence on whether this is actually common practice. A number of examples were discussed in Section 5 of SENGOS involvement in the processes of project generation and selection; for instance, various cases of forms of delegation or sub-programme elements, more-or-less formal consultations on terms of reference and participation in selection bodies. Nonetheless, the role of SENGOS beyond programme design is frequent only with respect to project animation, and there is some evidence of a reluctance to involve the private sector more actively in the processes of project selection and in other implementation processes where their input could potentially increase programme effectiveness (e.g. monitoring and evaluation). For example, the experience of implementing Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) amongst programmes is still rather limited, although evidence reveals that there is much interest in their potential.

The research uncovered a general appreciation amongst the SENGOS on their inclusion in the processes of programme design and/or measures/instruments targeting (where applicable). Similar appreciation was found amongst Managing Authorities, who noted that the inclusion of SENGOS contributes to better alignment of strategies to policy needs and better legitimacy of the policy choices made. This is in line with the place-based paradigm of Cohesion policy. By and large, however, SENGOS representatives interviewed did not feel that their contributions had had a marked influence in policy-making. At the same time, a cultural shift was noted in some cases among both public administrators and SENGOS, which is leading to a more open and frank dialogue, and to a better awareness of each other's position and the roles they play. There are some examples of programme improving their way of dealing with the requests and suggestions formulated by SENGOS, with more transparent and clear feedback and explanation given on decisions taken, when these are not in line with what was requested by the SENGOS.

### **3. The accountability role of partnership is undeveloped.**

Despite some evidence of inclusion of SENGOS in evaluation processes (e.g. through consultations for the drafting of the Evaluation Plans, evaluation Steering Groups, dissemination activities), it would appear that partners generally do not (or are not able to) hold Managing Authorities to account. Partner input is concentrated in the initial stages of programme design and sometimes in project generation/selection. Very little interest (or at least activity) was detected on partners being involved in assessing programme achievements, and why certain expected impacts have not been achieved. This is part of a wider concern with the degree to which programme authorities and partnership fora (such as the PMC) are giving sufficient attention to the performance of their programmes and the policy as a whole.

### **3. The Commission's role in this area seems very limited.**

The European Commission, in particular DG Regio, is regarded by programme managers as having become largely sidelined, at least in most EU15 programmes. While good working

relations are reported virtually everywhere and while in many cases the inputs of Commission representatives to PMC meetings are still valued (not least in terms of clarification of the regulatory provisions *vis-à-vis* SENGOS demands), for many EU15 programme managers Commission input is now marginal both as a partner (in terms of strategic direction, guidance, clear-cut advice on procedures etc.) and as enforcer of a certain interpretation of what partnership inclusion should entail. The ‘advisory role’ assigned to the Commission in PMC meetings by the regulations is clearly an element to this.

Looking to the future, these conclusions highlight many important issues concerning the implementation of the partnership principle with respect to SENGOS involvement in the remaining four years of this programme period and in future Cohesion policy. They concern: a) the rationale and scope for effective SENGOS involvement in programme management; b) the adequacy of regulatory provisions; and c) the reform of Cohesion policy and the place of Cohesion policy programmes in the broader framework of domestic policy-making in Member States.

#### **4. The rationale and scope for SENGOS inclusion in programme management is not always clear.**

To paraphrase Piattoni (2009) in her presentation at this year’s Open Days on the role of civil society in Cohesion policy: should the involvement of horizontal partners be considered as an aim *per se* or as an instrument towards something else (notably, as has been discussed, better responsiveness, effectiveness and accountability)?

The question is a rhetorical one, of course. If one agrees that SENGOS involvement in programme management is not an aim *per se*, there needs to be clarity on what partners can and should contribute, i.e. not just an agreement on the fact that SENGOS should be included in programme design and implementation (as per the regulations), but a more explicit reflection: by the SENGOS themselves on what they can ‘bring to the table’; and by the Managing Authorities on what it is that they think they can gain from the SENGOS inclusion on programme processes, to improve programme responsiveness, effectiveness and accountability. This clarity is not always present. Yet, programme managers appear in many cases satisfied with the extent to which SENGOS representations are currently involved in the stages of programme design and implementation and would not see with favour the idea of a formalisation of the relationship between partners and the programmes Managing Authorities, for instance to clearly set out reciprocal commitments and responsibilities. In several cases, programme managers argued that whilst it is essential that programmes allow room for partners input and stakeholders involvement, it is the programme authorities who have the ultimate responsibility over spending and who bear the consequences ‘when things go wrong’.

#### **5. The adequacy of the regulatory provisions can be questioned, but programme managers are not in favour of more stringent rules. Softer approaches in order to strengthen voluntary compliance, such as protocols of understandings, or capacity building initiatives are considered more effective tools.**

There are a number of aspects of the regulations that perhaps hinder the effective fulfillment of the partnership principle (as made explicit in Article 11). A first aspect relates to the definition of ‘partner’. The fieldwork research carried out for this study pointed to a certain confusion associated with the words ‘partnership’ and ‘horizontal partnership’. The fact that Article 11 incorporates tiers of government and SENGOS (socio-economic partners and “any other appropriate body representing civil society, environmental partners, non-governmental organisations, and bodies responsible for promoting equality between men and women”) perhaps does not help in this respect. It is clear that different types of partners, especially public versus private partners, have different stakes and interests in Cohesion policy and can potentially bring different inputs to the processes of policy-making and implementation. These are elements that could require further thinking in any re-drafting of the regulations.

A second aspect of the current regulations which may need further thought relates to the mono-fund character of programmes (Article 34(1) of the General Regulation). This is leading to a different composition of partnership in programmes which were previously multi-fund, in favour of certain types of partners (notably SME representations and R&D bodies) and to the driving-out of others. Further, there is some evidence that ESF programmes have been better able to involve SENGOS effectively in the processes of programme design and delivery (Piattoni 2009, EU4, PRT38). The separation between ERDF and ESF has not proven conducive to partnership and has also hindered the potential for synergies between the two funds. This is something that the current debate on the future of Cohesion policy should address.

Thirdly, the regulations state explicitly that “(t)he partnership shall cover the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of operational programmes” and that “Member States shall involve, where appropriate, each of the relevant partners, and particularly the regions, in the different stages of programming within the time limit set for each stage”. This provision is problematic for a number of reasons. First, nowhere is it explained what “where appropriate” should entail; second, is not clarified what “relevant” partners should mean; and, lastly, subsequent articles in the regulation - with the exception of those on the preparation and adoption of NSRF and OPs (Articles 28 and 32) - do not specify in more detail what the integration in each process of programme delivery should entail. Lastly, as already noted in Sub-section 3.1, the regulations foresee stringent obligations with respect to spending targets (N+2/3 rule) which in practice hinder the potential for an active inclusion of partners in programme implementation.

Various reform options emerge in this respect. On the one hand, the regulations could be amended to make the provisions of partnership both more specific and more stringent (with, for instance, targets and associated conditionalities) as regards the involvement of SENGOS in the processes of programme design and implementation (for instance, including specific partnership-related provisions in the articles that discipline the various phases of programming); on the other, it might be more fruitful to resort to softer approaches in order to strengthen voluntary compliance, such as protocols of understandings (like the Italian one discussed in Section 4), contracts (similar to those foreseen in the Barca report or those being experimented in Portugal), or capacity building initiatives etc. This second option is by far the preferred one by programme managers who feel that the regulatory

framework is already much demanding as it is and that partnership is better nurtured through softer, voluntary tools which, if adequately supported, can more usefully leverage on the drive and commitment of all those involved, avoiding the risk of formal compliance which is often associated with regulatory-imposed requirements.

Lastly, the presence of the Commission in the PMCs in an advisory capacity (Article 64 of the General Regulation) is proving controversial. Some Managing Authorities perceive the Commission as withdrawing from programme management and would prefer a more active involvement of Commission representatives in support of programme management. This 'withdrawal' is considered in some cases to hamper partnership as well, given the weak guidance or control exerted by Commission representatives in some programmes. Only a few programme authorities, however, feel that it would be beneficial to go back to the pre-1999 situation.

**6. The reform of Cohesion policy and the place of Cohesion policy programmes in the broader framework of domestic policy-making will affect the potential for SENGOS involvement in policy development and implementation in future.**

There are as yet no clear indications on the proposed shape of Cohesion policy from 2014 onwards. The timetable for the reform debates foresees a possible reflection paper by Commissioner Samecki in December, the publication of the 5<sup>th</sup> Cohesion Report in October 2010, a Cohesion Forum in December 2010 and first legislative proposals in the first part of 2011. Nonetheless, the Commission is working on possible reform proposals and initial, informal views seem to suggest that Cohesion policy might face significant budget cuts (at least if the proposals contained in the October 2009 draft Communication on the 2014+ budget remain); that it might be focused on the EU10 Member States; that it may be reorganised around key strategic priorities; and, that there may be the reintroduction of a thematic/sectoral component similar to the Community Initiatives that had been in place up until 2006. ESF might be taken out of Cohesion policy too, as anticipated above. The shape that Cohesion policy might take in the next programme period may affect significantly the potential for effective SENGOS inclusion in programme management yet research evidence suggest that the reform of SENGOS involvement is not the key priority for programme authorities.

Cohesion policy programmes, especially in the EU15, are now often part of a bigger picture and subsumed under the broader set of domestic policies operating in a Member State or region. This poses a fundamental issue for partnership, as the effective involvement of SENGOS in the programmes is ultimately dependent on the effective involvement of SENGOS in broader, domestic policy-making. This issue will be even more significant in the context of future Cohesion policy outwith the EU10, if the policy will be concentrated on the EU10 Member States. Where the experience of partnership with SENGOS was developed within Cohesion policy, but has remained foreign to domestic traditions, it will be essential to find mechanisms to ensure that the positive experiences matured in decades of Cohesion policy implementation are not lost.

## **8. ANNEX 1: INTERVIEWEES LIST**

### **8.1 European level interviewees**

**European Commission, D.G. Regio**, Principal Administrator of the Strategic Planning and Inter-institutional Relations Unit, face-to-face interview, 20 October 2009.

**European Commission, D.G. Regio**, Administrator of the Strategic Planning and Inter-institutional Relations Unit, face-to-face interview, 20 October 2009.

**Committee of the Regions**, Official of the Forward studies unit, face-to-face interview, 20 October 2009.

**European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)**, member, phone interview, 21 October 2009.

**Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) Brussels Office/Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)**, Official responsible for Cohesion policy issues, face-to-face interview, 20 October 2009.

**Businesseurope**, Economics Department, Advisor, face-to-face interview, 20 October 2009.

**European Citizens Action Service (ECAS)**, Director, telephone interview, 22 October 2009.

### **8.2 National and programme officials**

**ÖROK**, Official, face-to-face interview, 24 September 2009.

**Amt der Niederösterreichischen Landesregierung**, Abt. Tourismus und Innovation, Managing Authority of the ERDF 2007-13 OP, Head of the Managing Authority, face-to-face interview, 1 October 2009.

**Amt der Niederösterreichischen Landesregierung**, Abt. Tourismus und Innovation, Managing Authority of the ERDF 2007-13 OP, Official, face-to-face interview, 1 October 2009.

**Amt der Niederösterreichischen Landesregierung**, Abt. Wirtschaftsförderung, senior Official, face-to-face interview, 1 October 2009.

**Amt der Niederösterreichischen Landesregierung**, Abt. Wirtschaftsförderung, Official, face-to-face interview, 1 October 2009.

**Amt der Steiermärkischen Landesregierung**, Abteilung 14 Wirtschaft und Innovation, Managing Authority of the ERDF 2007-13 OP, Head of the Managing Authority, face-to-face interview, 24 September 2009.

**Agentschap Ondernemen: Afdeling Europa Economie - EFRO** (Flemish Enterprise Agency), Europe Economy Directorate, Official, face-to-face interview, 16 October 2009.

**Agentschap Ondernemen: Afdeling Europa Economie - EFRO** (Flemish Enterprise Agency), Europe Economy Directorate, Official, face-to-face interview, 16 October 2009.

**Czech Ministry for Regional Development**, National Coordination Authority of the NSRF, Department of management and coordination of the NSRF, Head of unit, face-to-face interview, 22 September 2009.

**Czech Ministry of Regional Development**, Department of the Managing Authority of the IOP, Head of unit, face-to-face interview, 23 September 2009.

**Czech Ministry for Regional Development**, National Coordination Authority of the NSRF, Department of management and coordination of the NSRF, Official, email responses, 29 September 2009.

**Czech Ministry for Regional Development**, National Coordination Authority of the NSRF, Department of management and coordination of the NSRF, analyst of OPs - face-to-face interview, 6 October 2009.

**Danish Enterprise and Construction Authority**, Head of Regional Policy Department, face-to-face interview, 6 October 2009.

**North Jutland Region**, Head of Division, face-to-face interview, 7 October 2009.

**Finnish Ministry of Employment and the Economy**, Senior Officer, email responses, 8 and 18 September 2009.

**Regional Council of Central Finland**, Programme Manager, telephone interview and email responses, 11 September 2009.

**Délégation interministérielle à l'aménagement et à la compétitivité des territoires** (DIACT), Official in charge of ERDF and coordination with ESF, face-to-face interview, 13 October 2009.

**Délégation interministérielle à l'aménagement et à la compétitivité des territoires** (DIACT), Official in charge of monitoring and evaluation, face-to-face interview, 13 October 2009.

**Délégation interministérielle à l'aménagement et à la compétitivité des territoires** (DIACT), Official in charge of Regional Innovation Strategies, face-to-face interview, 13 October 2009.

**Délégation interministérielle à l'aménagement et à la compétitivité des territoires** (DIACT), Official in charge of the national Technical Assistance OP EUROP'ACT, face-to-face interview, 13 October 2009.

**Nordrhein-Westfalen, Ministerium für Wirtschaft, Mittelstand und Energie (MWME)**, Head of the Managing Authority of the ERDF 2007-13 OP, face-to-face interview, 22 October 2009.



**Nordrhein-Westfalen, Ministerium für Wirtschaft, Mittelstand und Energie (MWME), ERDF 2007-13 OP Programme Secretariat**, Official, face-to-face, 22 October 2009.

**Sachsen-Anhalt, Ministerium der Finanzen**, Head of the Managing authority of the ERDF and ESF 2007-13 OP, face-to-face, 23 October 2009.

**Sachsen-Anhalt, Ministerium der Finanzen**, Managing authority of the ERDF and ESF 2007-2013 OPs, Official, face-to-face interview, 23 October 2009.

**Sachsen-Anhalt, Centre of Expertise for Economic and Social Partners**, Official, face-to-face interview, 23 October 2009.

**Ministry of Economy and Finance**, National Coordinating Authority, Special Service of Strategy, Design and Evaluation of Development Programmes, Director, face-to-face interview, 30 September 2009.

**Intermediate Managing Authority of Attiki**, Director, face-to-face interview, 12 October 2009.

**Management Organisation Unit (MOU)**, Director of the Planning and Development Department, telephone interview, 26 October 2009.

**Italian Institute for Industrial Promotion**, Senior Official, face-to-face interview, 30 September 2009.

**Italian Institute for Industrial Promotion**, Official, face-to-face interview, 30 September 2009.

**Region of Lombardy**, Head of the Managing Authority of the ERDF OP 2007-13, face-to-face interview, 1 October 2009.

**Śląskie Marshal's Office**, Deputy Director ERDF Unit, face-to-face interview, 29 September 2009.

**Śląskie Marshal's Office**, Deputy Director ESF Unit, face-to-face interview, 29 September 2009.

**Portuguese Financial Institute for Regional Development**, Director General, face-to-face, 12 October 2009.

**Portuguese Financial Institute for Regional Development**, Vice President, face-to-face interview, 12 October 2009.

**Portuguese Financial Institute for Regional Development**, Head of the unit for financial coordination, face-to-face interview, 12 October 2009.

**Portuguese Financial Institute for Regional Development**, Coordinator of the sub-unit for programming and financial monitoring, face-to-face interview, 12 October 2009.

**Portuguese NSRF Observatory**, Coordinator, face-to-face interview, 12 October 2009.

**Portuguese NSRF Observatory**, Deputy Coordinator, face-to-face interview, 12 October 2009.

**CCDR Algarve** - Official of the Direcção de Serviços de Desenvolvimento Regional, Divisão de Estudos Regionais, written feedback, 11 November 2009.

**CCDR Norte** - Coordinator of the Observatório das Dinâmicas Regionais do Norte, written feedback, 11 November 2009.

**Institute of Regional Development of Madeira**, officer from the Unit of Studies and Planning, written feedback, 11 November 2009.

**Slovenian Government Office for Local Self-Government and Regional Policy**, Official of the Evaluation Unit and System Tasks, face-to-face interview, 28 September 2009.

**Slovenian Government Office for Local Self-Government and Regional Policy**, Official of the System Tasks, face-to-face interview, 28 September 2009.

**Slovenian Government Office for Local Self-Government and Regional Policy**, Official of the System Tasks, face-to-face interview, 28 September 2009.

**Slovenian Government Office for Local Self-Government and Regional Policy**, Official of the ERDF Unit, face-to-face interview, 28 September 2009.

**Slovenian Government Office for Local Self-Government and Regional Policy**, Official of the ESF Unit, face-to-face interview, 28 September 2009.

**Slovenian Ministry of Public Administration**, Directorate for E-government and administrative processes, Senior Advisor, face-to-face interview, 28 September 2009.

**Spanish Ministry of Economy and Finance**, Official of the Programming and Evaluation Unit, face-to-face interview, 8 October 2009.

**Spanish Ministry of Economy and Finance**, Official of the Programming and Evaluation Unit, face-to-face interview, 8 October 2009.

**Spanish Ministry of Economy and Finance**, Official of the ERDF unit (MA for all ERDF/CF programmes), face-to-face interview, 8 October 2009.

**Diputación Foral de Bizkaia**, Pais Vasco, Official of the EU Funds team, face-to-face interview, 9 October 2009.

**Tillväxtverket** (Swedish Agency of Economic and Regional Growth), Head of the Department of the ERDF programmes and Deputy Director General, face-to-face interview, 2 October 2009.

**Swedish Ministry of Enterprise, Energy and Communication**, Official of the Division for regional growth, face-to-face interview, face-to-face interview, 2 October 2009.

**Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO)**, Head of WEFO Cross-cutting themes, face-to-face interview, 6 October 2009.

**Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO)**, Cross-cutting themes Official, face-to-face interview, 6 October 2009.

**Scottish Government**, Director of the European Structural Funds Division, face-to-face interview, 1 October 2009.

**Scottish Government European Structural Funds Division**, Official of the European Structural Funds Division, face-to-face interview, 1 October 2009.

**ONE North East**, Europe and International Policy Manager, face-to-face interview, 17 September 2009.

**Government Office for the North-East (GO-NE)**, Senior Official, face-to-face interview, 17 September 2009.

**Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG)**, Senior Official, face-to-face interview, 7 October 2009.

### **8.3 Programme partners (national and regional levels)**

**Bundesarbeiterkammer** (Austrian Chamber of Labour), Official of the Department of EU and International Relations, face-to-face, 30 September 2009.

**Wirtschaftskammer Österreich** (Austrian Federal Economic Chamber), Official of the Department of Financial and Commercial Policies, face-to-face, 30 September 2009.

**Flemish-Brabant Province**, Official, written responses to questions, 16 October 2009.

**Centre for Community Organizing and Governmental Council for Non-governmental Non-profit organisations**, director of CCO and Chair of the Board of EU within the Governmental Council for Non-governmental Non-profit organizations, face to face interview, 24 September 2009.

**Posázaví**, (non-profit organization, managing Local Action Group), Official, phone interview, 5 October 2009.

**Confederation of Danish Industry**, Senior Consultant, telephone interview, 9 October 2009.

**Local Government Denmark**, Senior Consultant, telephone interview, 8 October 2009.

**AAU Innovation, Aalborg University**, Director, telephone interview, 8 October 2009.

**L'Assemblée des Chambres Françaises de Commerce et d'Industrie (ACFCI)** (National representation of French regional Chambers of Commerce and Industry), Official of the unit for territorial policies, telephone interview, 30 October 2009.

**Arbeitgeberverband** (AGV, Employers' Association), Sachsen-Anhalt branch, Official, face-to-face interview, 23 October 2009.

**Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund** (DGB, Confederation of German Trade Unions), Sachsen-Anhalt branch, Official, face-to-face interview, 23 October 2009.

**Städte- und Gemeindebund** (SGB, Association of Local Authorities), Sachsen-Anhalt branch, Official, face-to-face interview, 23 October 2009.

**Landesfrauenrat** (LFR, the Land's Women's Council), Sachsen-Anhalt, former Official, face-to-face interview, 23 October 2009.

**Liga der Freien Wohlfahrtspflege** (LFW, Association of Non-Statutory Welfare Organisations), Sachsen-Anhalt branch, former Official, face-to-face interview, 23 October 2009.

**Athens Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI)**, Member of the Board of Directors, face-to-face interview and written feedback, 20 October 2009.

**Technical Chamber of Greece (TCG)**, Member of the Task Force for NSRF 2007-2013, phone interview and written feedback, 22 October 2009.

**Prefecture of East Attica**, General Secretary, face-to-face interview, 23 October 2009.

**Apindustria Lombardia** (Association of small and medium industry), Official responsible for economic development, face-to-face interview, 1 October 2009.

**Unioncamere** (Italian Union of Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Handicraft), Official of the Area Financial Services, Infrastructures and Internationalisation, telephone interview, 14 October 2009.

**Confindustria** (Confederation of Italian Industries), Official responsible for the Mezzogiorno, telephone interview, 23 October 2009.

**Confindustria** (Confederation of Italian Industries), Official responsible for R&D&I policies, telephone interview, 23 October 2009.

**CONFSAL** (General Confederation of the Autonomous Trade Unions of Workers), Official, written responses to questions, 14 October and follow up responses on 19 October 2009.

**Sub-Regional ESF Centre, Local Development Agency, Częstochowa**, consultant and advisor, face-to-face interview, 29 September 2009.

**Social Assistance Center, Municipality Office, Bielsko-Biała**, Project Leader, face-to-face interview, 29 September 2009.

**Social Assistance Center, Municipality Office, Bielsko-Biała**, Project Leader, face-to-face interview, 29 September 2009.

**Social Assistance Center, Municipality Office, Bielsko-Biała**, Official of the EU Funds Unit, face-to-face interview, 29 September 2009.

**ERDF Sub-Regional Partnership Platform, Municipality Office, Częstochowa**, Deputy Head of European Funds and Economic Development Unit, face-to-face interview, 29 September 2009.

**Civil Initiative Development Centre (NGO)**, Managing Director, face-to-face interview, 29 September 2009.

**CNVOS (Centre for Information Service, Co-operation and Development of NGOs)**, Head of the Office, face-to-face, 29 September 2009.

**Umanotera (environmental NGO)**, Project Leader, face-to-face interview, 29 September 2009.

**ZDS (Association of Employers)**, Head of the Department of International Cooperation, face-to-face interview, 29 September 2009.

**Confederación Sindical de CCOO (Comisiones Obreras)**, national level (Spanish trade union organisation), written response, 20 November 2009.

**National Commission of Sweden for UNESCO and Hushållningssällskapet** (the Swedish Rural Economy and Agricultural Societies, working for rural development and small firms), President of the National Commission and representative of Hushållningssällskapet, telephone interview, 27 October 2009.

**Östersund Municipality**, Mayor and President of the regional development issues and Structural Funds committee in the North of Sweden, telephone interview, 23 September 2009.

**Unis4NE** (represents universities in North east England), Director, telephone interview, 24 September 2009.

**TUC - Northern region**, Regional Secretary for Northern region, telephone interview, 21 October 2009.

**Tees Valley Joint Support Unit** (represents a number of local authorities in the North East England region) Director, telephone interview 2 October 2009.

**Welsh Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA)**, Director, face-to-face interview, 6 October 2009.

## **8.4 Organisations contacted but not able to be interviewed**

The following organisations were also contacted but without success in arranging interviews:

**European Parliament, MEP.**

**European Trade Union Confederation.**

**Eurochambres** (Association of European Chambers of Commerce and Industry).

**Naturschutzanwaltschaft Vorarlberg** (Environmental “Advocacy”, Austria).

**Österreichische Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Rehabilitation** (Austrian National Council of Disabled Persons).

**Federation of Finnish Enterprises.**

**Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions.**

**Confederation of Unions for Professional and Managerial Staff**, Finland.

**Hellenic Federation of Enterprises.**

**Associação Nacional de Municípios Portugueses** (National Association of Portuguese Municipalities).

**Conselho Económico e Social, Portugal** (Economic and Social Council).

**Consejo Económico y Social, Spain** (Economic and Social Council).

**Coompanion** (Swedish organisation promoting cooperative development and social economy development).

**SERUS** (Social Economic and Regional Development in Scandinavia).

**North Highland College UHI, UK.**

**Shetland Islands Council, UK.**

## 9. ANNEX II: SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND THIRD SECTOR PARTNERS INTERVIEWED - SHORT DESCRIPTION

**Bundesarbeiterkammer Österreich** (Austrian Chambers of Labour) - The Austrian Chambers of Labour act as a think-tank conducting studies on issues for employees' interests and strives to participate in and control the legislative process. The *Arbeiterkammer* also offer a range of services to their members, such as advice and legal assistance.

**Wirtschaftskammer Österreich** (Austrian Federal Economic Chamber) - With compulsory membership for all Austrian companies, the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber represents the interests of the country's entire business community at all levels of government as well as at the European level. The Chamber is consulted by the Government on legislative projects and important regulations, and is frequently involved in governmental decision-making and administrative procedures. The *Wirtschaftskammer* is involved in collective bargaining with the trade unions and provides information, consultancy services and training to its members through a network of its regional departments.

**Flemish-Brabant Province** - The Flemish-Brabant is the youngest Belgian province. It was created in 1995 as a result of the splitting up of the Province of Brabant. The provincial government of Flemish-Brabant represents the Federal and the Flemish Government in the province. It covers practically all policy areas. Its Governor is appointed by the Flemish Government following the unanimous advice of the Federal Council of Ministers. Among the main tasks of the Governor are supervision of the local authorities, ensuring that laws and decrees are observed, maintaining public order and security, and coordinating actions in case of disasters.

**Centre for Community Organizing** - The Centre for Community Organizing (*Centrum pro komunitní práci*) is a non-governmental organization founded in 1999 providing information and advisory services to a wide range of actors from public administration, civic organisations and business sector in several main areas. It supports citizen and NGOs participation in local and regional development, assists in preparing sustainable development strategies or projects, promotes interdisciplinary cooperation between NGOs and provides NGOs with support and training. It is also involved in several environmental projects.

**Governmental Council for Non-governmental Non-profit organisations** - The Council was set up in 2002 to officially embed NGOs in public administration structure. The Governmental Council was a natural continuation of Working Group of NGOs representatives which cooperated with the Czech Ministry of Regional Development in a various form since 1998 with the aim to prepare non-profit sector for the EU accession and afterwards for SFs and the 2004-06 programming in particular. Gradually, the Governmental Council established itself as a subject that MAs are asking to delegate a NGOs representative for various committees (monitoring, projects selection), working groups etc. Moreover, the Council organises regular meetings of those NGOs representatives involved in the PMCs to discuss the challenges and problematic issues.

**Posázaví, o.p.s.** (non-profit organization, managing Local Action Group) - Posázaví, o.p.s. is a non-profit organization managing Local Action Group operating in the region of Posázaví in Central Bohemia. Currently, it consists of 50 partners out of whom 41 % represent NGOs, 27 % businessmen, 12 % associations of municipalities, 12 % towns and municipalities, 4 % state organizations and 4 % schools (e.g. local secondary school). The organisation was founded in 2004 as a consequence of partners' demand to create a platform for the cooperation among different types of partners. It ensures and coordinates activities for the development to the region. It offers to its members consulting services when trying to obtain financial sources from various grants including Structural Funds. Posázaví o.p.s. also supports coordination of individual projects. It operates in the key areas of tourism, multifunctional agriculture, education and development of human capital, and the protection of landscape's values.

**Confederation of Danish Industry** - The Confederation of Danish Industry is a leading lobbying organisation for Danish firms. The organisation specialises in policy advocacy from the local to the European level. It also offers information, advisory and consulting services and supports networking between businesses and other actors.

**Local Government Denmark** - Local Government Denmark is an organisation representing the interests of the Danish municipalities. All of the 98 Danish municipalities are members of the organisation whose main mission is to defend the common interests of the local authorities, for instance in the negotiations with the Danish Parliament, the Government, European institutions as well as other non-state organisations. It also offers information and consultancy to its members.

**AAU Innovation, Aalborg University** - AAU Innovation is an organisation established by Aalborg University aiming at fostering links between the academia and industry. The organisation supports business and institutional networking, and cooperation with regional, national and international actors. It is also involved in fundraising and project management and on projects pursuing the commercialisation and patenting of research outputs.

**Assemblée des Chambres Françaises de Commerce et d'Industrie (ACFCI)** - The Assembly of French Chambers of Commerce and Industry is the national public establishment federating the 21 regional Chambers of Commerce as well as the 148 French local Chambers of Commerce and Industry, which collectively represent 1.8 million French firms. The Assembly intermediates between the Chambers and the national and European authorities, international organisations as well as non-state organisations. It creates a platform for networking and exchange of skills and experience between the Chambers of Commerce. It also provides them with support and advice in the areas of business development, territorial and infrastructural development and professional training.

**Arbeitgeberverband Sachsen-Anhalt (AWSA, Employers' Organisation Sachsen-Anhalt)** - A Sachsen-Anhalt branch of the Federal Association of German Employers. It represents the social economic and legal interests of its members and associated firms *vis-à-vis* the government and other public bodies. Its other tasks include informing its members about all events in the areas of social and economic policy or industrial law and presenting employers' concerns to the public.



**Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (DGB, Confederation of German Trade Unions), Sachsen-Anhalt branch** - The Confederation of German Trade Unions is the umbrella organisation for trade unions in Germany comprising eight member unions representing different sectors of the industry. It coordinates the activities of the unions and represents their interests in relations with the political actors and associations on a federal, state and municipal level (though it does not conclude collective agreements). The Confederation represents the member unions also in the international arena, defending the interests of German unions vis-à-vis EU institutions and global economic and financial organisations.

**Städte- und Gemeindebund (SGB, Association of Local Authorities), Sachsen-Anhalt branch** - Städte- und Gemeindebund is a country-wide organisation representing the voice of German local authorities. It regroups more than 12,500 municipalities across Germany. The SGB defends the interests of its members in relation to the Bundestag, the federal Government or the European institutions. Moreover, it provides the municipalities with key statistical and legal information.

**Landesfrauenrat Sachsen-Anhalt (LFR, the Land's Women's Council)** - Magdeburg-based Women's Council is an umbrella organisation bringing together 35 regional associations representing women's interests and promoting equality of rights and opportunities as well as political involvement women.

**Liga der Freien Wohlfahrtspflege (LFW, Association of Non-Statutory Welfare Organisations), Sachsen-Anhalt branch** - Liga der Freien Wohlfahrtspflege is an umbrella organisation for the German NGOs focusing on welfare, equal opportunities and charity, such as the Arbeiterwohlfahrt (national industrial welfare Association), the German Red Cross, or Caritas. The LFW provides the institutional backbone of the social service segment of German NGOs.

**Athens Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI)** -The ACCI was established in 1841. Its mission is to assist the Government in the fields of commerce, industry, services and general development policy and represent, support and promote entrepreneurship. It is composed of four directorates: The Directorate of Industry and Commerce, the Directorate of International Commercial Relationships, the Directorate of Administrative and Financial Management and the Directorate of Registries and ICT. The ACCI has 80.000 firms as members.

**Technical Chamber of Greece (TEE-TCG)** - The Technical Chamber of Greece was established in 1923. It is a public legal entity, with elected administration. Its headquarters are in Athens and has branches in 17 geographical regions. The TCG is the chamber of Greek engineers of all technical faculties at university level-(5-years of studies) and accounts 120,000 members. It supports the development of Science and Technology in sectors related to the disciplines of its members and the economic, social and cultural development of the country, in accordance with the principles of sustainability and environmental protection. The Technical Chamber of Greece is the official advisor of the State.

**Prefecture of East Attica** - East Attica Prefecture is situated in the periphery of Attica and covers the Eastern part of the agglomeration of Athens as well as rural areas East of the capital. The Greek prefectures are a second-degree organisation of local self-government regarded as administrative units of the central government, which are not hierarchically superior to the communities and municipalities. Following the legislative reform of 1994, prefectural elections were introduced and most of the administrative duties of the prefectures were transferred to the peripheries. Nevertheless, the prefectures retain some administrative duties attributed to them by the central government in the areas of sanitation, urban planning, etc.

**Apindustria Lombardia** (Association of small and medium industry) - Apindustria Lombardia is the federation of the provincial Associations of Small Industries in Lombardia, representing small and medium firms. Its members are largely small firms. It is a very representative reality in the Lombard context, accounting for about a third of the region's manufacturing firms. Starting off as a trade union of employers, the organisation now provides a variety of services to its members either directly or via brokerage, such as training, commercial support, legal advice, technology transfer, consultancy on energy efficiency. Nationally, the regional API are represented in CONFAPI.

**Unioncamere** (Italian Union of Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Handicraft) - Unioncamere is a national-level public body representing the provincial Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Handicrafts, and their regional unions (regional Unioncamere). Italian Chambers of Commerce are public bodies responsible for a wide range of functions assigned by law, including the management of the territorial registers of firms. They undertake "general interest functions for the system of firms, taking care of its development in framework of the local economies" (law 580/1993, art. 1).

**Confindustria** (Confederation of Italian Industries) - Confindustria is the main Italian organisation representing the interests of manufacturing and service companies. It comprises over 141,000 companies of all sizes, employing over 5.2 million workers; c. 56 percent of the companies it represents are from the manufacturing sector. The organisation's mission is to "contribute to Italy's economic growth and social progress, alongside the country's political institutions and economic, social and cultural organisations, both national and international". It is organised in over 100 local associations, 18 regional branches, almost 100 trade associations, 21 sector federations and 3 special federations (formed by trade associations to achieve common goals or special project), and 16 associate members (operating in related sectors).

**CONFSAL** (General Confederation of the Autonomous Trade Unions of Workers) - Confsal (CONF.S.A.L.) is the General Confederation of the Autonomous Trade Unions of Workers (i.e. Trade Unions not affiliated to political formations). It is organised in sectoral/thematic federations (including those of pensioners, home-renters and foreign workers), and regional and provincial offices.

**Sub-Regional ESF Centre, Local Development Agency, Częstochowa** - The Centre, based in the local development agency, contributes through active promotion, dissemination of information, and cost-free information and training, to the increase of awareness and

knowledge of applicants on EFS co-financed grants. It operates under the coordination of the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development. The Centre was chosen by and is accountable to the Intermediary Bodies for the Human Capital OP, set up in the regional self-governments.

**Social Assistance Center, Municipality Office, Bielsko-Biała** - Based in the municipalities, these centres use EU funding to launch a range of projects covering ESF activities at local level (e.g. revitalisation of local communities).

**ERDF Sub-Regional Partnership Platform, Municipality Office, Częstochowa** - The city authority of Częstochowa is the leader of the northern Sub-Regional Development Programme. One of the four sub-regional partnership programmes funded by ERDF under the Regional Operational programme.

**Civil Initiative Development Centre CRIS** - The Rybnik-based Civil Initiative Development Centre CRIS was created in 2002. It is an association whose mission is to support nongovernmental organisations and groups operating in the third sector, as well as to promote partnership between such organisations, businesses and local government. It is a member of the Network of Information and Support for Non-Governmental Organizations, "SPLOT". The Centre administers the Silesian Nongovernmental Organisations Server: [www.slask.ngo.pl](http://www.slask.ngo.pl). It is also responsible for the preparation and undertaking of training programs, the organisation of conferences and meetings, the setting-up of consultations and advising sessions for non-governmental organisations and other institutions.

**CNVOS (Centre for Information Service, Co-operation and Development of NGOs)** - CNVOS is an umbrella organisation for Slovenian NGOs. The Ljubljana-based Centre encourages networking and cooperation among NGOs and between them and the Government. It also diffuses information relevant to NGOs and strives to increase public awareness about their significance. CNVOS is also involved in lobbying to improve the legal, financial and societal position of NGOs in Slovenia.

**Umanotera (environmental NGO)** - Umanotera is the Slovenian Foundation for Sustainable Development. Established in 1994, its mission is to endorse the principles of sustainable development, particularly concerning preserving natural resources and biological diversity, i.e. balancing the human society with the environment and promoting ethics in our attitude towards nature and the environment. To this aim, Umanotera conducts promotion activities, co-finances environmental projects and provides the NGOs with advisory services and trainings. It is also involved in the promotion of fair-trade and consumers' rights, and cooperates with similar international organisations.

**ZDS (Association of Employers)** - The Association of Employers of Slovenia (ZDS) is the main voluntary federation of Slovenian employers. The organisation promotes social partnerships between firms, the Government and trade unions. It expresses and defends the employers' legal interests and intermediates in the relations toward social partners.

**Comisiones Obreras (CC.OO, The Workers' Commissions)** - Comisiones Obreras is the largest trade union organisation in Spain. It affiliates more than one million workers throughout

Spain and is organised according to different national sector-based federations and the regional confederations of the regions. CC.OO is a member of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). Because of its wide coverage across Spanish industry, CC.OO is present in more than 90% of all collective bargaining agreements and belongs to the consultative bodies of those institutions in charge of social affairs such as employment, social security, health and safety, migration and similar.

**Hushållningssällskapet** (the Swedish Rural Economy and Agricultural Societies, working for rural development and small firms) - Hushållningssällskapet, the Swedish Rural Economy and Agricultural Societies, are independent organisations aiming at the promotion of good rural and urban living environments and at the stimulation of an enterprising spirit in rural areas. The Societies, 19 in total, have a long history in Sweden, with the first one being established in 1791. The Societies have c. 55,000 members, 650 employees all over the country and boast 40 facilities for research and demonstration. The members of each Society participate and shape the conditions for urban and rural life through a range of varied activities.

**National Commission of Sweden for UNESCO** - The Swedish National Commission for UNESCO has its office at the Ministry of Education and Research. Its members are appointed by the Government for a period of four years and represent UNESCO's fields of competence. The main task of the Commission is to advise the Swedish government in UNESCO matters and on Swedish participation in UNESCO's activities as well as to diffuse the information about UNESCO in Sweden.

**Östersund Municipality** - Östersund Municipality is located in Jämtland County in northern Sweden. The city's population is 58,000. The municipality, governed by a coalition of Social Democrats, Greens and the Left Party, focuses on the development of renewable energy sources and prides itself on being one of the most successful Swedish municipalities in reducing carbon dioxide emissions.

**Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit** - The Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit represents a sub-regional partnership within North East England. It was set up to carry out a number of functions on behalf of Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton on Tees Borough Councils, including strategic planning, sub-regional economic development strategy, strategic transport planning and technical support, an information and forecasting service and the management and administration of European programmes.

**Unis4NE** - Universities for the North East (Unis4NE) is the regional association of the North East region's five universities (Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria, Sunderland and Teesside) and the Open University in the North. The universities have been working together for over twenty years to: "Co-ordinate their regional activities and identify opportunities for collaborative action so as to maximise their contribution to the social, economic and cultural life of the North East of England and develop partnerships with business, industry and public bodies". This includes acting as "a major point of contact and effective voice for the region's universities in and beyond the region". Represented on NE England PEG.

**TUC - Northern region** - The TUC's Northern region represents the TUC by supporting TUC campaigns and objectives and seeking the views of trade unions in the region. The key role of the Regional TUC is to: be the voice of working people; represent the views of trade unions; and support capacity building. This includes engaging with and influencing key strategies, including the Regional Strategy, Local Strategic Partnerships and City Regions; and engagement in the equality and diversity partnerships and strategic migration partnership. Represented on NE England PMC.

**Welsh Council for Voluntary Action WCVA** - The WCVA is the national umbrella body for voluntary organisations in Wales. It is a membership organisation, with over 1500 members, representing over 30,000 organisations in Wales. The WCVA co-ordinates the Third Sector European Team (3-SET), which has been set up providing services tailored to the interests of third sector organisations across the Welsh programme areas.



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## Improving the Quality of Structural Funds Programme Management through Exchange of Experience

IQ-Net is a network of Convergence and Regional Competitiveness programmes actively exchanging experience on practical programming issues. It involves a programme of research and debate on topical themes relating to Structural Funds programme design, management and delivery, culminating in twice-yearly meetings of members. IQ-Net was established in 1996 and has successfully completed three periods of operation: 1996-99, 1999-2002 and 2002-07. The fourth phase was launched on 1 July 2007 (Phase IV, 2007-10).

### IQ-Net Meetings

26 partners' meetings and a special 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference have been held in twelve European countries during 13 years of operation of the Network. Meetings are held at approximately six-month intervals and are open to IQ-Net partners and to observers interested in joining the Network. The meetings are designed to facilitate direct exchange of experience on selected issues, through the presentation of briefing papers, plenary discussions, workshop sessions and study visits in the hosting regions.



### IQ-Net Website

The IQ-Net Website is the Network's main vehicle of communication for partners and the public ([www.eprc.strath.ac.uk/ignet](http://www.eprc.strath.ac.uk/ignet)). The launch of Phase IV has been accompanied by an extensive redesign of the site which comprises two sections:



*Partner Intranet Pages* available exclusively to IQ-Net members.

*Public Pages* which provide information on the Network's activities and meetings, allow the download of IQ-Net Reports and Bulletins, and provide a news section on issues relevant to the Network.

The Partners' section of the website provides exclusive services to members of the Network, including access to all materials prepared for the IQ-Net meetings, a list of EU27 links (programmes, institutions, economics and statistics etc.), partners' contact details, a partners' blog and other items of interest.

### IQ-Net Reports

The IQ-Net Reports form the basis for the discussions at each IQ-Net meeting. They present applied and practical information in a style accessible to policy-makers, programme executives and administrators. The reports can be downloaded, at no charge, from the IQ-Net website. To date, around 25 thematic papers have been produced on both 'functional issues' (e.g. management arrangements, partnership, information and communication, monitoring systems) and 'thematic issues' (e.g. innovation, enterprise development,

tourism). A similar number of papers have also been produced to review developments in the implementation of the Network's partner programmes.

#### IQ-Net Thematic Papers

- Pandora's Box and the Delphic Oracle: EU Cohesion Policy and State Aid Compliance
- The Financial Management, Control and Audit of EU Cohesion Policy
- From Environmental Sustainability to Sustainable Development? Making Concepts Tangible in Structural Funds Programmes
- Making sense of European Cohesion Policy: 2007-13 on-going evaluation and monitoring
- Turning ideas into action: the implementation of 2007-13 programmes
- The New Generation of Operational Programmes, 2007-2013
- National Strategic Reference Frameworks and OPs, 2007-2013
- Preparations for the Programme Period 2007-13
- Territorial Cohesion and Structural Funds
- Cohesion Policy Funding for Innovation and the Knowledge Economy
- The Added Value of Structural Funds
- Information, Publicity and Communication
- Mid-term Evaluation of the 2000-06 Programmes
- Mainstreaming Horizontal Themes into Structural Fund Programming
- The Structural Funds: Facilitating the Information Society
- Information into Intelligence: Monitoring for Effective Structural Fund Programming
- At the Starting Block: Review of the New Programmes
- Tourism and Structural Funds
- Preparations for the New Programmes
- The New Regulations and Programming
- Strategic Approaches to Regional Innovation
- Effective Responses to Job Creation
- The Evolution of Programmes and Future Prospects
- Equal Opportunities in Structural Fund Programmes
- The Contribution of Meso-Partnerships to Structural Fund Implementation
- Regional Environmental Integration: Changing Perceptions and Practice
- Structural Fund Synergies: ERDF and ESF
- The Interim Evaluation of Programmes
- Monitoring and Evaluation: Principles and Practice
- Generating Good Projects
- RTD and Innovation in Programmes
- Managing the Structural Funds - Institutionalising Good Practice
- Synthesis of Strategies 1994-96

#### IQ-Net Bulletin

The IQ-Net Bulletin promotes the dissemination of the Network's activities and results. Fourteen issues have been published to date, over the period from 1996 to 2009. Bulletins are published using a standard format, with each providing summaries of the research undertaken and reports on the discussions which take place at IQ-Net meetings. The Bulletins can be downloaded from the IQ-Net website (public pages). A printed version is also sent out to the IQ-Net mailing list.



Admission to the IQ-Net Network is open to national and regional Structural Funds Managing Authorities and programme secretariats. For further information or to express an interest, contact Professor John Bachtler ([john.bachtler@strath.ac.uk](mailto:john.bachtler@strath.ac.uk)) or Laura Polverari ([laura.polverari@strath.ac.uk](mailto:laura.polverari@strath.ac.uk)).