

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES

POLICY DEPARTMENT
STRUCTURAL AND COHESION POLICIES **B**



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**AN ASSESSMENT OF
MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE
IN COHESION POLICY
2007-2013**

VOLUME II - CASE STUDIES





DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES
POLICY DEPARTMENT B: STRUCTURAL AND COHESION POLICIES

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**AN ASSESSMENT OF
MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE IN
COHESION POLICY 2007-2013**

CASE STUDIES

This document was requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Regional Development.

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LINGUISTIC VERSIONS

Original: EN.
Translations: DE, FR.

ABOUT THE PUBLISHER

To contact the Policy Department or to subscribe to its monthly newsletter please write to:
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Manuscript completed in January 2014.
Brussels, © European Union, 2014.

This document is available on the Internet at:
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/studies>

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VOLUME II

Abstract

This study provides an in-depth analysis of Multi-Level Governance in Cohesion Policy in the programming period of 2007-2013. It begins by examining the evolution of the concept and previous practices of implementing Multi-Level Governance in Cohesion Policy across the EU. It then provides a comparative analysis of partnership-working in nine programme case studies during the programming period and across the various stages of the policy cycle. The study identifies the advantages and disadvantages of partnership-working and formulates strategic and operational recommendations in the context of the preparation of the 2014-2020 programming period.

IP/B/REGI/FWC/2010-002/LOT01-C01-SC09

2014

PE 514.004

EN

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1. ERDF ETC OP ALPINE SPACE

1.1 Characteristics of OP

The Alpine Space with its core area, number of piedmonts and adjacent regions is rife with disparities in terms of economic development, sociodemographic trends and cultural patterns. At the same time, it is characterised by unique landscape qualities, a well-developed tourism industry and great water resources with a high potential for renewable energy production (Gloersen et. al 2013).

The transnational co-operation Programme Alpine Space 2007-2013 is an ERDF Operational Programme (OP) with a total budget of €129,980,630, of which €97,792,311 are funded by the ERDF (approximately 1.1% of the total EU resources invested for the ETC Objective under the Cohesion Policy in 2007-2013). Its programme area consists of regions from Germany, France, Italy, Austria and Slovenia (with participation from Liechtenstein and Switzerland). The programme has four priority axes, namely: 1) Competitiveness and attractiveness of the Alpine Space, 2) accessibility and connectivity, 3) environment and risk prevention, and 4) technical assistance.

1.2 Multilevel governance arrangements in Cohesion policy

Based on the experiences made in the INTERREG IIIB Alpine Space Programme – mainly resulted from evaluations – the partner states agreed on the following overall principles: slim, efficient and effective structures, clear definition of tasks and responsibilities, balance between structures at the national and transnational levels, and respect of the partnership principle as set out in article 11 of the Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 (Land Salzburg 2007).

As determined in article 60 of the Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 and article 15 of Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006, the MA is responsible for the management and implementation of the OP. Article 61 of the Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 and article 14 (1) of Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006 define the role of the Certifying Authority (CA). In the Alpine Space OP, the Government Office of the Land Salzburg, department 15 for Economy, Tourism and Energy, has been appointed as both the MA and the CA (Land Salzburg 2007).

The Audit Authority (in accordance with article 62 of the Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 and article 14 (2) of Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006) is represented by the Federal Chancellery of Austria, department IV/3 Financial Control of the ERDF. It is assisted by a group of auditors from each Member State (Land Salzburg 2007).

Following Article 14 (1) of Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006, a Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS) was set up, providing expertise and assistance to the MA, the Programme Committee and, where appropriate, to the Audit Authority (Land Salzburg, 2007). Each partner state sets up an Alpine Space Contact Point (ACP) "securing a link between the transnational and national/regional level in programme implementation and serving as a contact point for project applicants and partners in the respective country" (Land Salzburg 2007).

Furthermore, the partner states are represented by one national coordinator in the Programme Committee (from here on: Monitoring Committee, MC) who safeguards a continuous coordination among partner states.

In order to assess the situation on the part of the project level, two project Lead Partners who have worked in a particularly diverse project group were asked to fill in a questionnaire:

The first project "CLISP – Climate Change Adaptation by Spatial Planning in the Alpine Space" dealt with spatial development within regions that are vulnerable to climate change (Questionnaire project Lead Partner 1).

The second project "ACCESS – Improving accessibility of services of general interest – organisational innovations in rural mountain areas" aimed at improving the accessibility to Services of General Interest (SGI) in sparsely populated, mountainous areas by finding new forms of organisation of SGI using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and fostering demand oriented, integrated mobility systems (Questionnaire project Lead Partner 2).

1.3 Preparation/programming of the OP

The Alpine Space OP has been developed adopting a participatory approach. The final OP document was drafted as a result of a mutual commitment of an evaluator and members of a Task Force (Land Salzburg 2007).

Involvement of different partners

As mentioned by the MA, national and regional authorities were involved in the programming phase of the OP (Interview MA). In the transnational programme the involvement of all different types of actors as laid out in article 11 of the Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 takes place in the national coordination committees (ibid.). The interviewed member of the MC was fully represented in the OP drafting/working groups and very satisfied with these arrangements (Questionnaire MC Member).

All project partners were involved in the initial phases of the project preparations including the two-step application process. The phase was accompanied by several project preparation meetings and intense communication processes (Questionnaire Project Lead Partner 1).

Assessment of the involvement of different partners

According to the MA, a direct involvement of all different kinds of actors in the programming would be "too complicated". Therefore, the input of all actors is collected and brought into the OP by the national and regional representatives (Interview MA). In the opinion of the MA, the most influential partners or organisations are regional and national partners as well as administrative authorities. In the end, they provide the co-financing funds and decide about the projects. They have the direct knowhow and take responsibility on the implementation on national and regional level.

While the MA is satisfied with the contribution of different actors to the programme 2007-2013 and does not see any need for improvements, the representative argued that the main disadvantages of involving many partners in the programming phase is the "growing complexity, unrealistic expectations and suggestions linked to insufficient knowhow as well as wishful thinking that is not realisable" (Interview MA).

In the opinion of the MC Member, the participation of national authorities in the programming phase ensures that responsibilities are assumed as needed and coordination with national policy for territorial development is in place. The MC member however finds that an important barrier to the involvement and influence of various partners in the OP development is the multi-country character of the programme with its high number of relevant partners (Questionnaire MC Member).

According to the project Lead Partner 1, a non-involvement of some partners in the preparation phase is neither desirable nor, in fact, feasible. The main workload is taken up by the lead partner. In particular, all Work Package Leaders were also required to take an active role and to share responsibilities (Questionnaire project Lead Partner 1).

1.4 Project selection

In the OP document it is laid down that all programme bodies, but especially the JTS and Alpine Space Contact Points (ACPs) are involved in the dissemination of objectives and priorities of the programme as well as prerequisites for obtaining ERDF co-funding to potential beneficiaries. Project proposals are selected by the Programme Committee on the basis of a technical assessment and recommendations made by the JTS and ACPs (Joint Technical Secretariat, n.a). Projects are selected in a two-step application procedure. Later, the MA informs project applicants about the results of the selection process. Between the two steps of the process the JTS and ACPs gives technical support to the applicants (Land Salzburg 2007). With regards to the project evaluation, the partner states ensure a transparent evaluation and selection of projects by making the criteria and details on the evaluation process available (Land Salzburg 2007).

Involvement of different partners

In order to support the project selection process, national representatives are invited to bring in the opinion and outcome of discussions in national coordination committees for which they have a mandate (Interview MA). This interactive process is considered to have a positive impact on the effective project selection by the MA interviewee.

In the opinion of the MC member some stakeholders tend to defend their own project which leads to a conflict of interest affecting the partnership process (Questionnaire MC Member).

The interviewed project partner 1 assumes that the national ministries are particularly able to exert some political influence following their political agendas during the selection process. With regards to the project preparation, the interviewed representative of the CLISP-project criticised the hierarchic system in the OP arguing that the MA had not been able to give clear guidance on the eligibility of one partner institution until a few days before submission (Questionnaire project Lead partner 1). In the project selection phase, all project partners were involved (project Lead Partner 2).

1.5 Programme management

The programme management is shared with the controlling bodies at national level as well as the JTS that supports the completion of transnational tasks (Interview MA).

Shared responsibility

The representative of the MA does not find sharing the responsibility of OP management with the JTS particularly effective: "It is rather an administrative burden as the JTS is located far away from the MA. It would be much more effective and efficient if the JTS would be incorporated in the MA in the form of a new organisational structure. In my opinion the regulation is not consistent since the MA already fulfils the whole competence by itself." (Interview MA).

Shared contribution to the programme

The representative of the CIPRA (International Commission for the Protection of the Alps) finds the regular involvement, consultation, and information of NGOs essential. The Alpine Space programme and the CIPRA International institutions share common information channels for the dissemination of newsletters and public relations in general (Interview NGO). Additionally, the ACPs of the Alpine Space programme and their own delegations regularly exchange information (*ibid.*).

The MC member mentioned that the role of national contact points most importantly consists in ensuring that the partner-countries actively contribute in the programme. They cooperate with the MA on specific tasks such as disseminating the information to potential beneficiaries (Questionnaire MC Member). In addition, they contribute to the eligibility check of partners and provide their opinion in the coherence of the projects with national and regional strategies (*ibid.*). Moreover, working groups are sometimes established to analyse specific implementing issues (*ibid.*).

The project Lead Partner 1 mentioned that the interest of the partners does not always necessarily coincide with the overall transnational project ideas. Furthermore, the competence of the individuals involved in the project is sometimes considered to be inadequate for carrying out the required work. The Lead Partner cannot influence the selection of external experts (subcontractors) by the partners (Questionnaire project Lead Partner 1). It can therefore take immense efforts to increase the quality of outputs from partners that are relevant to achieving the overall project objectives (*ibid.*). He mentions the importance of an integrative project design with close interdependencies between Work Packages as they counteract the risk of becoming isolated and following their own track. However, from a management perspective, too many interdependencies between Work Packages (input-output-input chains) are a challenge for managing, monitoring and carrying out quality control (*ibid.*). Finally, he describes that some partners were not able to provide the necessary information for each reporting period in time, in the needed quality. In particular, poor financial management on the part of a few partners led to a delay of the finalisation of the project, and therefore the transfer of the last tranche of the project budget was delayed by almost a year (*ibid.*).

Management at project level

The lead partner has to report to the JTS and MA in the form of regular progress reports (Land Salzburg 2007). After checking the compliance of the report, the MA asks the CA to initialise the payment of the respective ERDF funds (*ibid.*). As laid down in article 61 of the Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006, the CA will initialise the payment to the lead partner who will transfer the funds to the partner consortium.

At the operational level, an external office supported the lead partner of the first project, CLISP, in conducting the transnational project management activities (Questionnaire project Lead Partner 1). With the support and advice of the lead partner, each project partner was responsible for his/her own financial management (ibid.). In the second project, ACCESS, the Lead Partner was no longer involved in the direct implementation of the project (Questionnaire project Lead Partner 2). The financial management was implemented only by the Region of Lombardy (ibid.).

Lead partner 1 described that similar to his institution, many partner institutions outsourced this management to subcontractors, which considerably increased the number of people and institutions involved. According to the project lead partner 1, sub-contracting causes communication and steering challenges, because subcontractors often join the project implementation only at a later stage. Furthermore, contractors were not always in the direct line of communication and received their information via the official partner representatives (Questionnaire project Lead Partner 1). It was therefore stressed that at the partner meetings even the sub-contractors, who carry out a substantial part of the project implementation, were required to be present.

The project Lead Partner 1 found the cooperation with OP authorities to be "good and helpful". The barriers in this respect have little to do with the multilevel governance character of the OP, but rather with administrative issues (sudden changes in the interpretation of OP rules by the programme bodies; introduction of new monitoring and reporting instruments as well as project durations without a clear picture on the part of programme authorities on how to apply them). This however creates considerable insecurity for the project management (Questionnaire project Lead Partner 1).

The project Lead Partner 2 experienced the project partnership as very efficient in all phases of the policy cycle. Similarly, the cooperation with the OP authorities was considered very effective as well as efficient. In contrast to the first project they did not have any cooperation problems thanks to regular project steering meetings (1-2 meeting per year) with high transparency, clear communication structures and a good relation with early and frank information to JTS and ACPs (Questionnaire project Lead Partner 2). He considers the workshops, taking place for the development of phase 2014-2020, as a very good initiative.

1.6 Monitoring

As laid down in article 63 of the Council Regulation No 1083/2006 and article 19 (3) of the Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006, the partner states implemented a MC responsible for selecting operations. According to the OP document the MC is composed of 2-3 representatives of each partner state and respects the partnership principle as predefined in article 11 of the Council Regulation No 1083/2006. Each partner state has one vote for all decisions made in the MC (Land Salzburg 2007). Different types of programme authorities are involved in the activities of the MC:

- a representative of the MA as a full member,
- a representative of the European Commission as a member with advisory capacity,
- a representative of the Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS) for technical support,
- representatives of transnational organised non-governmental bodies (NGOs), and

- Alpine organisations and networks, specifically the Alpine Convention, as irregular members with an advisory capacity.

Additionally, it is laid down that meetings take place regularly, at least once a year, and are chaired in a rotation principle, i.e. each year by a different partner state. Decisions are taken by consensus of all members in the MC (Land Salzburg 2007).

In mid-2009 the MC launched a strategy revision process for which a transnational task force was set up to critically reflect on the programme (Land Salzburg 2011). In the 2011 Annual Implementation Report (AIR) it is mentioned that the ongoing cooperation between MA, JTS and ACP is considered constructively as it represents a useful support and efficient assistance to projects (Land Salzburg 2011).

Decision making

According to the MA, in the MC, composed of regional and national partners as well as administrative authorities, all members have voting rights but not for all decisions, e.g. at the national level there is only one vote per country. The MC decided, in consultation with the MA, that the responsibility weighs in the administrative level and a 100% consensus is needed for taking decisions (Interview MA). According to the MA representative, the involvement of various partners in the MC meetings ensures a common understanding and shared ownership of OP objectives (Interview MA).

Collection and reporting of monitoring data

There are no guidelines at transnational level on the collection and reporting of monitoring data from numerous partners involved in the OP for national interest parties (Interview MA). The website serves as a source of information and passive communication (ibid.). The facilitation of wider project participation and dissemination of information on the programme and projects co-funded by the programme, mentioned in the OP document, are implemented by the respective ACPs in coordination and with support of the JTS (Land Salzburg 2007; Interview MA)

Interaction between different partners

According to the member of the MC, regular consultation and interaction between the different partners involved is ensured through annual events organised by the managing bodies. The interviewee finds that, especially in ETC programmes, the involvement of multiple partners increases the complexity of the meetings or delays programme management as well as decision-making. In the interviewee's opinion, the MC has to remain a manageable structure (Questionnaire MC Member).

1.7 Evaluation

According to the OP document, the partner states of the programme commissioned an expert to carry out the Ex-ante evaluation of the programme (Land Salzburg 2007). The evaluation was carried out by involving different actors, and a dialogue-oriented relationship among the evaluator and the various stakeholders of the programme (Land Salzburg 2007).

The representative of the MA described that throughout the programme implementation different evaluations were executed but none of them have examined the multi-level governance or partnership arrangements. According to the representative, the results of evaluations are disseminated at the national level in a satisfying way. Also, points for improvement are discussed with the partners (Interview MA). The MC has direct responsibility in all steps and participates in steering groups responsible for the evaluation activities (Questionnaire MC Member).

1.8 Outlook

In view of developing a long-term strategy orientation for the future periods, an extensive stakeholder dialogue was organised including workshops in all languages spoken in the Alpine Space as well as an online survey (Gloersen, et al. 2013). The report that was published in May 2013 under the responsibility of a team of six experts, from different alpine countries, shows a broad participation process which was judged as very successful by the experts' own account (Expert opinion). The project involved various experts and stakeholders in order to serve as a basis for the next programme 2014-2020 (Expert opinion).

Efficiency and Effectiveness in multi-level governance

According to the MA, the involvement of partners in the implementation process is appropriate and should not be increased. Overall the representative was very satisfied with the whole programme and does not see any need for future improvements (Interview MA). However, there were "mixed feelings" about the involvement of numerous (and different) partners in the OP: On the one hand, positive stimuli result from a multi-level atmosphere, mostly in the scope of varying programme objectives. On the other hand, discussions with partners who are not sufficiently informed but who want to take part are "tiring and inefficient" (Interview MA).

The representative of the MC interviewed for this study was satisfied with regards to the participation of all partners: "The stakeholder dialogue is intense and provides inputs both for the implementation of the current programme and for the preparation of the future one." It was further mentioned that the involvement of socio-economic partners and representatives of civil society in OP implementation should be improved, e.g. through regular web consultations, invitation to meetings, specific monitoring and surveys, etc. Additionally, it is viewed that the level and quality of the debate and information provided about the performance of the OP and outcome of meetings could be improved. It should be ensured that the results of the MC meetings are communicated in a simple and friendly way on the website of the programme (Questionnaire MC).

On the other hand, the interviewee described the following problem as hampering to the effectiveness of the multi-level governance structure: "The participation of partners tends to be immediately related to the possibility of having a project financed rather than to the control, as democratic citizens, on the use of public funds or the stimulation of a collective debate on the programme strategy and expected results" (Questionnaire MC Member).

The representative of the CIPRA International, a non-profit NGO, particularly welcomes the possibility to contribute to the programme on an informal content-wise basis (Interview CIPRA International).

Project level

The representative of the project "CLISP – Climate Change Adaptation by Spatial Planning in the Alpine Space" described the influence of national political interests on the decision-making and selection of projects. In the view of this representative, the non-acceptance of (certain) partner institutions from a country as well as other external political factors reduce the chances of project approval (regardless the quality of the proposal) and undermine a main principle of "good" partnership building, i.e. a consistent partnership structure with project objectives and programme priorities. He also mentions the risk of "free riders" wanting to hop on a promising project application in the second submission stage. As for the four OP authorities (JTS, MA, First Level Control (FLC) and Second Level Control) the representative of the project acknowledges a good working relationship. Weak effectiveness was noticed, in particular at the beginning of the project when the certification procedure is not clear leading to administrative burden mainly with regards to reporting. He also notes that administrative requirements – not only by the programme but also due to additional requirements in some partner countries like Austria – lead to an immense use of resource. According to the calculations of the OP-representative, approximately 15% of the resources were needed for the fulfillment of pure administrative requirements. This does not include the actual project management administration or monitoring. An enhancement of administrative burden is expected. In the opinion of the representative, this is the reason for an increased difficulty to find partner institutions, because many potential partners are not willing to cope with the administrative overload.

For the future, the Lead Partner of the CLISP project pointed out possible improvement: Concerning the number of project partners, he suggests not letting smaller consortia have a disadvantage in the project selection. In the same breath, many partners from all Alpine countries and many different institutions do not necessarily produce the quality outputs the OP is looking for. In addition, re-establishing common transnational activities is suggested, so that the consortia can contribute parts of their budget to activities of transnational interest more easily. The Lead Partner recommends for the future to establish a harmonised FLC system across the countries and to reduce and simplify administrative costs and burden. Furthermore, the provision of financial reimbursement for all costs that occur is strongly recommended. The overall cost-benefit ratio of excessive controlling schemes is expected to be distinctly negative.

The institution of the current Lead Partner is not planning to apply again for EU support as a partner or Lead Partner, because the financial incentives are not sufficiently high in relation to the costs that actually arise, of which only a part is eligible under the OP rules (e.g. overheads). In his opinion, about 50% of the entire project expenses have to be carried by the institution itself (Questionnaire project Lead Partner 1).

In contrast, the Lead Partner of the Access project was satisfied with the implementation of the project overall and mentions that he has no recommendations for the future (Questionnaire Lead Partner 2).

External Evaluation

Currently, the Ex-ante evaluation of the transnational cooperation programme Alpine Space 2014-2020 is carried out by t33 and Spatial foresight. According to them the approach is characterised by interaction with all involved stakeholders and by a use of qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The upcoming OP document is currently in the drafting and consultation phase (t33 sound policy Website).

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1.10 Interviews und Questionnaires

Managing Authority	Christian Salletmaier, Head of Managing Authority, Land Salzburg, Managing Authority of the OP Alpine Space, 15.07.2013
Horizontal Partner: NGO	Wolfgang Pfefferkorn, project partner or sub-contractor, CIPRA International, autonomous non-governmental, non-profit umbrella organisation to the protection and sustainable development of the Alps since 1952, 19.07.2013
Monitoring Committee	Rossella Rusca, MC member, Department for Development and Cohesion Policy, 19.07.2013
Expert opinion	Wolfgang Pfefferkorn, Consultant at Rosinak & Partner, 19.07.2013
Project Lead Partner 1	Jochen Bürgel and Wolfgang Lexer, project lead partner, CLISP – Climate Change Adaptation by Spatial Planning in the Alpine Space, Umweltbundesamt, 19.07.2013
Project Lead Partner 2	Peter Niederer, Project Manager, Swiss Center for Mountain Regions, ACCESS – Improving accessibility of services of general interest – organisational innovations in rural mountain areas, 06.08.2013

2. ETC ERDF OP AUSTRIA – CZECH REPUBLIC

2.1 Characteristics of OP

The Cross Border Co-operation (CBC) Operational Programme (OP) Austria – Czech Republic 2007-2013 is an ERDF OP, with a total budget of €126,394,580, of which €107,435,393 are funded by the ERDF (approximately 1.2% of the total EU resources invested for the ETC Objective under the Cohesion Policy in 2007-2013). Its programme area consists of Austrian and Czech regions along the common border. The Austrian Regions are as follows: Waldviertel, Weinviertel, Wiener Umland Nordteil, Wien, Mühlviertel, Innviertel, Linz-Wels, Steyr-Kirchdorf, Mostviertel-Eisenwurzen and St. Pölten. The Czech regions are as follows: Jihočeský kraj, Jihomoravský kraj and kraj Vysočina. The OP has three priority axes, namely: 1) Socio-economic development, tourism and know-how transfer, 2) regional accessibility and sustainable development, and 3) technical assistance (European Commission, DG Regio Website).

The OP's aim is foremost to support the active continuation and future development of the cross-border cooperation between the regions, which has a long-standing tradition of over ten years (Operational Programme 2007).

2.2 Multilevel governance arrangements in Cohesion policy

Article 70 of the Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 determines that Member States are responsible for the management and control of the OP. The CBC OP Austria – Czech Republic 2007-2013 is represented by the Federal Chancellery in Austria and by the Ministry for Regional Development in the Czech Republic (Operational Programme 2007). In line with article 59 of the Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006, the Member States designated the Office of the Government of Lower Austria as a Managing Authority (MA) as well as a Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS), working on behalf of the Managing Authority (article 14 (1) Council Regulation No 1080/2006). The CA and the Audit Authority functions are carried out by the Federal Chancellery of the Republic of Austria whereas the function of the Czech National Authority, supporting the MA, is realised by the Ministry for Regional Development of the Czech Republic (Operational Programme, 2007). In addition, a Central Monitoring System (ERP Fund), various control systems in both Member States (one of which is the office of the City Government of Vienna, precisely the Unit for Finance and Financial Control, interviewed for this study) and so-called "Regional Bodies", are set in place (Operational Programme 2007).

2.3 Preparation/programming of the OP

According to the 2007 AIR, a bilateral "programming Group", containing members from regional and national level from both sides of the border, started the elaboration of the OP in 2005 (Joint Technical Secretariat, 2007). The OP drafting was supported by three external expert teams, conducting an ex-ante evaluation as well as a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) (ibid.).

Involvement of different partners

As predefined by the structure of the OP, the MA led the programming process and defined the technical framework (Interview MA). The European Commission sets the standards in a top-down process and the Länder and administrative districts are responsible for the content-based direction in a bottom-up process (ibid.). The programming is carried out in consensus with the programme areas and is built on the input of the respective speciality department (ibid.).

Both, the MA and the Czech National Authority stated that 15 people were involved in the programming phase from national and regional level bodies from both sides of the border. In the opinion of the MA, the contribution of private institutions, economic and social partners as well as representatives of the civil society would be rather inefficient in a system where decisions are made in a 100% consensus. Therefore, these groups are not involved in the programming process (Interview MA). The only exceptions are the possibilities to comment on the website and single activities for potential project partners (ibid.). According to the MA, not many partners have enough knowledge about ETC processes to take on an OP perspective. Many of them want to “promote their own interests and lobby” (ibid.). In the interview, it was therefore stated that it is necessary to ask the question of “who has or should have a mandate”. According to the MA, only professionals who have a sufficient level of knowledge about certain interests and who can represent them in the whole concept should be included in the process (ibid.). In their opinion, another aspect lies in the question of “who is able to speak for a whole interest group”. In the end, the programming process aims to be consented by the Commission, which is why the involvement of many partners is preferably reduced (ibid.).

The Czech National Authority stated that particular emphasis was given to the integration of environmental and gender aspects. In addition, three external expert teams supported the programming group by drafting (1) specific chapters of the OP, (2) an ex-ante evaluation and (3) the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) (Interview Czech National Authority). The European Commission set the standards in top-down processes. The federal states and administrative districts were responsible for the content-based direction and for the implementation in a bottom-up process (ibid.).

As confirmed by a representative of the First Level Control in Vienna, bodies of the control system are not involved in the programming process (Interview Control Body).

The MC is structured in different working phases, which means that not all types of actors are involved in direct implementation (Questionnaire MC Member). The representative of the region of Upper Austria states that he is partly involved in MC working groups, since he is being consulted occasionally for input and preparatory exchanges. He is however not regularly invited to attend large stakeholder meetings. Furthermore, he is in regular contact with the MA as well as local associations, which lobby for their interests, e.g. the working group European cross-border regions or other regional associations in Upper Austria (Questionnaire MC Member).

Satisfaction with the way of involvement

In the words of the Czech National Authority, “the bilateral programming process was accompanied by various internal feedback loops at regional and national level on both sides of the border in order to ensure broad regional and sector acceptance as well as participation of social partners and NGOs”. By his own account, the Czech National

Authority was represented in OP drafting and working groups, invited to submit input, involved in preparatory exchanges with the drafting team, invited to attend stakeholder meetings as well as invited to respond to public consultation. Overall, the Czech National Authority was fully involved in the programming process (Interview Czech National Authority). People working for the Czech National Authority are responsible for implementing the OP on the Czech side and support the MA in coordinating the activities in the Czech Republic. Their participation during the programming process is therefore essential (ibid.). Overall, they are very satisfied with the way they were involved. Also, their views were taken into account in the final documents. Similarly, the cooperation of involved partners was considered as positive and result-oriented (ibid.).

While the MC member interviewed appreciated the possibility to bring in his experiences especially on formal issues, there was a major barrier to the effectiveness of this process due to the size of the programme and the heterogeneity of the programme area. He rates the satisfaction with his involvement in the process as "moderate" (Questionnaire MC Member).

2.4 Project selection

According to the OP document, the MC is the only body in the OP responsible for the final selection of operations to be supported. The Regional Bodies and/or the JTS shall inform potential beneficiaries of the objectives of the OP, the prerequisites for obtaining ERDF funds and the individual procedures to be followed (Operational Programme 2007). In cooperation and with the support of the Regional Bodies, the JTS is responsible for the assessment process of operations and the preparation of suggestions for the Monitoring Committee.

Method of Decision Making and effectiveness

According to the MA, the MC decides on a project upon consensus of both, the Czech and the Austrian partners (almost 50 members, partly observer status). In addition, the projects are embedded in the regional strategies (Interview MA). Every decision is a result of 100% consensus, so that all involved partners have a say (ibid.). The projects have to fulfil certain criteria and contribute to the OP (ibid.). The 100% consensus rule contributes to the fact that all involved partners base their consequent actions on these decisions (ibid.). According to the MA, a decision by majority would be easier. However, given the widely-agreed-upon importance of consensus, the process is still efficient. The MA is responsible for following the rules of operation and therefore does not make decisions or pre-decisions (ibid.).

According to the Czech National Authority, projects are discussed at national level in order to give the members of the MC the possibility to learn about their content before taking concrete decisions. The MC takes decisions on projects in the MC meetings upon consensus of both, the Czech and Austrian partners (Interview Czech National Authority). The representative of the Czech National Authority describes the process as follows (ibid.):

- Ten working days before the meetings each member of the MC receives a list of the projects with all necessary information.
- In addition, each project, including its evaluation, is presented at the meeting by the Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS), assisted by the responsible Regional Body.

- The JTS informs the MC on the rejected/postponed projects and explains the reasons for it. At each MC meeting, the JTS informs about actual budgets of the areas of intervention and about restrictions for new projects due to eventual financial shortage.
- The MC has the possibility to either: accept, accept with reservation, suspend or refuse particular projects.
- Projects may be withdrawn from the programme at the MC meeting. The Lead Partner has the right to withdraw the project through its Regional Body, if member of the MC.
- The MC may suggest modifications of the contents and the budgets of projects, which leads to an "accepted with reservation" or "suspended" decision.

In fact, the MC takes decisions but is not involved in the development of prospective calls for tenders which lies in the responsibility of the task force (Questionnaire MC Member). In the view of the MC member, the involvement of different partners contributes to a more effective project selection because different views at regional level are considered as valuable for decision making.

2.5 Programme management

As laid down in the OP document, the constitution of bodies and the distribution of voting rights have been agreed on by mutual consensus of the Austrian and Czech programme partners. In agreement with the MA, the MC adopts its rules of procedure in order to exercise its missions in accordance to the present regulation (Operational Programme 2007).

Involvement of different partners

According to the MA, no intermediate bodies were involved in the programme management phase. Merely some preparation tasks were carried out by the JTS but in general they hold the opinion that tasks and the responsibility, especially, cannot be shared as the signing institution is liable (Interview MA). The Czech National Authority supports by its own account the MA in tasks of implementation of the joint programme in the Czech eligible area. It is responsible for internal planning management, coordination of the Czech regions and national co-financing (Interview Czech National Authority). National competencies in the fields of internal relations within the programme are defined in bilateral agreements (ibid.). All tasks connected with liability and with responsibility are dealt with simultaneously (ibid.).

According to the MC member, its only involvement in OP management is within the MC meetings where they decide about project funding, monitoring and authorizations. While he would have appreciated more intense involvement, this would not have been feasible in terms of financial and time resources (Questionnaire MC Member).

Organisation of OP management within the partners

The Czech National Authority also gave concrete information about the organisation within the institution: The Czech National Authority is officially represented by the Minister for Regional Development or the Deputy Minister for Regional Development. Five people in the department are directly responsible for the OP AT-CZ but there are activities which are

supported also by other employees (Interview Czech National Authority). The Department of European Territorial Cooperation is divided into one unit responsible for the methodology of the European Territorial Cooperation programmes (one head of unit and one officer responsible for the OP AT-CZ) and one unit responsible for the implementation of European Territorial Cooperation programmes (head of unit and one officer responsible for the OP AT-CZ) (ibid.).

Added value and contribution of different partners

In the opinion of the representative of the MA, the main contribution to the OP comes from public institutions and administration in the form of professional knowledge. The private sector is not interested in the OP because of the structure of the programme (Interview MA). With regards to civil society and NGOs, the question of "who represents whom and who should be involved?" is yet to be answered according to the MA (ibid.).

With regards to the requirement of elaborating various reports on a regular basis, the Czech National Authority finds the support of the Joint Technical Secretariat as well as the communication with the MA and the possibility to discuss any upcoming issues highly satisfactory (Interview Czech National Authority).

2.6 Monitoring

Article 65 of the Council Regulation No 1083/2006 lists the tasks of the MC. As predefined in the partnership requirements (article 11, 1083/2006) the following partners and authorities have been invited to MC meetings: regional, local, urban and other public authorities; economic and social partners; other bodies representing civil society; environmental partners; non-governmental organisations and bodies responsible for promoting equality between men and women (Joint Technical Secretariat 2011).

Involvement of different partners

In the MC, the following groups are involved: Political representatives from administration as well as from the civil society (Interview MA). The private sector is not involved but the Ministry of Economy represents private interests among other aspects (ibid.). As described by the representative of the Czech National Authority, the MC is solely responsible for the final selection of actions to be supported. Its composition is listed in the Rules of Procedure for the MC and decided by the Member States (article 64 Council Regulation No 1083/2006) as well as the MA (Interview Czech National Authority). The MC is headed by the MA and adopts its own rules of procedure in agreement with the MA in order to exercise its missions in accordance to the present regulations (ibid.).

Implementation of multi-level governance

The Member States nominate members of the MC and grant them voting rights or observer status (Interview MA). According to the representative of the MA, it is a matter of negotiation between Austria and the Czech Republic and depends on the ability to take responsibility and on the resources that the institutions can provide. In the end, representatives must contribute sufficiently to the programme so that the minority for decisions is reached (Interview MA). According to the MA, the best outcome is achieved when all partners involved agree on a decision, which is why the partners involved in the MC are content with the quality of the outcome.

The programme website contains all important information, but the outcomes of the MC meetings are not published. In the words of the representative of the MA: "transparency in Austria is not as high as in Sweden" (Interview MA).

The MC meetings are held at least three times a year. After the MC meetings, the JTS writes up the the draft minutes and disseminates it to the participants. All participants have the right to send any comments on the document. After revision, the final minutes are available in the internal programme database (Interview Czech National Authority).

The representative of the MC stated that the involvement of multiple partners increases the complexity of the meetings or delays programme management because of the heterogeneity of the MC. The communication is not easy but in the end the partners all agree on the decision taken (Questionnaire MC member). However, although the process does take time, in the end the decisions are taken on a common basis and all regions are equally involved (ibid.). The quality of the debate and the information material disseminated about the performance of the OP and outcomes of the MC meeting are sufficient for the regions, which is a time-consuming exercise for the MA, according to the MC member interviewed (Questionnaire MC member).

Satisfaction with the way of involvement

Overall, the Czech National Authority is content with its contribution and involvement in monitoring. In the representative's opinion, the constitution of the MC, with its different types of representatives, is beneficial for the whole process of programme implementation. The public can access important information through the website and comment on the draft AIR. So far, all comments were taken into account, which leads to the fact that the Czech National Authority is satisfied with the final version of the OP. The monitoring data of the programme are presented in the MC. They are also available in the report manager and database of the programme. The Czech National Authority considers the quality of the data and information adequate (Interview Czech National Authority).

The Control Body however had a different opinion: Since the outcomes of the MC meetings are not publically accessible, the interviewed representative stated that there is a lack of information dissemination about difficult projects. In some cases the Control Body would appreciate the access to more information in the implementation process. This dissemination however is not an established custom in the process and there are no structures to ensure adequate information exchange. For the new period, the Control Body claimed a better integration in the discussions and meetings. On the other hand, the representatives of the Control Body do weigh the statement as they are only responsible for the control of expenditure (Interview Control Body).

2.7 Evaluation

As laid down in article 47 of the Council Regulation No 1083/2006 evaluations of the programme should be carried out before, during and after the programming period in order to assess impacts, undertake qualitative research and focus on the capitalisation of programme results as well as optimisation and evolution of the programme (Operational Programme 2007). Article 47 Council Regulation No 1083/2006 determines that evaluations shall be carried out by internal or external evaluators, which are functionally independent of the certifying and audit authorities.

As agreed on by the MC (June 2009), no external evaluation of the programme was contracted (Joint Technical Secretariat 2011). However, the cooperation programme took part in the cross-programme evaluation pilot in November 2009. The study was carried out by the INTERACT Point Vienna and the MA and JTS cooperated with experts of the evaluation pilot by providing data, contacts and by giving interviews (Joint Technical Secretariat, 2010)

The Austrian Society for European Politics (Österreichische Gesellschaft für Europapolitik, ÖGfE) conducted a qualitative survey with relevance for the AT-CZ programme. According to the Annual Implementation Report, similar surveys were carried out in 2001, 2004 and 2005 so that positive developments in terms of cooperation, culture and tourism could be observed since the EU accession of the Czech Republic (Joint Technical Secretariat 2011).

Handling of evaluations

According to the MA evaluations in the OP AT-CZ were not mandatory in the current period. The representative of the MA stated that they choose the pragmatic approach and only implemented what is obligatory such as the AIRs and some case-oriented exceptions, e.g. small ex-post evaluations of the programme in order to improve the programming stage for the upcoming programme. If so, evaluations were carried out only by the JTS (Interview MA). The outcomes are distributed through an information blog accessed by the MC members (ibid.). Within the MC meetings discussions are expected and claimed (ibid.).

According to the Czech National Authority, the implementation process of evaluations is also supported by the activity of other forums such as the Task Force or the Programming Group for the next period.

MC members have the possibility to give comments in writing to evaluation activities. The outcomes are discussed only if they are relevant (Questionnaire MC Member).

2.8 Project Level

One project implemented in the current programming period had a strong multilevel governance character: "European Region Danube Vltava". Its objective was in fact to observe the status quo of networks and multilevel governance. Briefly, it was found out that ETC programmes help achieving important progress in respect of cross-border MLG structures (Interview MA). The project expenditures were evaluated in cooperation with Control Bodies and Intermediate Bodies (Regional Bodies) (ibid.). The latter examine the content report of projects and in this way support the Control Bodies who are responsible for the control of expenditure for project relevant issues (ibid.).

A questionnaire was sent to the Lead Partner of the "European Region Danube Vltava project". The actual aim of the project was analysing the existing cross-border networks of key players in the regional development system and it was applied in three different ETC-programmes (Questionnaire project Lead Partner).

Involvement of different partners

According to the Lead Partner in each phase of the project cycle the same partners were involved in the implementation of the project:

- Czech regions: South Bohemia, Pilsen, Vysocina

- Bavarian regions: Lower Bavaria, Oberpfalz
- Austrian regions: western part of Lower Austria, Upper Austria (Lead Partner)

Efficiency in cooperation with project partners

In the opinion of the project Lead Partner, the involvement of a considerably large number of partners was overall very efficient, with the exception of the cooperation with the Czech partner-regions regarding financial management as well as monitoring and evaluation. According to the Lead Partner, the inefficiency in financial management, monitoring and evaluation resulted mainly from the different structures of ETC-programme administration and eligibility rules between Austria and the Czech Republic. An additional challenge consisted in the communication between the partners due to a language barrier. This challenge was largely managed by the involvement of translators (Questionnaire project Lead Partner). However, as it was the very goal of the project to implement the tri-national cooperation structure, they were conscious of these challenges from the start (ibid.).

Effectiveness in cooperation with OP authorities

The project Lead Partner was very satisfied with the effectiveness of the cooperation with the programme authorities. The MA delivered all necessary information for the project application, financial management and project implementation in a very effective way by newsletters, courses or “desktop help”. It is required that the projects are reported on annually in the MC meetings. As a result, the project Lead Partner had the opportunity to discuss issues of project implementation with the MC members directly. Further, the Lead Partner describes that Intermediate Bodies have been very supportive in the project application and implementation phase where it was very challenging to coordinate three parallel projects in three different ETC-programmes (Questionnaire project Lead Partner).

Efficiency in cooperation with OP authorities

With an exception in the project implementation phase as well as the Monitoring and evaluation phase, the efficiency of cooperation with the programme authorities concerning time, costs, possible administrative burden and delays) was rated rather low by the project Lead Partner (Questionnaire project Lead Partner). The project Lead partner justified the low rating as follows: In general the process of project application with its extreme formalism and administrative complexity is a massive barrier for applying ETC-projects. Different Intermediate Bodies require different descriptions of goals and milestones. Also the complex and different eligibility rules discourage project applicants. He also describes the very complex project administration because of the three parts of the project with different beginnings and durations as well as common costs that had to be split between the three ETC-programmes (Questionnaire project Lead Partner).

2.9 Outlook

The interviewees were overall satisfied with the efficiency of the programming process. As the elaboration of a new programme is considered to be a very demanding process, the number of partners is preferably kept to a necessary minimum. The interviewees generally came to the conclusion that there were no major constraints during the process due to the output-orientation and manageability of the process that must result in 100% consensus.

Efficiency and Effectiveness in multi-level governance

The MA holds the opinion that the main important aspect of the programme is a slim and efficient implementation regarding the involvement of different partners. This is why they stated that there is no possible improvement regarding the involvement of different actors. On the other hand, it was mentioned in the interview that the future of the OP will be publically consulted (Interview MA).

In order to avoid lobbying, the MA has to apply strategic thinking which needs partners that are prepared to invest personal resources by actively contributing on a regular basis not least by attending the stakeholder meetings (Interview MA). The OP's success is based upon the confidence and familiarity of the actors involved which is why communication is a key aspect. The process must be output oriented, constructive within a restricted timeframe and allow for flexible adaptations over time (Interview MA).

The Unit for Finance and Financial Control in the office of the Viennese City Government was only involved marginally in the different phases of the policy cycle (Interview Control Body). However, the interviewees expect more information and a concrete involvement in the information process, especially during the programming period in order to have the possibility to intervene earlier if necessary (ibid.).

Given the higher concentration of the programme in the next programming period 2014-2020, the representative of the MC expects that there will be fewer difficulties in terms of accommodating different expectations (Questionnaire MC Member).

Lessons learned

According to the Czech National Authority, the lessons learned from the cooperation with a large number of partners will influence the future processes of implementation. These mainly include the ever-developing "spirit of cross border co-operation", the sound implementation of the activities, the efficient programme management and project generation. The role of Regional Bodies will be essential in the future (Interview Czech National Authority).

The representative of the MC Member mainly pointed to difficulties related to the administrative load and the requirements at EU and national levels (especially with regards to projects) (Questionnaire MC Member).

Project Level

For the future programming period of 2014-2020, the project Lead Partner recommends establishing an opportunity to adopt tri-national projects even in the framework of a single bi-national cross-border ETC programme. The project partners plan applying for the implementation of such bi-national and tri-national cooperation projects in the European region of Danube-Vltava. Regarding the complex application, implementation, monitoring and financial management the interviewee however insists on further simplifications (Questionnaire project Lead Partner).

2.10 References

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2.11 Interviews und Questionnaires

Managing Authority	Bernhard Köhle, Head of Managing Authority, Amt der niederösterreichischen Landesregierung/ department of state government Lower Austria, Managing Authority of the AT-CZ cross-border cooperation programme, 05.07.2013
Vertical Partner: Czech National Authority	Věra Korkischová, Officer, Ministry of Regional development of the Czech Republic, Czech National Authority of the AT-CZ cross-border cooperation programme, 04.07.2013
Horizontal Partner: Control Body	Gabriele Springinklee, vice-chair department control of expenditure (FLC), Viennese City Government, Municipal Department 27 – European Affairs, control of expenditure, Control Body, 11.07.2013
Monitoring Committee	Wilhelm Patri, MC Member, representative of the region, Regional Management Upper Austria, 19.07.2013
Project Lead Partner	Günther Knötig, project lead partner European Region Danube Vltava, Office of State Government of Upper Austria, Department for Regional and Spatial Planning, 23.07.2013

3. ERDF OP CASTILLA Y LEÓN

3.1 Characteristics of OP

The Spanish region of Castilla y León is a phasing-in region under the Regional Competitiveness and Employment Objective for the period 2007-13. It is a large region by Spanish standards (representing 19 percent of the national territory), but has the third lowest population density of the 17 regions in Spain (at 27 inhabitants per square km). A distinctive feature of the economic structure is the relatively high proportion of agricultural sector output and employment.

The total budget of the regional Operational Programme is €1.2bn (ERDF €800m), structured according to 5 priorities (plus technical assistance): (1) Development of the Knowledge Economy (€112.8m or 10% of total funding) (2) Entrepreneurial development and innovation (€312.8m or 27% of total funding) (3) Environment, natural habitat, water resources and risk prevention (€267.7m or 23% of total funding) (4) Transport and energy (357.1m or 30% of total funding) (5) Local and urban sustainable development (€118.3m or 10% of total funding).

3.2 Multilevel governance arrangements in Cohesion policy

Spain has a highly devolved political system. The 1978 constitution established seventeen self-governing regions (so-called Autonomous Communities) with extensive powers in the field of economic development and a commitment to the "establishment of a fair and adequate level of economic equilibrium between the different parts of the country". At national level, this commitment to solidarity is pursued through intergovernmental fiscal transfers across the regions and two regional policy instruments: the Inter-Territorial Compensation Fund for public infrastructure expenditure and a regional aid scheme for business investment, both of which are managed by the Ministry of Economy and Public Administration.

EU Cohesion policy provides a major source of funding for regional policy and the only cross-cutting strategic framework for regional development policy at national level. Reflecting the shared nature of regional development competences, Cohesion policy is delivered through national and regional programmes. For the 2007-2013 period, there are three national ERDF and CF programmes - two ERDF OPs on the 'Knowledge-Based Economy' and 'Business R&D and Innovation' respectively and a multi-fund (ERDF-CF) programme for transport and environment infrastructure. The remaining 19 ERDF programmes are regional, one for each of the 17 regions (including Castilla y León) and two cities Ceuta and Melilla. However, the regional OPs also contain a national investment strand for interventions managed by national Ministries and agencies. As a result, the national ERDF unit within the DG for EU Funds (Ministry of Economy and Public Administration) is the Managing Authority for all regional programmes, although in practice management responsibilities are shared with Structural Funds secretariats in the regions (usually located in the regional government's Finance department), which are formally designated as intermediate bodies.

3.3 Preparation of the OP

The development of the Castilla y Leon ERDF OP was led by the Directorate-General for EU Funds of the national Ministry of Economy and Finance, involving close collaboration with the equivalent EU Funds unit of the Castilla y Leon regional government's Finance department. While the national level takes the lead because of its status as Managing Authority, the two secretariats are each responsible for the programming of their corresponding components of the OP, which includes a national funding tranche (co-funded by the central government's budget) and a regional tranche (co-funded by the regional government's budget). During the programming preparatory stages, each secretariat consulted the relevant national or regional governmental bodies about multi-annual plans, programmes and interventions which could be co-financed by the ERDF OP based on the eligible themes and interventions in the draft EU legislation (Community Strategic Guidelines, Structural Funds Regulations) and national guidance. Taking account of the available funding and the fit with EU and domestic priorities, these inputs were then assembled into the draft regional OP and consulted on more broadly with wider stakeholders. As stated in the OP, the main bodies involved in the programming of the ERDF OP outside of the central and regional government secretariats and implementing bodies were environment and gender equality bodies, local authorities, and economic and social partners.

Several mechanisms were used to involve partners in programming. First, technical working groups were organised at national and regional level comprising public officials with competences in the main areas of Cohesion policy expenditure. Second, direct information requests were made to these actors (as well as local corporations) to inform the programming. Third, the draft OP was presented to economic and social partners (the main trade unions as well as the Economic and Social Council, where all economic and social interests are represented). Finally, a public consultation was launched as part of the Strategic Environmental Assessment.

The most influential actors in the programming of the OP were central and regional government actors with ERDF coordination and implementation responsibilities, followed by the public bodies/agencies responsible for gender equality and the environment. The influence of economic and social partners - notably the Economic and Social Council (CES), the Confederation of Business Organisations of Castilla y Leon (CECALE) and the labour union (UGT)¹ - was less important but still perceived to be relevant. It should be noted, moreover, that economic and social partners are also consulted on the domestic sectoral policies and regional development plans that inform the ERDF OP through existing interest intermediation mechanisms and channels outside of the Cohesion policy framework. Finally, the input of non-governmental stakeholders to programming was limited or non-existent, although the public consultation did provide an opportunity for participation.

There is general satisfaction with the approach to programming and several beneficial effects of the partnership principle have been identified. The ex-ante evaluation of the OP presents the partnership approach as a key element of added value, both in terms of the involvement of a wide number of actors and the consensus achieved among these actors in the programming of the OP (Ministry of Economy and Finance 2007: 193-4). Moreover, the mature nature of the partnership based on the long experiences of all of the actors involved

¹ CES: Consejo Economic y Social (Economic and Social Council); CECALE: Confederacion de Organizaciones Empresariales de Castilla y Leon (Confederation of Business Organisations of Castilla y Leon) ; UGT : Sindicato Union General de Trabajadores (Labour Union)

in the governance of the Structural Funds, was considered to provide a solid basis for effective implementation of the Funds. Similarly, the regional secretariat considers that the programming approach contributed to transparency in regional policy decision-making, to improving the quality of the programme, and to minimising problems that could arise during implementation. By contrast, the main perceived challenge is the administrative effort required to coordinate the various inputs of partners.

The regional environment authority provided a mixed assessment. On the positive side, the consultative approach to formulating the OP was welcomed in terms of the provision of information and draft programme documents as well as the exchanges with the EU Funds secretariat and external consultants that supported the drafting process. More fundamentally, a common criticism by most of the regional environmental authorities in Spain, as expressed in the meetings of the environment network, is that there is insufficient opportunity for strategic reflection and dialogue to inform and add value to the policies choices. Rather, the programming of the OPs is dominated by a budgetary logic based on the identification of eligible interventions for co-financing. This is partly due to the nature of the Structural Funds regulatory framework, especially the requirement to earmark funds to pre-defined expenditure categories based on the Lisbon agenda; and from an environmental perspective, to the SEA Directive, which focuses on the minimisation of negative environmental impacts rather than maximising positive ones. Indeed, the Spanish environmental network had proposed a more ambitious methodology for a different impact assessment procedure adapted to the SF Regulations and specificities of Cohesion policy, but this was not applied by the national authorities. It is also of note that the lead role for integrating the sustainable development into the OP programming and organising the SEA process was taken by the central government's environmental authority, which differs from the Rural Development OP where there was much greater involvement of regional environmental authorities.

Finally, the private sector body represented in the Monitoring Committee was satisfied with their participation but considered that additional meetings could have enriched the process further.

3.4 Project selection and implementation

As required by the regulations, the responsibility for approving and modifying the OP's project selection criteria lies with the Monitoring Committee (MC). However, in practice the main decision-making responsibility lies with the individual managers of OP interventions (e.g. the different central and regional government Ministries, departments and agencies), which propose their own project selection criteria and select projects autonomously subject to certain conditions²: alignment with the relevant Priority axis and expenditure category; conformance with the selection criteria approved in the Monitoring Committee; and compatibility with national eligibility rules. The members of the MC are informed about the project selection criteria – namely, how they have been selected and modified – during the MC meetings and have the opportunity to make observations. According to the regional environment authority, additional criteria may sometimes be taken on board in response to these observations, but normally as second order criteria.

² Decreto 86/2008, de 23 de diciembre, que regula la participación de los organismos de la Comunidad de Castilla y León en la gestión, seguimiento, control, evaluación y difusión de las operaciones financiadas por el FEDER, FSE y Fondo de Cohesión, BOCYL N°251/27042 de 30 de diciembre de 2008.

Regarding project implementation, the regional secretariat interviewee stated that all projects are led and managed by single project promoters. While led by a single project promoter, the OP's flagship 'Palencia Urban Project 2007-2013' (ERDF €8m) is a participative project involving bottom-up consultation with a range of organisations and civil society groups in the regeneration of two neighbourhood districts ("El Cristo" and "el Barrio del Ave María") through 10 actions (the renovation of buildings, the abolition of architectural barriers, the establishment of cycle lanes, an indoor sports hall, solar energy street lighting etc). The project application was informed by a consultation with over 20 public, private and non-governmental organisations, which committed to participate and cooperate in the project during implementation.³

3.5 Programme management

The Managing Authority for the Castilla Leon ERDF OP is the central government's DG for EU Funds (Ministry of Economy and Finance), although this responsibility is shared with the EU Funds secretariat of the regional government of Castilla y Leon which is designated as an intermediate body for the OP. The EU Funds secretariat and the central MA are both responsible for the MA functions and tasks listed in Article 60 of the General Regulation with respect to interventions within their own territorial remit and competences. The MA has designated a further 18 intermediate bodies at national level to carry out MA tasks.⁴ The majority are Ministerial departments or agencies responsible for Research, Technology, Development and Innovation (RTDI) and business support, although there are also three local authorities that have been designated intermediate bodies under the local development priority axis of the OP. At the level of the regional government, there are nine implementing bodies within the different departments⁵ of the regional government⁵, although they do not have formal intermediate body status.

Similar to the MA arrangements, the Audit Authority of the Castilla Leon OP is located at national level - the General State Controller (IGAE) of the Ministry of Economy and Finance - but the tasks are shared. The IGAE discharges this responsibility on the basis of the work done by the Castilla y Leon General Controller, which is responsible for controlling the interventions of the regional government's public bodies. By contrast, the Certification

³ 1. Cámara Oficial de Comercio e Industria de Palencia. 2. AA.VV. Barrio Ave María. 3.C.d. Ave María. 4. Asociación Cultural Muriel. 5. Asociación Payas y Gitanas Romí. 6.Asociación Universidad Popular De Palencia Rey Alfonso VIII. 7. U.G.T. de Palencia. 8. Universidad de Valladolid (Vicerrectorado del campus universitario de palencia). 9. Federación Minusválidos de Palencia. 10. U.S. de CC.OO. de Palencia. 11. C.P.O.E. 12. Federación de Asociaciones de Vecinos de Palencia. 13. Ecologistas en Acción-Palencia. 14. Universidad de Valladolid (Escuela Técnica Superior de Ingenierías Agrarias). 15. Asociación Colectivo "Porque Sí". 16. Fundación Secretariado Gitano. 17. C. O. Arquitecto de león, delegación de Palencia. 18. AA.VV. Barrio del Cristo. 19. Colegio Oficial Ingenieros Técnicos Agrícolas "Castilla Duero" (COITA). 20. Centro Regional U.N.E.D. 21. Cátedra de Estudios de Género.

⁴ (1) D.G. de Telecomunicaciones y Tecnologías de la información (MITC) (2) D.G. de Servicios del Ministerio de Medio Ambiente, Medio Rural y Marino (3) D.G. de Comercio Interior (MITC) (4) D.G. de Política de las PYMES (5) S.G. de Incentivos Regionales (MEH) (6) Turespaña. Instituto de Turismo de España (MITC) (7) Instituto para la Diversificación y Ahorro de la Energía (IDAE) (8) Aeropuertos Españoles y Navegación Aérea (MF) (9) Administrador de Infraestructuras Ferroviarias (ADIF) (10) Instituto Español de Comercio Exterior (ICEX) (11) D.G. de Cooperación Local del Ministerio de Política Territorial (12) Consejo Superior de Cámaras Oficiales de Comercio, Industria y Navegación (13) INCYDE (14) Entidad Pública Empresarial Red.es (15) Ayuntamiento de Soria (16) Ayuntamiento de Burgos (17) Ayuntamiento de Palencia (18) D.G. de Industria (MITC).

⁵ 1. Agrarian Technological Institute of Castilla y León. 2. DG Telecommunications, of the Department for Development and Environment. 3. DG Transport, of the Department for Development and Environment. 4. DG Universities and Research, of the Department for Education. 5. DG Energy and Mines, Department of Economy and Employment. 6. DG Environmental Infrastructure, Department for Environment. 7. DG Cultural Heritage, Department for Culture and Tourism. 8. Investments and Services Agency of Castilla y León. 9. DG Innovation and Administrative Modernisation, Department of Regional Administration.

Authority tasks are centralised at the ERDF Payment's unit of the DG EU Funds (Ministry of Economy and Finance).

The ex-ante evaluation of the OP assessed the management arrangements and capacity as being adequate, including the horizontal and vertical coordination mechanisms among the managing and implementing bodies. Similarly, the regional secretariat argues that the management structure work wells and is effective. While some other Spanish regions would like MA authority to be devolved to the regions for 2014-2020, this is not the position of the Castilla Leon regional government which considers the present shared management arrangements to work well.

A measure that supports OP management capacity at the regional level is the annual programme of training, which aims to enhance the knowledge and understanding of the programme's objectives, interventions and rules among all partners involved in OP management and implementation. The DG for EU Funds has organised annual training courses to support this. The training is given over four days by public officials from the regional government and central government with expertise on Cohesion policy and covered administrative tasks (such as financial monitoring and control, compliance with EU rules on State aid, environment and gender equality, information and publicity etc.) as well as information sessions on the future of Cohesion policy.

In terms of the project management, the responsibility lies with the individual beneficiaries and intervention managers in the public administration with limited input from the OP management staff, aside from requests for monitoring data. As noted, the OP's flagship 'Palencia Urban Project 2007-2013' is unique by the standard of other projects in the OP in so far as it involves close collaboration between a range of public, private organisations and civil society groups across the different stages of the policy cycle. During the management and implementation phase, the key forum for the involvement of the different partners is the Municipal Environment Council which includes representation from all of the key stakeholders and meets on a quarterly basis to monitor and review implementation.

3.6 Monitoring

The main forum for involving partners in the monitoring of the OP is the Monitoring Committee. The rules governing the MC provides for the participation of a wide range of actors distinguishing permanent members from advisory members.

Permanent members

- Chair: DG EU Funds (national Ministry of Economy and Finance) under a co-chair system with the DG Budget and EU Funds (Ministry Finance, Castile and Leon regional government).
- Secretariat: DG ERDF Management (national Ministry of Economy and Finance) as Managing Authority.
- A representative of DG ERDF Management (national Ministry Economy and Finance)
- A representative of DG Budget and European Funds (Ministry of Finance of the regional Government Castilla y León).
- A representative from the Ministry of Environment of the Castilla y León government, as the body with responsibility for the Environment.

- A representative from DG Women (Department of Family and Equal Opportunities, Castilla y León regional government), as the body with responsibility for Equal Opportunities.
- A representative of the Territorial Programming and Evaluation unit of DG EU Funds, as the body with responsibility for monitoring and evaluation

Advisory members

- A representative of the Certification and Payments unit of the DG for EU Funds (national Ministry of Economy and Finance), as the Certification Authority.
- A representative of the General Fund Cohesion and Cooperation European Territorial Directorate General of Community Funds of the Ministry of Economy and Finance.
- A representative of the Administrative Unit of the European Social Fund of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.
- A representative of the unit responsible for the administration of the European Agricultural Funds for Rural Development (EAFRD) in the Castile and Leon and a representative of the Directorate General of Rural Development, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, responsible for coordination of rural development programs financed by the EAFRD.
- A representative of the Ministry of Environment in relation to the evaluation Environmental.
- A representative of each of the key economic and social partners: CECALE, CCOO, UGT and CES
- A representative of the Commission, which participate in the work of the Committee.
- One representative, where appropriate, of the EIB and the EIF.

The MC rules allow other civil society organisations and ngos to be invited to the meetings. In practice, this has not occurred.

Decisions in the MC are taken by consensus among the “permanent members”. There is no formal voting system as such, but all actors can express views on OP decisions and revisions during the meetings. The regional environmental authority is required to prepare an environmental report when a reprogramming decision is proposed. That said, the main function of the MC is to provide information to partners on programme implementation developments. According to the regional secretariat, the environmental body and a private sector representative body, a large amount of information is shared with all participants, which contributes to improving the understanding of the OP and improving relations with the management bodies (for instance, when seeking information from the implementing bodies for reporting). Whether this leads to changes in the economic development priorities or behaviour of the individual organisations remains unclear.

The main monitoring challenges relate to the indicators. First, the indicators are not always appropriate and sometimes require modifications during the period. Second, interpretation problems can arise, especially when there are staff changes in the implementing bodies. Third, national and regional bodies sometimes use different indicators for the same priorities which cannot therefore be aggregated and leads to a proliferation in indicators. Fourth, the collection, coordination and reporting of indicators is administratively

demanding, especially given the need to comply with a range of other regulatory requirements. Finally, there are variations across implementing bodies in the monitoring of the horizontal themes, although this has been partly offset by training sessions for intervention managers.

Aside from the monitoring committee, there are several thematic networks which operate at the national level and include representation from all of the regions. The gender equality and environmental networks already existed in the previous period, but additional networks have been created for 2007-2013 on the themes of local/urban development, R&D and innovation and social inclusion to debate and exchange experiences on how these themes are dealt with in Cohesion policy.

3.7 Evaluation

A Strategic reporting and Evaluation Advisory Committee is responsible for the coordination of evaluation and strategic reporting activity for all of the OPs in Spain. It is comprised of the national and regional programme managers and European Commission officials, covering the the ERDF, CF and ESF. Economic and social partners or civil society/ngo groups are not represented in the committee. The main tasks of the Committee have been to draw up the evaluation plan at the start of the period, with support from external consultants, and, subsequently, to prepare the terms of reference, oversee and review the evaluations of the communication plans and the thematic evaluations.

The thematic evaluations (on RTDI, sustainable development, and gender quality) were undertaken internally at the national level for all OPs by the evaluation unit of the DG EU Funds. As a national approach has been adopted in this period, no evaluations of the Castilla-Leon ERDF OP have been undertaken, aside from the OP communication plan evaluation and the operational evaluations that must accompany any proposal for a programme revision.

No evaluations have been undertaken of MLG in the 2007-2013 OP, although there was a chapter on governance and coordination in the MTE of the 2000-2006 OP.

The results of the national evaluations are presented in the regional monitoring committees, which allows the wider partnership to be informed about evaluation results and developments.

3.8 Conclusions and outlook

The main actors governing the Castilla y Leon ERDF ROP are public bodies involving cooperative relations at a horizontal level (between ministries at national level and between the equivalent departments at regional level) and vertical level (between regional and central government). Other horizontal partners, notably Economic and social partners, also contribute to programming and are represented in monitoring committees, but have limited influence over programme decision-making. Public consultation processes provide a mechanism for involving all stakeholders in programming, but many of the policy choices are pre-determined by domestic strategies and interventions. The main forum for partner involvement is the Monitoring Committee, but this is mainly serves an informational function and does not include representation from civil society organisations and NGOs. The national thematic networks and evaluation committee provide another mechanism for MLG, although participation is restricted to national/regional OP and intervention managers.

The main lessons for improving multi-level governance are four-fold. First, differentiated working arrangements are useful for involving different partners in accordance with their responsibilities and needs, but targeted measures are needed for involving non-governmental actors and civil society. Second, a greater level of strategic dialogue is needed with the wider partnership in the preparatory phases of programming prior to the selection of interventions. Third, regional environmental bodies should be granted a greater role in the SEA process, as is the case in the rural development OP. Finally, MLG in the monitoring and evaluation of the programme could be improved, notably by including civil society organisations and NGOs representation in the Monitoring Committees, and through better coordination across levels of governance in the definition, collection and supervision of monitoring indicators.

3.9 References

- Decreto 86/2008, de 23 de diciembre, que regula la participación de los organismos de la Comunidad de Castilla y León en la gestión, seguimiento, control, evaluación y difusión de las operaciones financiadas por el FEDER, FSE y Fondo de Cohesión, BOCYL Nº251/27042 de 30 de diciembre de 2008.
- Dirección General de Fondos Comunitarios (2008) Reglamento Interno del Comité de Seguimiento del Programa Operativo FEDER de Castilla y León para el Periodo 2007-2013, Aprobado por el Comité de Seguimiento celebrado el día 15 de febrero de 2008.
- Junta de Castilla y León (2007) Evaluación previa del Programa Operativo del Fondo Europeo de Desarrollo Regional (FEDER) de Castilla y León, 26 de febrero de 2007, Junta de Castilla y León.

3.10 Interviews and questionnaires

Managing Authority	Francisca Fernandez, Administrator, DG EU Funds, Castilla Leon regional government, intermediate body with some delegated managing authority responsibilities
Vertical Partner / Horizontal partner	Jesús Ángel Diez Vázquez, Programme Director of the Natural Heritage Foundation of Castilla y León, environment authority
Monitoring Committee	Sonia Martinez, Member of a business sector confederation (Confederación de Organizaciones Empresariales de Castilla y León - CECALE)

4. ERDF OP LANGUEDOC-ROUSSILLON

4.1 Characteristics of OP

The region of Languedoc-Roussillon is located in the south of France and comprises five departments which altogether count 2.5 million inhabitants. The GDP per head amounted to 78% of the national average in 2009, which is the second lowest rate in mainland France. In 2012, the regional unemployment rate is the highest in France– around 40% higher than the average for mainland France (Préfecture de la région Languedoc-Roussillon 2007).

The French Languedoc-Roussillon ERDF OP follows the Regional Competitiveness and Employment Objective. It has a total budget of about €817m, of which Community assistance through the ERDF amounts to €270m which accounts for approximately 1.9% of Community aid to France as part of Cohesion policy for 2007-2013.

4.2 Multilevel governance arrangements in Cohesion policy

Déconcentration and décentralisation

The French regions' autonomy is financial rather than judicial. In each region, a regional prefect (préfet de région) nominated by the central government in Paris coordinates the activities of the regional government. The préfet de region is seated in the Département (local authority) where the capital of the region is located. The Regional Council (conseil régional) is directly elected every six years. The Regional Council elects a self-government authority (président du conseil régional).

The main difference between France and other EU Member States lies within the differentiation between "decentralisation" (decentralisation) and "déconcentration" (deconcentration):

- Déconcentration (deconcentration): Following the principle of „l'Etat dans la Région" ("The State within the region"), the State or the government delegates certain tasks to local actors without weakening its central power. This means that the hierarchical dependence of Paris and other central authorities is maintained.
- Décentralisation (decentralisation): The State or government delegates responsibilities to regional or local authorities. The representatives are being elected; they make their own decisions and manage their own resources.

Following the first principle, within a region, there are civil servants who represent Paris. The General Secretary for Regional Policy SGAR (Secrétaire Général des Affaires Régionales) coordinates the central policy at regional level managing the EU Funds (ERDF, EAFRD, ESF...) to an important extent.

The funds are highly integrated within each region in the sense that the programming as well as the decision-making of the OPs are carried out by the same authorities (e.g. there is one common Monitoring Committee – MC – as well as a common programming committee for all EU funds' OPs in Languedoc-Roussillon). This system has been built on the objective to ensure a high degree of coherence between the funds implemented in the region (Préfecture de la région Languedoc-Roussillon & Secrétariat Général aux Affaires Régionales 2007).

Overall assessment of MLG in Cohesion Policy by interviewees

The MA of the OP Languedoc-Roussillon considers partnerships to be very important for the OP especially for disseminating information about EU funds and the developments within the OP on the ground. Overall, it seems however that due to the complex administrative political system in France the governance of the ERDF OPs at regional level is already very complicated. Therefore, partnerships are difficult to maintain throughout the OP policy cycle (Interview MA).

According to the French regional development agency, (DATAR) representative interviewed, more national coordination is needed between the European Commission, the MAs and the sectoral administrations as well as between the funds. This can only be achieved through more political support which is lacking due to the absence of a single responsible Ministry (Interview DATAR).

4.3 Preparation/programming of the OP

Involvement of partners in the preparation of the OP

The OP has been developed with the involvement of a regional and local authorities, institutional and socio-economic partners, the CESR (Conseil économique, social et environnemental régional – one of the two regional assemblies that exist in each region) and the government departments in specially created thematic working groups. A regional meeting on the 5th of September 2006 has allowed for the dissemination of the first OP draft to debate the regional priorities (Préfecture de la région Languedoc-Roussillon, 2007). The draft OP was also publically available for discussion in an online public consultation, but according to a representative of the Conseil Régional, only few comments were made due to the specific knowledge required (Interview MA).

The main decisions were taken by the Préfet on a proposal of the regional programming committee. The programming committee is led by the Préfet as well as the President of the Conseil Régional. It is also composed of:

- The Préfets of the départements (local authorities)
- The Presidents of the general councils
- The Accountant General of the region (Trésorier Payeur Général de la région Languedoc-Roussillon)

According to the MA, the order of influence in the programming phase was, due to the political and administrative system in France, 1) the Government (national level), 2) the Départements and 3) the civil society (Interview MA).

In 2007-2013, the DATAR (French Regional Development Policy Agency) was largely responsible in the decision-making and mainly in coordinating the ERDF, EARDF, ESF programmes in France. The DATAR was already fully involved in the phase of the OP programming. According to a representative of the DATAR who was involved in the programming of the ERDF OPs in 2006, between 15 and 20 DATAR representatives from various departments were involved in the programming through (Interview DATAR):

- Developing the strategy and logic of intervention at national level (National Strategic Reference Framework - NSRF) in parallel to the development of the state-region contracts (defining the financial investments and distribution)
- Coordinating the MAs. There is one responsible at DATAR for each region in France who then participates in the regional MC meetings as well.

Challenges of multi-level governance in the programming phase

According to all interviewees, while there were mechanisms in place to ensure that the views of the partners involved were taken into consideration, some challenges remained: The social and economic partners did not have much influence in reality according to the MA because they each had a long list of “wishes and comments” based on their own interests which could not all be accommodated (Interview MA).

A representative of the Conseil Général des Pyrénées-Orientales, who is a member of the MC committee, argued that the regional priorities and the thematic concentration of the OP were not totally aligned with the local needs and challenges. Moreover, the political affiliations and agendas played an important role and influenced the orientation of the programme (Questionnaire MC). In the future, the involvement of this MC member could be improved by intensifying the exchange with the MA, taking more consideration of the territorial challenges to align the OP’s objectives with “territorial reality”.

According to a representative of the DATAR, the views of the agency were however sufficiently integrated due to the following barriers:

- lack of human resources , lack of adequate human capacity and knowledge about EU funds
- The lack of financial resources in the crisis and the undermining of the role of Structural Funds and more precisely of evaluation, monitoring and other Technical Assistance activities
- The lack of political support for EU funds and the resulting difficulty to coordinate between the DATAR and the Ministries because there is not one single Ministry responsible for EU Funds (the EU Funds are linked to the Ministries based on their thematic concentration).

4.4 Project selection

Process of project selection

The Préfet, the Conseil de la Région and the Départements (local authorities) are the financial donors so they are the main decision-makers. Although the social and economic partners participate in the MC meetings and the thematic pre-committee meetings, they are not involved in the project selection (Interview MA, Questionnaire MC). In contrast to the ERDF OP where the MA take the ultimate decisions, in European Territorial Cooperation programmes the decisions have to be made by all partners. However, according to the MC member interviewed, the MA had asked its institution (Conseil Général des Pyrénées-Orientales) to be part of a local committee for selecting best practice projects (Questionnaire MC).

Application and selection from a project's point of view

The project "Rehabilitation of 188 housing units – "Cité le VIGUIER" – CARCASSONNE" led by the social enterprise ALOGEA with a total budget of EUR 7,081,000 is a wide-ranging energy rehabilitation programme for 188 buildings in 6 axes: 1) adapted building envelope treatment, 2) ventilation treatment, 3) heating regulation, 4) energy saving in common spaces, 5) summer comfort, 6) replacing gas-heating boiler by a wood-burning collective boiler (Questionnaire Project ALOGEA).

In the application phase, ALOGEA cooperated with the service provider SOCOTEC who carried out the preparatory study, as well as the French Environment and Energy Management Agency (ADEME) and the ERDF authority at the Conseil Régional. The interviewees were not able to describe or rate their satisfaction with these partnerships at the early stages of the project given that they were not yet involved in the company at that time and given the staff fluctuation in the institution (change of job, retirements, etc) (Questionnaire Project ALOGEA).

4.5 Programme management

Roles and functions in OP management

The OP sets out the bodies responsible for carrying out the main programme authority functions:

- The function of Managing Authority is carried out by the Préfet in cooperation with the general secretary for regional affairs at the Regional Council.
- The function of Certifying Authority is also carried out by the Préfet. The tasks are delegated to the Accountant General of the region (Trésorier Payeur Général de la région Languedoc-Roussillon).
- The Audit Authority is the "Commission Interministérielle de Coordination des Contrôles portant sur les opérations cofinancées par les fonds structurels européens - CICC" (the Interministerial Commission for Coordination of Controls in respect of operations part-financed by European Structural Funds).

The role of the MA in 2007-2013 is shared between the Préfet (i.e. the national level), the Region, and an intermediate body:

- The Conseil de la Region held 28% of the MA competence
- The intermediate body which was an agency of the government was responsible for financing – 30% of MA competence
- The rest of the MA competence lies within the Préfet, i.e. the government, which is coordinated by the DATAR.

More precisely, the Préfet and the Conseil de Région divide their tasks by sectoral competences (e.g. the Region is responsible for regional competencies such as economic development, energy, maritime ports, etc.).

Challenges related to the involvement of a large number of partners

According to the MA, this share of competences is very complex which led to substantial changes in the administrative handling of EU Funds for 2014-2020 (see Point 3 of this Case Study) (Interview MA).

In the OP implementation phase, the DATAR was involved by carrying out the following tasks:

- General coordination of the OPs and funds
- Technical assistance
- Managing the information and monitoring data system
- Acting as an intermediary between the European Commission and the MAs with regards to SFC data
- Assistance, information and support with regards to EU and national regulatory frameworks

Although the role of the DATAR was clearly specified, there were often coordination problems with the ministries due to blurred political competences which resulted in "responsibility shifting". The solution would be to designating a single ministry responsible for EU funds (Interview DATAR).

According to a representative of the Conseil Général des Pyrénées-Orientales, who is a member of the MC committee, another difficulty lies in the differences of interpretation of the documents and tasks at hand. This is partly related to differing (or lacking) competences. A possible solution would be for the MA to delegate certain tasks to MC members and to intensify the exchange (Questionnaire MC).

Partnership in the implementation from a project's point of view

In the implementation phase, the Lead Partner ALOGEA of the project analysed worked together with five different contracted service providers (architects, economists, label certification, etc). For the financial management tasks, ALOGEA worked together four different service providers and eight different institutional actors, namely:

- ERDF authorities (subsidies)
- ADEME (subsidies)
- Conseil Régional (subsidies)
- Government (Urban refurbishment programme 'ANRU', PALULOS & ECO PRET loans from the Caisse des dépôts et consignation)
- Caisse des dépôts et consignation (bank, lending institution)
- CILGERE (organisation collecting 1% housing from companies and financing refurbishment programmes)
- CONSEIL GENERAL: loan guarantee (50%)
- Community of urban centres "CARCASSONNE AGGLO": loan guarantee (50%)

The project lead partner reports that in general the partners have shown a strong will of cooperation. However, given that ALOGEA is a small enterprise, there is a very small number of staff foreseen for administrative work and financial management.

The company does not have sufficient resources to finance a permanent team or service contractor for financial management and monitoring tasks. Nevertheless the project lead partner describes the efficiency of the partnership as satisfactory (rating between 3-4 out of 5 possible points) although sometimes not perfectly coordinated.

The project lead partner is satisfied with the cooperation with the OP authorities and had no further comments except for the difficulty of reporting and financial management compared to the resources available (Questionnaire Project ALOGEA).

4.6 Monitoring

Composition of MC

In view of supporting an integrated approach and ensuring a complementary implementation of all funds in the region, the MC is responsible for all OPs in Languedoc-Roussillon namely "Regional Competitiveness and Employment – ESF Languedoc-Roussillon", "Rural Development – EAFRD Languedoc-Roussillon" and the Fisheries Fund (Préfecture de la région Languedoc-Roussillon 2007).

The MC is composed of the Préfet, regional members of parliament (deputies and senators), the State representatives in the region, the local authorities, co-financing institutions, social and economic partners, representatives of the research and innovation sector as well as environmental representatives. Representatives of the European Commission are associated with the works of the MC.

The DATAR also takes part in the MC meetings. Each region has one responsible authority for the region at DATAR (e.g. one person at DATAR responsible for Languedoc-Roussillon). This person then attends the MC meetings (approximately two meetings per year). The role of the DATAR at the meetings is mainly to explain or "translate" the national and EU Regulations to the MC participants, which has been much appreciated by the MAs. For instance, when the Commission changed the allowed share of financing for photovoltaic and solar energy, the DATAR decided on a methodology with the EC and then explained it in the MC meetings or answered questions in the case of doubts or misunderstandings (Interview DATAR).

Information dissemination

The information about the OP and the outcomes of the MC meetings are being disseminated regularly to the partners and authorities at all administrative levels which is much appreciated by the MA (Interviews MA and DATAR).

Effectiveness of participation in the MC meetings

MC members do not have voting rights; they participate in the discussions (e.g. content of the AIR). According to the MA, the participants in the MC often seem to be present because they are obliged to as "active participation is lacking". In the opinion of the MA, this is because the issues discussed in the MC meetings are too technical and too complex but cannot be simplified to a degree to support the participation of all social and economic

partners. There is more active participation in the framework of specific thematic seminars and trainings (e.g. training on the Joint European Resources for Micro-to-Medium Enterprises Initiative (JEREMIE) with representatives of the banking and financial sector) (Interview MA).

This view is shared by the DATAR representative interviewed. In his opinion, the MC meetings are often used as platforms for expressing wishes and concerns which often are not based on profound EU knowledge (Interview DATAR).

Moreover, the MA argues that the involvement of multiple partners currently results in more complex and time-consuming decision-making processes. The solution is that in preparation of the 2014-2020 period, more efforts will be made to explain the OP technicalities to the partners involved given that judging from the comments in the MC meetings the partners do not have sufficient knowledge of EU funds, regulations etc (Interview MA). A representative of the Conseil Général des Pyrénées-Orientales criticised the MC meetings for being a "platform for presenting information on statistics" rather than an platform for debate. According to this interviewee, the most fruitful meetings are the informal discussions preceding the official sessions (Questionnaire MC).

Cooperation in monitoring tasks from the point of view of a project

The Lead Partner ALOGEA of the project analysed worked together with four different contracted service providers (architects, economists, label certification, etc) on the monitoring requirements. The partnership was considered satisfactory and rather efficient (rating of 4 points out of 5) (Questionnaire Project ALOGEA).

4.7 Evaluation

Only the MA and the DATAR have an input in informing decisions about evaluation activities; the reports are published and disseminated online as well as in the newsletter (Interviews MA and DATAR).

At the DATAR, there is a specific unit responsible for carrying out evaluation activities. The DATAR proposes evaluation topics as well as common layouts and provisions for the terms of reference. The evaluations carried out in the OPs are an important part of the DATAR's portfolio as the coordinator of the funds and OPs (which will be maintained in 2014-2020) (Interview DATAR).

The governance of the OP has not been subject to evaluation (AIR 2011; Interviews).

4.8 Outlook

Changes in the political administrative structure in France

As a result of the last presidential elections in France, the country has been going through some institutional changes which have important implications for the governance structure of the EU funds implementation in the 2014-2020 period. In the period of 2014-2020, the regions will in fact gain in independence from the government and the role of the préfetures is becoming increasingly unclear. The ERDF will then be 100% decentralised. The ESF will be decentralised which means the number of actors will increase (while it was only implemented by a national programme until now) and so will the EAFRD. Moreover, in order to obtain a more strategic approach, the regions are considering the option of

creating a multi-fund approach combining the ESF, ERDF and EAFRD at regional level. This means that in the 2014-2020 period, 100% of the MA responsibilities will be given to the Region meaning that the government will no longer have a say and will only have a coordinating role. The Region will from then on be corresponding with the European Commission and the DATAR, in contrast to the Préfet (Interviews MA and DATAR).

Future plans based on lessons learned

The MA argued that in order for the partners to be better involved in the next programming period of 2014-2020, the thematic concentration of the OP must be precise enough to clarify which partners are most relevant to the development of the programme. The partners must also be better informed about the functioning of EU funds in general and the ERDF and the OP in specific. This can be achieved through specific trainings for social and economic partners (Interview MA).

On the other hand, a representative of the Conseil Général des Pyrénées-Orientales, who is a member of the MC committee, argued that the requirement of a strong thematic concentration in the future OP will make it difficult to take on board the opinions and interests of a large number of partners, especially given the stark differences between the territories of the region. This in turn will result in a misrepresentation of the region (Questionnaire MC).

According to the DATAR representative, public consultations should become obligatory and systematic and they should be more flexible for involving partners. Also, the European Commission should increasingly share good practices on the involvement of partners in other countries and OPs. Most importantly, a single Ministry should be chosen as the responsible authority in contrast to blame and responsibility shifting (Interview DATAR). The draft OP for 2014-2020 is now being commented by the départements and the civil society. The feedback and exchange helps shaping the OP. However, in contrast to the programming in 2007, the feedback and comments are collected electronically rather than in meetings as this proves to be more effective (Interview MA).

Although the financial resources and staff capacities impede efficient implementation, monitoring and financial management, the Project Lead Partner interviewed was satisfied with the cooperation with both the various project partners (public institutions and service providers) as well as OP authorities. The fluctuation of staff is however very high at ALOGEA itself as well as the partner institutions which makes it difficult to maintain good contact with specific contact persons within these relevant institutions. The project is however planning to apply for ERDF funding again in the next programming period (Questionnaire Project ALOGEA).

4.9 References

- Préfecture de région LR (2007), Programme Opérationnel « Compétitivité et Emploi » (2007-2013) Languedoc-Roussillon, Volume 2 : Stratégie régionale, Axes prioritaires, Maquette financière, Dispositions de mise en œuvre, Version of 18 September 2007.
- Languedoc-Roussillon (2012), Rapport Annuel D'Execution – Objectif Compétitivité Régionale et Emploi, Programme Opérationnel FEDER, Année 2011, 28 June 2012.

4.10 Interviews and questionnaires

Managing Authority	Stéphane Nguyen, MA OP Languedoc-Roussillon, Conseil Régional Languedoc-Roussillon, 17.07.2013
Vertical Partner: DATAR	Mickael Vaillant, French Regional Development Policy Agency DATAR, National Coordination of Structural Funds OPs, 18.07.2013
Monitoring Committee	Florent Martiche, MC member, Conseil Général des Pyrénées-Orientales, Pôle Europe / Affaires transfrontalières, 2.08.2013
Project leader	David Spanghero & Baptiste Raymond, ALOGEA, Responsible for the Management Service of the Energy, sustainable development and rehabilitation services, Aude (Languedoc-Roussillon), 21.08.2013

5. ERDF OP NORTH EAST ENGLAND

5.1 Characteristics of the OP

The Region of the North East of England comprises two Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics 2 (NUTS 2) regions : the Region of Tees Valley & Durham and the region of Northumberland & Tyne-and-Wear. Although the North East of England is highly urbanised, it is UK's least populated (and densely populated) region, with a population of only 2.6m people. The region has been an objective 2 region since the 1980s and is a classic region of industrial decline with a legacy of heavy industry and mining and a record of declining performance since the beginning of the 20th century.

The Competitiveness and Employment ERDF Operational Programme (OP) for North East England 2007-2013 has a budget of €375.7m of ERDF. The OP is split into two main priorities Enhancing and Exploiting Innovation, and Business Growth and Enterprise, with Technical Assistance forming a third nominal priority.

5.2 Multilevel governance arrangements in Cohesion policy

The regionalisation of England

During the 2000s there was a period of strong regional policy in the UK with considerable devolution of powers and responsibility for economic development and related policy domains. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were given devolved government with wide, but varying powers, and the nine English regions were given regional development agencies which worked alongside integrated offices for central government in the region. The Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) were central government controlled and funded, but had a local board comprising representatives from business, local government and other regional institutions. The RDAs were responsible for the development of a regional economic strategy (RES) in partnership with local authorities and other bodies, and also for regional planning strategies covering transport and housing etc.

In the 2000-06 programme period the North East regional OP was managed by the Government Office for the region, although the RDA, One NorthEast, was heavily involved in the design of the strategy and as a provider of matched funding. For the 2007-13 period the RDA was initially delegated the managing authority role and established a dedicated team for this, although the design and negotiation of the programme was still led by the Government Office. However mid way through the programme in 2010 the new Coalition government decided to abolish the RDAs and regional government offices and the management team for the OP was transferred to the Department for Communities and Local Government, although the staff remained based in the region. So what had been a programme designed and managed at a devolved regional level is now managed by a local team of central government.

An additional element in the restructuring of economic development has been a policy towards localism pursued by the Coalition government with the formation of a new set of Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs) as business-led public-private consortia at a sub-regional scale. These are usually built around groups of local authorities and in the case of the North East there are two LEPs: one for Tees Valley in the south of the region with five unitary local authorities, and one covering the rest of the region including Northumberland County, the five Tyne and Wear authorities and Durham County.

Multi-level governance in Cohesion Policy in England

Sub-national governance in the UK is complex as there is not a consistent structure across the country. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland there are wide-ranging devolved powers including responsibility for local government. In England there is now mainly a structure of local government which varies between single and dual tier, and a range of different forms of partnerships between local government areas.

- England was formerly divided into nine **regions**, roughly equivalent in scale to Scotland or Wales. Eight of these English regions have now been abolished along with all associated government bodies with the exception of the ERDF programme management structures. The one region to be maintained is London, which was the only one that had an elected authority and which continues unchanged.
- England has 193 district council **local authorities** which represent the lowest tier of local government. 123 of these are unitary councils with the full range of responsibilities, and including city authorities, metropolitan districts, and other single tier authorities. The remaining 70 are located within 27 shire county council or upper tier local authorities. Where two tiers exist the county council focuses on strategic matters including education, transport and social services, whilst districts cover housing, waste collection and local plans.
- Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs) consist of groups of local authorities working in partnership with representatives from business and other organisations to promote economic development. There are currently 39 LEPs in England, and this policy only applies in England. Although not all local authorities were initially in LEPs they all are now, and with some in more than one LEP area.

In the North East of England there are currently 12 single tier local authorities and 2 LEPs.

Currently national government is responsible for the management of ERDF through the Department for Communities and Local Government, in partnership with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills which oversees LEPs. The managing authority employs regional secretariats which work with local partnerships covering the former RDA areas. ERDF programmes are currently defined at the regional scale.

5.3 Preparation/programming of the OP

Consultation process

Initial development of the OP was at the regional scale involving the regional Government Office and the regional development agency.

The region was described as having consultation overload and 'death by consultation' but this was also seen as a highly positive aspect of the 2007-13 programme. In part the huge scale of consultation was due to the coming together of the consultation process for the development of the Regional Economic Strategy (RES, a statutory requirement on the RDA) and the development of the OP. The RES was completed in 2006 just as the OP was being developed so the two fitted together very closely.

The process of developing the RES was highly interactive and with a very high degree of consultation. The underlying evidence base included an exercise called Strategic Horizons in

the North East (SHiNE) which was an inclusive foresight exercise led by the RDA with a number of expert panels and consultation events and a final programme of dissemination. This drew on the views of all public bodies in the region, business representatives, higher education, unions, voluntary sector, etc. 200 stakeholders were initially interviewed, with more participating in dissemination events. The results of the SHiNE exercise then fed into the RES which had its own consultation process, and which identified the key elements in the region's overarching economic strategy. This provided a framework for the development of the OP.

The Government Office developed the OP with the assistance of consultants who helped to assemble the evidence base, undertook an ex ante evaluation and strategic environmental assessment, and then developed the OP itself. This was overseen by a steering group made up of partners, with representation from central government, the RDA, local authorities and other social partners. This group was presented with a series of drafts and working papers that provided underpinning evidence for the programme.

The consultants were working with the RDA and with members of the steering group, pulling together the data which was the underpinning evidence. A series of proposals for the programme were put forward to the steering group, and in the context of the regional economic strategy it was clear that the region wanted to move towards a principle of concentration on two key areas which were innovation and business enterprise. Those proposals then became the focus for a series of consultation events with partners. The initial draft was open to consultation, then reshaped and a formal proposal was subject to a formal written consultation process, leading to the early drafts of the programme itself, which was again subject to a statutory three month consultation process, a strategic environmental assessment, plus an equalities impact assessment, all of which allowed partners to contribute.

Satisfaction with the involvement of various partners

Whilst there was a strong process of consultation, there was nonetheless a view among some in the local authority sector that their role had been limited and that the strategy that emerged was driven by the interests of the RDA. The resultant strategy tended to focus on the needs and interests of the main Tyne and Wear conurbation, which was diverging from Tees Valley and the more rural areas. However, the region as a whole was willing to support the strategy.

"So, you could argue that people had been consulted to death within about 2 to 3 years because they had already had a two to three year process on the regional economic strategy and then had to go through another one (...) which got us to the end in a really strong position in terms of ownership for where exactly we wanted the ERDF operational programme to be." (Interview MA)

Within sub regions there were discussions between the local authorities and other members of their strategic partnerships which also helped inform the local authority responses to the proposals.

For 2014 the situation is to be considerably changed as strategies are being developed by LEPs with strong local authority input.

5.4 Project selection

Process of project selection

The Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC) agreed the terms of reference and the selection criteria, but then the actual appraisal and selection decisions, initially at least, were made within the RDA, but against the selection criteria agreed by the PMC. So partners were not initially directly engaged in selection. The part of the RDA secretariat which was doing the MA function was a discrete unit within the RDA - there was a separation of functions - and reported to a Programme Executive Group which was a technical group set up beneath the PMC.

This changed after the abolition of the RDA and the role of partners was strengthened. After 2010 the statutory instrument that had established the delegation of MA functions to the RDA was rescinded, and the staff transferred to DCLG as the MA, and so the selection decisions were shifted to the programme executive group. However, the overarching strategic dimension still exists and the secretariat still had the role of doing the appraisal but their recommendation for endorsement or selection is now made within the programme executive group itself. The PMC meets three times per year but the Programme Executive Group (PEG) has been meeting every month or five weeks depending upon the level of business but with additional virtual procedures in place, if needed. The terms of reference for both the PMC (now Local Management Committee - LMC) and the programme executive group have been revised to introduce conflicts of interest procedures as a consequence.

The Programme Executive Group now consists of 11 members with senior representation from:

- Deputy Chair of the LMC (Chair) (1)
- Local Enterprise Partnerships (2)
- Local Authorities (4)
- Higher Education Sector (1)
- VCS (1)
- Private Sector (2)

There are three main procurement approaches for projects: non-competitive selection (for strategic projects), limited bidding and open bidding, but all must go through the same three stages of selection. First there are the commissioning documents which PEG agree. This leads to a call for proposals. The outline applications which come in are filtered by the MA who make recommendations to the PEG who then endorse those outline applications. The full applications then go back to the MA team for a full technical appraisal, before final recommendations for approval being submitted again to the PEG. Finally it goes back to the MA to arrange the funding. So at two stages there is a stronger role for the partners in terms of selection since 2010.

Local authorities seem to be satisfied with the arrangements for project selection as endorsement of decisions has been devolved to the PEG. Members are provided with summaries of project appraisals, and can request a copy of all the relevant documentation if needed. Officers present the project appraisals to PEG and PEG members can request special conditions or further clarification of projects, and have done so on occasion.

Project level

The project case study team was satisfied with the process of project selection. Despite the shift from ONE to DCLG during the application process, it was felt that the process was handled well with only minor delays. Queries were clearly articulated with a timescale for responses. Useful guidance was given on where to obtain state aids advice. Queries from the project team were quickly addressed. Following the application, there were several queries from DCLG which were resolved after just one meeting. Similarly, the project team were under the impression that an approval decision would not be made until early 2013, but this actually happened at the beginning of December 2012, just a week after the application queries meeting.

5.5 Programme management

Project management functions and roles

PEG and the LMC both hold a role in programme management. PMC/LMC in particular provides more of a strategic direction to make sure that the general direction of the programme reflects the trajectory set within the operational programme. Their remit was to make sure the operational programme is developed. There are some technical aspects of programme management involving the PEG, such as their increased role in appraisal and endorsing recommendations on decommitment. However the core of programme management sits within the MA and that now takes place directly in the local team, but also now at the national level there is a much stronger role for the MA in terms of the overarching programme management such as irregularities and management information.

The MA always did perform a national level MA role, as DCLG has always been the managing authority, but having taken those intermediary body functions that were delegated back with the ones that it had before, that gives a very strong oversight of programme management. Regional partners have more of a strategic engagement rather than a direct involvement in programme management.

Satisfaction with involvement in OP management

Again partners are happy with their oversight of management through PEG, and receive progress reports at every meeting. PEG makes decisions on some aspects such as payments and value for money on outputs. DCLG provide support for this role. The local authority respondent was very happy with this aspect of the programme and felt no real improvements were needed.

Project level

From the project perspective, the financial management and monitoring, of the project has been incredibly smooth and there was no problems.

5.6 Monitoring

Composition

The MA used the basis of the regulations (Article 11) to identify who should be on the PMC. The terms of reference for the PMC set out which sectors should be represented. It is chaired by the MA, with Commission advisors, government departments and

representatives from all of the partners, from public, private, voluntary, trade union, private sector, environment sector, and finally observers from the rural programme in terms of demarcation and alignment issues. The MA allocated one or two places to partner types and then asked them to nominate a representative of that sector to act as a delegate. It was then incumbent upon the sectors to organise themselves into electing somebody or select the processes that led to a person acting as their representative.

So in the case of the private sector there was the Northern Business Forum which is the acknowledged representative of the private sector in the North East, because it brings together the Federation for Small Business, CBI and the Chamber of Commerce. They were invited to nominate their two representatives. Similarly there is an umbrella organisation for the voluntary sector for the North East, VONNE. The regional TUC represented the trade unions. From 2010, the representation from the private sector was strengthened and the representation from LEPs was added which meant more private sector members. The local authorities from the outset were allocated 4 places as there were four sub-regions in the NUTS 1 region but each of the 4 allocated members (elected councillors) were allowed to bring an officer to assist them.

The effectiveness of involving different partners

One of the lessons learnt from previous PMCs was to avoid the scenario where people just come together and moan about their sectoral representation. From the outset in the terms of reference it was made clear that PMC members had a strategic obligation to the programme to make this work – a joint and several responsibility for the strategic delivery of the programme. The private sector members took this responsibility particularly seriously and provided useful scrutiny of business measures such as the JEREMIE fund.

The intention of the PMC/LMC is to be discursive and strategic. Presentations are made to facilitate discussion and ownership of the programme. The PMC/LMC also has to sign off on modification to the programme strategy.

More technical issues are dealt with in the PEG, so the LMC can be more of a strategic forum. For some members such as elected politicians, the issues can be quite technical and so it is helpful that they can be supported by officers from their authorities who can also help maintain continuity over time.

Monitoring data was felt to be very good with simple visual reports and traffic light systems that enabled clear understanding of progress. Data is circulated to PEG and LMC for discussion before submission to the Commission.

5.7 Evaluation

The LMC agreed a 4-5 year evaluation plan, which incorporated thematic as well as sectoral, spatial, project and mid-term evaluation. With the changes in management the strong project based evaluation and a mid-term evaluation have been maintained, but the MA has struggled to find the resources for some of the thematic evaluation and it has been sidelined by other priorities. Some other research has been commissioned, but not as much as originally planned. Currently the partnership are just going out to tender on a mid-point review for the Jeremie programme, which will indirectly funded by the MA.

All outcomes from the evaluations have been discussed with partners through PEG and the LMC. Anything that has been evaluated and all reports are presented to the LMC. Also

projects are not closed and don't get their final 10% of funding unless they can demonstrate that they have completed their evaluation. The project needs an evaluation before they can be closed down.

The MA has also put aside money, for partners to bid into for post 2014 preparatory work. This has allowed LEPs and local partners and universities and the financial instruments community to support significant research which has helped to shape their proposals for the new programme.

5.8 Outlook

The MA took the view that the engagement of partners from the outset has been absolutely critical to the operation of the programme. The programme seems to be broadly on track, despite the upheavals in the region and there seems to be a strong relationship across the partnership. There is a strong feeling of ownership in the programme.

In terms of multi-level governance there is close collaboration between the MA and local partnership and departments at the national level but also close links with Commission desk officers. The MA felt that the link with the Commission was a very important relationship and that it would be important to find a way to preserve that in the future programme. The link with the Commission was important for understanding what they were looking for from a programme, but also making the DG Regio staff aware of the needs of the region and how things work on the ground. Whenever a desk officer visits, the partnership makes a point of showing them some projects and creating time for informal discussions between the Commission and partners.

The current proposals for the 2014-20 programme are somewhat uncertain as to detailed management as the proposed England-wide programme is expected to be largely devolved to LEPs for implementation although with MA support from regional level teams in DCLG. Projects have been given very little information about future arrangements for interaction with the MA.

5.9 References

- Government Office for the North East (2007) Competitiveness and Employment ERDF Operation Programme Document 2007-2013, GONE, Newcastle.
- One North East (2006) Leading the Way: Regional Economic Strategy, 2006-2016, ONE, Newcastle.
- Regeneris (2011) North East ERDF Operational Programme 2007-13 Mid Term Evaluation, March 2011, Regeneris.

5.10 Interviews and questionnaires

Managing Authority	Iain Derrick, Department of Communities and Local Government
Vertical Partner:	Heather Smith, European Funding Officer, Northumberland County Council (Observer at LMC and member of PEG)
Monitoring Committee	Questionnaire sent to social partner but no response received
Project leader	Jo Thornton, Deputy CEO, Generator

6. ERDF OP NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA

6.1 Characteristics of OP

The North Rhine-Westphalia ERDF Operational Programme (OP NRW) in Germany is implemented under the objective of Regional Competitiveness and Employment with a total budget of €3.3bn, of which €2.2bn are funded by the ERDF (European Commission, DG Regio Website). This amount represents approximately 5% of the total EU resources invested for Germany in the period of 2007-2013 (ibid.). The programme has four priority axes, namely: 1) Strengthening the entrepreneurial basis, 2) innovation and knowledge-based economy, 3) sustainable urban and regional development, and 4) technical assistance.

6.2 Multilevel governance arrangements in Cohesion policy

In accordance with article 59 of the Council Regulation No 1083/2006 (Operational Programme, 2012):

- The role of Managing Authority (MA) is carried out by the Ministry of Economy, Energy, Industry, Mittelstand and Crafts of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW)
- the NRW BANK is the CA, and
- the NRW Ministry of Finance (Department of Financial Control of EU funds) takes on the role of Audit Authority for the OP NRW.

A Monitoring Committee (MC) as well as a working committee and an objective-2-secretariat ("Ziel-2-Sekretariat") – from here on referred to as "Secretariat" – were established to support the MA.

The compliance of the OP with the partnership principle provided for in article 11 of the Council Regulation 1083/2006 is first and foremost applied in the MC and its working committee which includes representatives of the Commission, the national government, the Regions and other authorities and organisations including social and economic partners (article 63 of the Council Regulation No 1083/2006; Ministerium für Wirtschaft, Energie, Bauen, Wohnen und Verkehr des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen 2012).

For this case study it was not possible to find appropriate interview partners on the part of projects. Neither the Secretariat nor the interviewed MC member could help out by forwarding contacts. Additionally, every attempt to contact a project directly via contact information on the objective-2 website was not successful.

6.3 Preparation/programming of the OP

The MA is the responsible unit for coordinating the strategic and financial implementation of the OP which is why it had the most important role in the programming phase (Operational Programme, 2012). In view of involving different partners in the programming phase, the MA organised large stakeholder meetings as well as public consultations (Interview Secretariat). This was confirmed by the representative of the MC (Questionnaire MC).

Consultation and coordination in multi-level governance

In the 2011 AIR it is described that the NRW government had introduced a consultation process which included municipalities, regions as well as economic and social partners (Ministerium für Wirtschaft, Energie, Bauen, Wohnen und Verkehr des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen 2012).

The representative of the Ministry of Economics and Technology confirmed that the preparation of the OP was organised in an interactive process with all different types of actors defined in article 11 of the Council Regulation No 1083/2006 (Interview Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology). The Federal Ministry is by its own admission responsible for the partnership principle in which the exact division of tasks and deliveries is regulated. This actor verifies that the process which includes all funds and programmes is not a top-down regulation but represents all interests and positions between the national and the regional level while observing the EU regulations. In this way, the strategic directions, a focus on certain topics within the subsequent programmes, and the elaboration of a common position is taken into account in the preparation phase. Conversely, thematic objectives which are not defined in the strategy will not be approved in the OP (ibid.). The representative of the Federal Ministry described the following chronological order of events applied as a basis for the programming phase:

- Definition of strategic priorities in consultation with the EU level
- Coordination of preliminary proceedings: discussion in different committees in NRW, determination of funding guidelines and focus areas
- Thematic concentration of the strategies and processes to be applied at regional level

The actual programming of the regional OPs in Germany is subsequently carried out solely by the regional level. According to the national department for EU cohesion policy and EU Funds, the national level is not represented in the preparation process at this stage. However, thanks to the preliminary strategic discussions in the scope of the partnership principle the national level is sufficiently involved in the process and their views are taken into account (ibid.).

Satisfaction with the involvement and contribution

The ex-ante evaluation was carried out during the programming process. Therefore external evaluators were continuously involved in the programming process through giving comments and recommendations (Kienbaum und Regionomica 2006). The ex-ante evaluation concludes that the division of tasks is sufficiently described in the OP (ibid.). In the document it is further stated that the aforementioned Secretariat which supports the MA, MC and Working Committee, is well established and acknowledged. The same goes for the Working Committee which supports the MC and gives valuable input to programme implementation (ibid.). As for the CA, the ex-ante evaluation recommends a thorough examination of the effect of the additional administrative burden on the efficiency of programme implementation. The composition of the committees is considered reasonable with the exception of an under-representation of the urban dimension (ibid.). This also concerns representatives from structurally weak areas which gain still high funds.

According to a representative of the Secretariat, the MC is the communication and information platform in NRW and is largely much appreciated by the Secretariat. The feedback and comments from the partners involved have been highly valued especially in the programming phase (Interview Secretariat). Comments help covering all aspects that can otherwise easily be overlooked by the MA (e.g. aspects in rural development). The MA filters comments and takes the right to only use those valuable for the programme process. In contrast, the interviewed MC member was not entirely satisfied. In his opinion, the formal involvement of the sub-regional level, e.g. through regional development agencies at an early stage of designing the OP was insufficient. The interviewee therefore complains about missing transparency in the follow-up process (Interview Secretariat).

Overall, the Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology finds that the institution has been sufficiently involved in accordance with its responsibility and competence. A clear division of tasks is considered very important in NRW and the system is very well established. The interviewee described a highly intense as well as direct exchange with the MA. The regional level is actively engaged as well.

In contrast, the MC member interviewed claimed that the views of his institution were only taken into account in the final documents upon intense lobbying activities. His satisfaction with the institution's involvement is moderate (Questionnaire MC).

Advantages and Disadvantages of involving many partners

In the opinion of the Secretariat the main disadvantage of involving numerous different partners is the additional workload that comes with it. Interests that are brought in must be filtered by the MA. An example is the Ruhr region which wants to position itself in the programme but must be hampered by the MA repeatedly. On the other hand, thanks to the involvement of multiple partners, various needs and requirements can be evaluated and reassessed (Interview Secretariat).

From the point of view of the MC, an early involvement can lead to a stronger positioning compared to other regions. For example, the interviewed MC member was thereby able to position the Region Köln/Bonn in the best possible way given the competition among North Rhine-Westphalian sub-regions (Questionnaire MC).

6.4 Project selection

The regional state government of NRW decided to implement competition proceedings for the 2007-2013 period in order to reach the objectives and improve the quality of the OP. Funding decisions about projects are made by respective technical departments of the Federal Ministry of Economy, Energy, Industry, Mittelstand and Crafts of North Rhine-Westphalia, other ministries or funding institutions as Intermediate Bodies (IB) in coordination with the MA which takes the overall responsibility (Operational Programme, 2012). Additionally, some single projects are assigned in responsibility of the technical respective ministries on the basis of the technical programmes (Operational Programme 2012). Within the MC the project selection criteria are defined but no decisions about single projects are made. The latter are implemented only at regional level (Operational Programme, 2012).

For the project applicants, there is a lot of information material available with regards to the application and implementation processes (Ministry of Economy, Energy, Industry, Mittelstand and Crafts of North Rhine-Westphalia 2011/n.a).

Decision-making

According to the Secretariat competitions proceedings are organised through competent departments within the institution. The MA verifies the basic requirements in accordance with the terms of reference. Subsequently an independent jury assesses the contents of the project proposals (Interview Secretariat).

According to the Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology the discussion about project selection is more about transparent procedures and prioritisation and less about the selection of single projects. The interviewee stated that the involvement of different partners contributes to a more effective project selection. During the development of the strategic direction all participants in the MC have a right to vote. Finally, the MC takes decisions based on the discussions and different perspectives. Likewise for large projects the national level is only involved indirectly as the decisions are taken by the European Commission (Interview Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology).

The MC member has a different opinion. He states that he has no say on project selection as this falls under the responsibility of the MA. He also mentions that he is not invited to discuss prospective calls for tenders (Questionnaire MC).

Assessment of competition proceedings

The ex-ante evaluation of the OP (Kienbaum und Regionomica 2006) describes the competition proceedings in a positive light with regards to the efficient use of funds and the "reduction of free-rider effects". On the other hand, already at that stage of programming substantial administrative burden had been expected (ibid.). Indeed, in the scope of the evaluation of competitive processes in the OP it was found that the dimensions a) duration of the procedure, b) effort and c) transparency of the processes are of importance for competitions (Burkert, et al. n.a).

In the view of the MC member the involvement of different partners would contribute to more effective project selection. He believes, especially when it comes to regionally significant projects (spatial development planning demands, close involvement of regional practitioners), it would be of great value (Questionnaire MC).

6.5 Programme management

The MA is responsible for managing and implementing the OP as laid down in article 60 of the Council Regulation No 1083/2006. For the MC the working committee in which local public authorities and regional development agencies are not represented prepares the MC meetings and monitors the OP implementation (Questionnaire MC member). The MA, the MC and the working committee are supported by the aforementioned Secretariat under the direct control of the MA (Interview Secretariat).

It is stated in the 2011 AIR that the existing coordination between the departments responsible for different EU interventions at regional level strengthens the complementarity and coherence between ERDF and ESF, ERDF and EAFRD or ERDF and ETC objectives. Continuous arrangements and meetings between the different MAs of different regional OPs and a mutual involvement in the MCs at national level therefore ensure the consistency of the implementation process of each OP (Ministerium für Wirtschaft, Energie, Bauen, Wohnen und Verkehr des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen 2012).

Division of responsibilities

The programme management is carried out solely at regional level. The MA is fully responsible for financial management, project selection as well as coordination (Interview Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology).

The MA administers the federal funds including co-financing in the framework of the common task (Gemeinschaftsaufgabe). Hence, in the actual implementation the federal state has no function. The implementation is characterised by a clear division of tasks which is considered as satisfactory and functional by the interviewee (Interview Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology).

The MC member confirms that there is no further formal involvement beyond MC meetings or communication which boils down to the approval of the Annual Implementation Reports. He is not fully satisfied, as in his opinion North Rhine-Westphalia needs a more balanced partnership between the regional level and the (sub-)regions. He would have wished for more transparency, intense communication, more detailed and more regular information, more opportunities for dialogue and discussions during the MC meetings.

One important function of the Ministry is, by its own account, the possibility to discuss legal aspects which the regional level is confronted with regarding the EU and Structural Funds regulations. It serves as the national contact point for the MA. Every three month, meetings with the ERDF MAs are held in order to discuss funding guidelines, the involvement of Intermediate Bodies and all aspects of the policy cycle (Interview Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology). Additionally, common seminars with the European Commission are organised in conclusion of the OP to clarify unresolved questions (ibid.).

Difficulties in the OP Implementation

Many actors, especially Intermediate Bodies acting on behalf of the MA are involved in the form of thematic groups (e.g. research or urban planning) in the current programming period which is considered a very complex structure (Interview Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology). At the moment there are approximately 100 Intermediate Bodies which decreases the effectiveness and makes the information transfer more difficult (Interview Secretariat). In fact, one result is that various institutions give different information to the project applicants which increases the error rate (ibid.). According to the Secretariat, the NRW Bank has currently the task to settle the level of information. An advantage of many Intermediate Bodies is the direct contact to many potential project partners (ibid.). The MA has the role of moderating and mediating between the actors (ibid.).

In the opinion of the representative of the Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology financial management is also considered to be very complicated, mostly because of the difficulty of aligning the national standards to the EU requirements. For instance, it was impossible on the side of the regional level regulation (Landeshaushaltsordnung) to use fixed rates for advanced trainings or setting up businesses (Interview Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology). In that case it was possible to simplify the costs for ERDF Programmes (ibid.).

6.6 Monitoring

The NRW OP document defines the aim to improve continuously the transparency, effectiveness and efficiency of the OP (Operational Programme 2012). At the programme-, priority-, and implementation-level a system of indicators has been developed in cooperation with the Ministry of Economics and Technology and the evaluators which has been discussed in detail with the respective departments (Kienbaum und Regionomica 2006).

Similarly in the AIR (2011), it is laid down that an electronic monitoring and information system as well as ongoing evaluations serve as a source of information for the actors involved. In addition the AIR mentions that the Secretariat uses various communication means to reach the wider public ranging from brochures on to newsletters, project trailers as well as comprehensive project proposals.

Effective involvement of different partners

According to the Secretariat, all national ministries are involved in the MC, with the exception of the Ministries for Education, Internal affairs and Justice (although they are informed about the OP). In addition, representatives of the districts, the political parties as well as economic and social partners are involved (Interview Secretariat). The MC is the main platform for involving the partners (ibid.). The Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology is also represented in the MC and has voting rights.

The interviewed MC member stated that the only voting right MC members have is on the Annual Implementation Report. The involvement of multiple partner do not increase the complexity of meetings or delay programme management/decision making. According to this interviewee, especially the regional agencies can give important input based on their project-related experiences. With the participation of the interviewee's institution, important information on the OP can be transported into the region Köln/Bonn and can enable local partners to participate in the OP. In doing so, the translation of technical terms into everyday language is enabled and can thus act as a multiplier (Questionnaire MC, Interview Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology).

On the other hand, the representative of the Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology criticises the involvement of multiple partners for also increasing the complexity of meetings or delaying the decision-making. This is why the meetings held in the framework of the partnership principle are highly focused and restricted to merely two meetings a year. The level and quality of the debate and information about the performance of the OP and outcome of the MC meetings that is provided is considered satisfactory (Interview Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology).

Influence of different partners

According to the representative of the Secretariat, the stakeholders involved in the MC are those already involved in previous programming periods. However, political influence caused an expansion of the committee now including political party representatives and district representatives. In fact, decisions are made at the political level, the MC merely takes formal decisions (Interview Secretariat).

The Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of the Environment are the main influences, beside the political parties. These two ministries are responsible for the majority of the agendas in ERDF programmes. Their contribution is considered very valuable on the part of the Secretariat as they care about aspects that are often forgotten.

Satisfaction with the process

In the view of the Secretariat, all partners are satisfied with the process. The reporting and delivery of data is well established and works to the MA satisfaction (Interview Secretariat).

The interviewee from the Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology stated that an active contribution to the monitoring process is possible and required and different aspects and ideas are implemented as long as they are not judged to be individual, personal interests (Interview Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology). According to the interviewee, the participation in the MC meetings contributes to an improved knowledge of the partners that they can forward to customers. The minutes of the MC meetings as well as the Annual Implementation Reports and evaluations are valuable and important as they give detailed information about the implementation of the OP and single projects (Interview Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology).

The representative of the MC points out that the minutes of the MC meetings are only distributed to the MC members and not published for other stakeholders online. In his opinion, debates could be improved by providing information earlier and more coherent. Not all information about the performance of the OP and the project selection results are available in a transparent way (Questionnaire MC member).

6.7 Evaluation

Besides the ex-ante evaluation (Kienbaum und Regionomica 2006) including a strategic environmental assessment mentioned in the OP document, additional evaluations were carried out mostly by external evaluators (Kühbauch et al. 2009; Untiedt and Damberg 2008; Meyer and Biermann 2010).

According to the Secretariat, no recurring evaluation has been done in the current programming period. Only specific assessments have been contracted. The Secretariat considers the evaluation of the competitive tender procedures to be the most important one (Burkert et al. n.a ; Interview Secretariat).

The decision to carry out evaluations lies within the responsibility of the MA (Interview Secretariat). While the interviewee from the Secretariat mentioned that evaluation plans are presented and adopted in the MC meetings, the MC representative stated in the interview that MC members can in fact only approve the results of the evaluations. Whenever outcomes are discussed, this is often done very superficially. In addition, information about external evaluators which are selected by the MA as well as the results of the completed evaluations are presented in the meetings (Interview Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology).

Coordination of and networking through evaluations

The opinions differ between the regional and the national level with regards to the coordination of evaluations. In the view of the Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology, there is an expert network within the MC which deals with the improvement of

evaluations. However, the Secretariat stated that partners are involved when interviews are necessary and that there is no regular evaluations committee foreseen.

The results of the Europe-wide ERDF evaluation network are disseminated through the Federal Ministry. According to their representative, these exchanges promote networking (formal as well as informal). Networking processes are however considered to be more effective when they focus on concrete topics or requests. Over time, the most pressing topics have been identified and an intensive professional exchange has developed. Here, also horizontal topics are processed, e.g. gender mainstreaming or questions as the involvement of the local level in federal states (Interview Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology).

The representative of the MC also confirms that the exchanges promote networking, especially amongst the regional representatives (Questionnaire MC).

6.8 Outlook

As laid down in Burkert, et al. (n.a) an improvement of efficiency and transparency of the decision-making process could be achieved through the reduction of the number of actors as well as a simultaneous inclusion of all actors throughout the whole process. By doing so, the quality of support would be improved through the contact with the same (ibid.).

Involvement of partners

According to the representative of the Secretariat, partners should be better involved in the future although this could increase the complexity of communication and work for the MA. Notwithstanding faster and increasing feedback loops would be appreciated (Interview Secretariat). Also in the opinion of the representative of the Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology, an improvement of the programming process could be reached by the integration of additional partners with the aid of regional conferences (Interview Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology).

The MC member interviewed would be in favour of establishing a more dialogue-oriented OP preparation phase upon the initiative of the MA. A partnership "at eye level" is needed to facilitate the understanding of OP regulations and promote the implementation of Structural Funds (Questionnaire MC member). He suggests round table meetings with regional and local practitioners to share the day-to-day experiences with existing programmes and rules at an early stage. He holds the view that cooperation with and active involvement of different actors from all administrative levels is necessary to adapt the OP as much as possible to "real life" needs at the local and national levels. In addition, a close involvement of regional development agencies at all stages guarantees a coherent use of funding in a bigger frame (Questionnaire MC member).

Reduction of IBs

On the other hand, the Federal Ministry of Economy and Technology holds the opinion, that for the future a concentration of thematic groups, where a lot of Intermediate Bodies are involved, would be meaningful so that the application procedure is less complicated and the error frequency as well as the amount of funding guidelines within the programme can be reduced. As a result the support of applicants and project partners would be less complex (Interview Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology). In this sense the MA published a call giving potential Intermediate Bodies the possibility to apply for future engagements in

view of reducing the number of Intermediate Bodies from a 100 to 10 (Interview Secretariat).

General improvements

The representative of the MC holds the view that improvements are needed in terms of communication at an early stage of the programming process and with regard to transparency (project selection, management and evaluation). Furthermore, it is suggested that the creation of formal instruments will permanently feed in proposals for the improvement of the current OP (Questionnaire MC).

In the current process of preparing the new programming period of 2014-2020, a decision of the cabinet concerning a general reduction of the administrative burden is in the pipeline (Interview Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology). For the future programming period some changes towards quality improvement have been proposed such as (Interview Secretariat):

- the reduced amount of Intermediate Bodies,
- quality management situated at MA level,
- active knowledge concentration and dissemination
- better service to the Intermediate Bodies from the MA

According to the Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology, the main point for improvement for the future is to make evaluations more significant and widely accessible for persons who are not necessarily experts in the field.

6.9 References

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6.10 Interviews und Questionnaires

Managing Authority: represented by the Objective-2- Secretariat	Claudia Schulte, head of department, Objective 2 Secretariat North Rhine-Westphalia, conducted on 17.07.2013
Vertical Partner: national department for EU Cohesion policy and EU Funds	Karin Scheffel, head of division EU Cohesion policy and EU Funds for Regional Development, Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology, conducted on 04.07.2013
Monitoring Committee	Dr. Reimar Molitor, Managing Director and MC member, Region Köln/Bonn e.V. (Regional Development Agency) questionnaire from 31.07.2013

7. ERDF OP SILESIA

7.1 Characteristics of OP

The ERDF Convergence Regional Operational Programme (ROP) for Śląskie Voivodeship (Silesia) in Poland 2007-2013 has a total budget of €2.02bn, of which €1.71bn come from the ERDF (approximately 2.5% of the total Cohesion Policy funds invested in Poland in 2007-13 and the second largest sum in terms of funds in Poland). The Voivodeship is inhabited by nearly 4.7 million people, i.e. over 12% of the total populace of Poland and it is one of the most urbanised regions in Poland (the urban population accounting for over 78%) with the largest population density in Poland (377 people/km², the national average being 122 people/km²). The OP is divided into ten priority axes, namely, of which transport, the sustainable development of cities and research and technological development (innovations and entrepreneurship) are the most important ones in financial terms (ROP Website).

7.2 Multilevel governance arrangements in Cohesion policy

The regionalisation of Poland

Multi-level governance has been developed in the last years, which is why it is interesting to look at its historical background. The regionalisation of Poland has been initiated by the country's EU accession in 2004 in view of making the absorption of the EU-Funds more effective (financial support since 1989 through the programmes PHARE, SAPARD, ISPA). The idea of „multi-level governance” has been realised only in 1999 through the introduction of a three leveled administrative structure (regions, districts and communities) (Kozak et al. 2009).

In the programming period of 2000-2006 the EU Funds were administered centrally by the respectively responsible Ministries and the Ministry responsible for regional development had the role of MA. Whenever implementing bodies were involved, they were anyway located at the Ministries (e.g. POLISH Agency for Enterprise Development PARP; Industrial Development Agency – ARP, etc). The Integrated Regional Operational Programme (IROP) was managed centrally by the Ministry of Regional Development while the Voivodeships were responsible for managing specific priorities and measures.

The role of the regions has been strengthened only in preparation of the 2007-2013 programming period. The regional system in Poland was shaped according to other European regional models, such as the French one (Kozak et al. 2009).

Multi-level governance in Cohesion Policy in Poland

Regional bodies:

- There are 2489 Communities (gminy) in Poland - local authorities.
- There are 380 Powiat in Poland. A powiat is a district composed of several gminy.
- The polish Voivodeship is the equivalent of a region. As Poland is a unitary state, there is one state representative in each region. There are 16 Voivodeships in Poland in total. The communities and the districts are not subordinate to the Voivodeships.

Currently, the government is responsible for deciding on regional policy, the Ministry of Economy develops the regional development policy and the regional development strategies through bilateral contracts with the corresponding Voivodeships. The Voivodeship is responsible for allocating resources as well as coordinating the tasks and responsibilities at regional level. The share of competences however often remains unclear. According to an interviewee, the decentralisation of the competences has not been accompanied by adequate public financial support. The lack of resources at regional and local levels makes the implementation of the Voivodeship contracts difficult which is problematic given the importance of these contracts in regional development (Bafoil 2010).

The implementing bodies are usually located at regional level (Urzedzy Marszalkowskie). These public bodies manage and implement parts of the programmes (e.g. a Priority Axis) delegated by the MA. Implementing bodies of second degree (Voivodeship labour office / Wojewodzkie Urzedzy Pracy) are public or private bodies responsible for the implementation of tasks that are directly targeted at the beneficiaries (e.g. control of co-financing of project applications, monitoring project implementation, etc).

7.3 Preparation/programming of the OP

Consultation process

The ROP Silesia (2007) describes the consultation process with social and business partners in the development of the OP in a specifically dedicated Annex (Annex 3 of the OP). The consultation phase on the first, second and third version of the preliminary draft of the ROP already started in 2005. As a result of the consultations, the following amendments were introduced to the OP:

- a list of key projects (indicative financial plan), including the suggestions of the representatives of subregions;
- the instrument (Integrated Subregional Development Programmes) of the co-participation of territorial self-government units in the decision-making process
- selection of projects to be co-financed;
- the allocation for Priority III: Tourism was substantially increased;
- the opportunities of obtaining financial resources by rural municipalities were increased by organising separate tenders;
- the list of beneficiaries was expanded;
- the subject scope of the Programme was modified.

The consultation process consisted in:

- a survey (online questionnaire) organised by the Board of Slaskie Voivodeship between 9 August 2005 and 9 September 2005 to collect information on the needs of the regional community and opinions on the measures and projects to be included. 215 institutions participated in the survey.
- Workshops with social partners were organised on 4 and 7 October 2005 focused on four thematic groups to detail project types, selection criteria and beneficiaries.
- Presentation of the ROP at various meetings with scientists and representatives of the business sector.

- Subregional social consultations between November and December 2005- 283 representatives of local governments, business organisations, schools and higher education or other organisations from the voivodeship participated in the meetings.

The Board of Slaskie Voivodeship adopted a second draft of the OP incorporating the comments from the social consultations. That draft was again subject to social consultation (over 150 participants from the different sectors). After presenting the new draft OP to the Ministry of Regional Development, in May 2006 the ROP social consultations were held via the PARTNER II internet base. The same was the case for the third version of the ROP. Finally, on 5 October 2006, the Preliminary Draft of the ROP was referred to inter-ministry consultations which resulted in 64 comments out of which 40 were accepted by the Board of Slaskie Voivodeship.

Satisfaction with the involvement of various partners

According to the MA (Director of the Regional Development Department, Marshall Office Silesia Voivodeship), there were approximately 10 persons from the Regional Development Department directly involved in the process of programming while five persons from other departments were indirectly involved in the process through partial input and consultations (Interview MA). The MA was not willing to qualify or rate the involvement of its participation in the process in the interview.

In an interview, a representative of the Ministry of Regional Development in Warsaw (responsible for the coordination of all regional OPs) confirmed that the Ministry was involved in the programming phase by commenting on the draft OP through submitting input in preparatory exchanges with the drafting team, attending large stakeholder meetings and responding to public consultations. The role of the Ministry was to negotiate the OPs with the European Commission and to ensure that the OPs fulfill the EC rules and expectations. Despite the "ambiguity" of some provisions or rules and the consequent delay in the OP development, the Ministry of Regional Development is however rather satisfied with the way its could contribute to the process (Interview Coordinating Unit at National Authority).

As an MC member, the interviewee from the Strategic and Spatial planning Department at the Marshall office of the Silesian Voivodeship was fully represented in OP working groups and invited to submit input in preparatory exchanges with the drafting team. In total, 3 representatives of this department were involved in the programming process mainly in co-drafting the diagnosis part of the OP. The main added value of participating in the programming of the OP is, according to the interviewee, the access to information, the possibility to exchange ideas and "the opportunity to influence the shape of the programming documents and the way the documents will be implemented" (Questionnaire MC). Despite the time-constraints related to the large quantity of information material sent by the MA, the MC member interviewed was very satisfied with the way his department had been involved in the programming phase as the final documents had been highly influenced by its opinions.

7.4 Project selection

Process of project selection

The MA is responsible for preparing the calls for tender but the project selection criteria are approved by the MC. The MA is responsible for project selection, preparation and signing as well as the financial settlement, but the MC has the right to comment and change the project selection criteria or the schedule of tenders (Interview MA, Questionnaire MC). According to a representative of the Ministry of Regional Development in Warsaw, who is part of the MC, the involvement of a variety of partners in the project selection process “helps in improving criteria and its adaptation to real needs of potential beneficiaries” (Interview Coordinating Unit at National Authority).

Application and selection from a project’s point of view

The project “e-Myszkovia – Rozwój elektronicznych usług publicznych w Powiecie Myszkowskim” led by the Powiat Myszkow (Starostwo Powiatowe w Myszkowie) between 2007 and 2010, with a total budget of PLN 3,085,624 (approximately €735,951) aims to strengthen the implementation of e-administration in its Powiat to increase the efficiency of the local administration (Questionnaire project e-Myszkovia).

In the project application and selection process phase the project manager solely cooperated with the Marshall Office of the Silesia Voivodeship. The project leader qualified this cooperation as highly effective as well as efficient (not time and resource consuming, but with some administrative burden) (Questionnaire project e-Myszkovia).

7.5 Programme management

Project management functions and roles

The ROP Silesia (2007) describes the institutions responsible for the following main functions in the OP:

- The function of the MA is carried out by the Board of Slaskie Voivodeship (Regional Development Department of the Marshall Office of the Slaskie Voivodeship).
- A 2nd level intermediate body is carrying out the following specific actions delegated by the MA: 1.2. Micro-enterprises and SMEs within priority I (technological research and development, innovations and entrepreneurship); 3.1.1. Tourist infrastructure / enterprises and 3.2.1. Tourism-related infrastructure/ enterprises within Priority III (Tourism).
- The functions of the CA are performed by the CA Department. Within the ROP, the CA delegates part of its functions (related to the function of Authority Mediating in Certification) to the Slaskie Voivodeship Office.
- The Audit Authority is seated at the secretary of the Ministry of Finance in the capacity of the General Fiscal Control inspector and the Revenue Office in Katowice.

The coordination at the level of the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) is carried out by the minister responsible for regional development (NSRF implementation and evaluation). The minister responsible for regional development assisted by the Regional programmes Coordination Department (RPCD) within the Ministry for Regional

Development is responsible for the coordination of the 16 ROPs (verification of compliance with NSRF, negotiating OPs with the European Commission, monitoring ROP implementation) (ROP Silesia 2007).

Satisfaction with involvement in OP management

A team of desk officers at the Ministry is responsible for coordinating the ROPs, and another team is responsible for monitoring the ROPs and taking charge of the financial flows from the EC to the ROPs' MAs. While the Ministry takes part in every MC meeting, answers the questions of the MAs as well as the beneficiaries, the MAs however still have a high level of independence in implementation of the programme (Interview Coordinating Unit at National Authority). The MA as well as the MC member interviewed in the framework of this study is satisfied with the extent and the way his department was involved in the OP management in the current programming phase (Interview MA, Questionnaire MC).

Partnership in the implementation from a project's point of view

With regard to the projects implemented under the ROP Silesia, the OP set out for the MA to "oblige the ROP beneficiaries to observe the partnership principle at the preparation and realisation stages of the individual projects" (ROP Silesia 2007: 85). According to the 2012 AIR, over 120 projects had in fact been realized between the start of the programme and the cut-off date (end of 2011), which included more than one beneficiary. The large majority of those projects included at least one beneficiary that was a public institution. According to the 2012 AIR, these partnerships are effective for creating synergies, finding common solutions, increasing the cooperation between different institutions and strengthening the exchange of information (AIR 2011: 52).

In the project implementation phase, the leader of the "E-Myszkovia" project (the Powiat Myszkow) cooperated with a large number of partners:

- the software developers Assecco Systems S.A. in Warsaw and Sputniks Software sp. Zo.o. in Poznan.
- the local authorities (gminy) of the cities of Myszkow, Zarki, Kozięglow, Niegow and Poraj.

The project leader is mostly satisfied with the cooperation of all these partners (rating: 4 out of 5 possible points).

Also, the project leader cooperated with the following authorities:

- Bank Gospodarki Żywnościowej w Częstochowie oddz. w Myszkowie
- Unikkon Integral sp.zo.o. w Warszawie (technological advisor)

Similarly, the project leader is mostly satisfied with the cooperation with both (rating: 4 out of 5 possible points).

According to the project leader, the main barriers to a fruitful cooperation with the OP authorities were based on an unprecise definition of the eligibility of project costs and index (Questionnaire project e-Myszkovia).

7.6 Monitoring

Composition

The composition of the Monitoring Committee is balanced with a seat division between the representatives of self-government, government, and social and economic partners (OP 2007). The Ministry of Regional Development, which coordinates all ROPs in Poland, is part of all MCs and always has a right to vote in view of influencing the criteria or schedules of tenders (Interview Coordinating Unit at National Authority).

Information dissemination

The MA prepares OP documents, the minutes of the meetings, as well as information about the OP development and disseminates it online as well as in the meetings. MC members have the possibility to comment on these documents (Interview MA, Questionnaire MC, Interview Coordinating Unit at National Authority).

The effectiveness of involving different partners

According to the MA, the involvement of a large number of partners in the MC meetings does increase the complexity given that the partners represent their own interests which results in a time-consuming process (Interview MA). Also, in the opinion of the representative of the Ministry of Regional Development, the participation of different partners in the MC meetings facilitates a better understanding and increases the shared ownership of the OP objectives. In fact, beneficiaries of projects are often part of the MC and present in the meetings which, in the opinion of this interviewee, helps beneficiaries understand the background of certain limitations. The subsequent increase in transparency makes up for the slight delays caused by the involvement of multiple number of partners (Interview Coordinating Unit at National authority).

The interviewee from the Strategic and Spatial planning Department at the Marshall office of the Silesian Voivodeship (MC member) also stated that the MC meetings are a good platform for acquiring and exchanging information as well as giving all partners involved (also social and economic partners) the possibility for sharing their views. According to this interviewee, the MC meetings are not dominated by the members' interests and agendas (Questionnaire MC).

Monitoring from a project's point of view

With regards to monitoring and reporting, the project leader of the "e-Myszkovia" project is mostly satisfied with the cooperation of the partners involved, i.e. the department of public investment in the Powiat and the aforementioned local authorities (rating: 4 out of 5 possible points) (Questionnaire project e-Myszkovia).

7.7 Evaluation

The evaluation unit in the Regional Development Department of the Marshall Office Silesia Voivodeship (MA) is responsible for preparing the evaluation terms of reference, identifying thematic evaluation, selecting evaluators and supervising evaluators' progress.

The evaluation plan is presented annually to the members of the MC with the possibility to comment (Questionnaire MC).

The results of the evaluations are presented with the possibility to comment on them in the MC meetings (Interview MA, Questionnaire MC, Interview Coordinating Unit at National Authority). Usually there are however no discussions on evaluation results amongst the MC partners (Interview Coordinating Unit at National Authority).

7.8 Outlook

Overall, the interviewees (MA, MC member) were satisfied with the participation in the OP development and implementation in the 2007-2013 period. The MA wishes to intensify partnerships in the next programming period 2014-2020 based on the lessons learned from the current period (Interview MA).

According to the Ministry of Regional Development (coordinating all ROPs), Poland is now moving to a new era with a further step towards decentralization. In fact, about 60% of the financial allocation will now be transferred to the ROPs which will be new challenge for the Ministry as well as for the regions (Interview Coordinating Unit at National Authority).

The leader of the project "e-Myszkovia", the Powiat Myszkow, is planning to apply for EU support again in the phase of 2014-2020. The communication with the partners will definitely need to be improved according to the project leader. More importantly, the OP authorities should better communicate the rules and procedures (mainly eligibility rules) to the projects to avoid repeating the mistakes from the programming phase 2007-2013 (Questionnaire project e-Myszkovia).

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7.10 Interviews and questionnaires

Managing Authority	Malgorzata Stas, Managing Authority, Director of the Regional Development Department, Marshall Office Silesia Voivodeship, 19.07.2013
Vertical Partner: Coordinating Unit at National Authority	Kinga Nowopolska, Chief specialist at the Department of Coordination of the regional programmes, Ministry of Regional Development, 12.08.2013
Monitoring Committee	Mariusz Raczek, MC member, Vice-Director of the Strategic and Spatial planning Department, Marshall Office Silesia Voivodeship, 19.07.2013
Project leader	Magdalena Ciuk, project leader of the project "e-Myszkovia. Rozwój elektronicznych usług publicznych w Powiecie Myszkowskim", Powiat Myszkow (Starostwo Powiatowe w Myszkowie), 26.07.2013

8. ERDF OP Strengthening Regional Development Potentials in Slovenia

8.1 Characteristics of OP

The national ERDF Operational Programme (OP) "Strengthening Regional Development Potentials" in Slovenia has a total budget of €2.01bn, of which €1.71bn are funded by the ERDF Convergence objective (approximately 40% of the total EU resources invested in Slovenia under Cohesion Policy 2007-2013) (European Commission, DG Regio Website).

The main goal of the OP is "to attain the core objectives defined in the National Strategic Reference Framework, namely fostering the country's competitiveness while ensuring a balanced regional development in the entire country." (European Commission, DG Regio Website). The OP has five priority axes, namely: 1) Competitiveness and Research Excellence, 2) Economic Development Infrastructure, 3) Integration of Natural and Cultural Potentials, 4) Development of Regions, and 5) Technical Assistance.

Slovenia experiences a high GDP growth rate since 2000 but the country was hit hard by the economic and financial crisis (Kavaš 2012). It has been shown that interventions, co-financed from the ERDF and Cohesion Fund, however strengthened the capacity of Slovenia to sustain economic development and improve the quality of life (ibid.).

8.2 Multilevel governance arrangements in Cohesion policy

According to the OP document, a clear demarcation of tasks and the definition of relationship between the involved institutions are defined. In accordance with articles 58 to 62 of the Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006, the following management structures are established in the OP (Government Office for Local Self-Government and Regional Policy, 2007):

- The Managing Authority (MA) is represented by the Government Office for Local Self-Government and Regional Policy
- The CA is represented by the Ministry of Finance, National Fund
- The Audit Authority is represented by the Ministry of Finance, Budget Supervision Office

As laid down in the OP document a Monitoring Committee (MC) has been established by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia and is responsible for directing and controlling the implementation of both ERDF OPs at national level. The members of the MC were nominated by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia and chaired by the representative of the MA (Government Office for Local Self-Government and Regional Policy 2007).

The interviewee from the MC represents a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) which resulted in an interesting mixture of perspectives about MLG in the OP.

A questionnaire has been sent to the project Lead Partner of the project "WEP – Water is Environmental Pearl" which has the objective of improving flood protection and the

revitalising watercourses. The main achievements related to multi-level governance included the increased transfer of knowledge and the strengthening of the cooperation between Slovenia and Hungary as well as the development of a joint strategy. Except for financial management tasks, the three partners West-Transdanubian Directorate for Water Management from Hungary, the Municipality of Lendava and the Lead Partner (Eko-park d.o.o. Lendava, Slovenia) were all involved in all phases of the project cycle (application, selection, implementation, monitoring and reporting).

8.3 Preparation/programming of the OP

Article 47 of the Council regulation 1083/2006 determines the evaluations as a mandatory element before, during and after the programming period. The programme is subject to ex-ante, ongoing and post evaluation (Government Office for Local Self-Government and Regional Policy 2007).

Involvement of different partners

According to the MA different types of actors were formally represented in OP drafting groups. They were invited to submit input, to attend large stakeholder meetings and to participate in public consultations. The MA pays great attention to the establishment of networks in order to form close cooperation between the partners – the State and the EC on the one hand and other authorities and bodies on the other (competent regional, local and other public bodies, economic and social partners as well as other appropriate authorities which represent the civil society, environmental partners, NGOs as well as bodies responsible for the promotion of gender equality, etc.). According to the MA, the implementation of the partnership principle means informing partners (mediation of facts and presentation of the key contents in the form of key messages for partners) as well as communicating with the partners by establishing and preserving networks) (Interview MA).

Regional and local bodies were involved in the preparation phase through consultations where special attention was paid to the development of regions (Interview MA). The following governmental bodies contributed to the preparation of the OP and were active in the preparation through numerous meetings (Interview MA): the Ministry of the Economy, the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning, the Ministry of Education and Sport, the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Finance, the Institute of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development, the Government Office for Growth and the Office of the Prime Minister.

The CA was not involved in the programming phase of the programme (Interview CA).

Overall, all contribution was included at an early stage, i.e. prior to the first draft of the OP (Interview MA). During the programming they paid attention to ensure that the OP can be combined with other programmes on EU (COSME, HORIZON 2020) and national level (Slovene Industrial Policy).

Provision of information

The official website includes information on events and contents of the preparation of the OP. The MA also organised press conferences as well as partnership events. After the announcement of the OP Draft, cooperation activities between the partners were intensified to increase the exchange of ideas and proposals between the representatives of different

NGOs and the MA (Interview MA). Public discussions were facilitated through e-communication tools; the questions asked were generally very specific (ibid.).

Advantages and disadvantages of the involvement of different partners

The MA provided examples of how the involvement of partners improved the quality of the OP:

- By defining and implementing the protection of the environment.
- Given that the MA had been criticised for not involving the NGOs enough, the MA is now making an effort in this respect which proves to be an improvement in comparison to the previous practice.
- The consultations with the representatives of the economic and research sectors drew attention to the necessity of concentrating the development assets and promoting the preparation of quality projects in the framework of the implementing the OP.

The MA concludes that the involvement of different shareholders leads to better understanding, even if the input of the stakeholders is in their own interest. In other words, partnership enhances shared ownership despite the fact that some partners take programming as an opportunity for promoting their interests. In the end, the MA found any input worth consideration (Interview MA).

They also stated that it is difficult to take on board all opinions and suggestions coming from different types of actors in the OP. It is important that the main goal(s) is/are fixed and all the programmes/projects follow these goals. If all consultations are planned in advance and carried out in parallel to the programming process, the burden is not excessive. According to the MA it is effective to include the partners in a timely fashion using various methods and to allow for adequate time for including comments and suggestions (Interview MA).

The CA was not involved in the programming phase which was acceptable given the lack of resources. However, the CA was not satisfied with its involvement in the implementation phase. It is planned however for the CA to be involved earlier in the process in the next programming period (Interview CA).

The MC member stated that it was a benefit to participate in the process as it means the possibility to give input for the planning of the use of EU funds (Questionnaire MC).

Satisfaction with the involvement

Overall, the MC member as a representative of an NGO was not satisfied with the involvement at all as her inputs were not fully taken into consideration, especially not in the final documents. In the interviewee's opinion, the comments of non-decision-makers are not likely to be taken seriously in conditions of poor communication culture and time constraints. This in turn hampers the effectiveness of the OP development according to the interviewee (Questionnaire MC).

8.4 Project selection

The MA is responsible for the project selection criteria and reviewing the adherence of each instrument (Interview MA). In the words of the CA it would be a “conflict of interest” to be involved in project selection as they are responsible for assessing the project implementation (Interview CA).

Project level

The project selection phase was considered as very inefficient concerning financial and time-related costs within the project partnership (Interview project Lead Partner). Regarding the effectiveness and efficiency of cooperating with the OP authorities the rating is similarly rather bad. According to the project Lead Partner the project application has been very time as well as resource-consuming in the preparation phase because of the intensive planning and presentation requirements.

8.5 Programme management

Shared responsibility and cooperation

In accordance with the EU Cohesion fund regulations in the Republic of Slovenia, Intermediate Bodies (IBs) are direct budget users to whom the MA may delegate the implementation of specific tasks (Interview MA). This delegation of tasks is settled in an agreement between the MA and the IBs. According to the MA this involvement of IBs in the OP management improves the effectiveness of OP implementation as these bodies bring in the necessary expertise for developing new instruments and supporting the selection process.

The CA has to cooperate with the MA on a daily basis with regards to controlling and reporting on the financial progress of the OP and the projects. Given that the MA has delegated the task of submitting claims for the reimbursement to IBs, the CA also cooperates with the latter (Interview CA).

The MC member interviewed is only involved in OP management with regards to the approval of the annual report, which is a very passive role (Questionnaire MC).

Satisfaction with involvement in OP management

According to the CA the involvement in OP management could be improved. The CA mainly claims a stronger position and better or smoother cooperation with the MA which is currently hampered because of an institutional barrier. In fact, the MA and CA have recently been separated as they were divided into two ministries with two different ministers. This makes it difficult to align the national law to the EU rules (Interview CA). According to the CA representative, the MA and CA positions should be more powerful in order for the two ministers to understand the need for improvement and accordingly react on this (ibid.).

The representative of the NGO is not at all satisfied with the organisation’s low involvement in the OP implementation, stating that the MA hardly ever involves NGO representatives, while the interest was expressed repeatedly (Questionnaire MC).

Project level

The project Lead Partner found the overall cooperation with project partners efficient to very efficient. The efficiency of cooperation with OP authorities was rather rated as low because it was considered as very time-consuming to accomplish the administrative work required. Of all OP representatives however, the cooperation with the MA was considered to be most efficient by the Project Lead Partner. The MA was available and helpful for the project representatives (Questionnaire project Lead Partner). According to the interviewee they got all the support and advice needed while at the same time the MA was strict regarding the rules.

8.6 Monitoring

As laid out in the OP document, the MC monitors the efficiency and effectiveness of the OP implementation and adopts guidelines for the implementation (Government Office for Local Self-Government and Regional Policy 2007). Detailed competences are regulated by a special act (ibid.).

The composition of the MC is in line with the principle of partnership which means that representatives of social partners, regions and NGOs as well as representatives of key development stakeholders are involved (Government Office for Local Self-Government and Regional Policy 2007).

MC members and tasks

The MA provided a list of MC members:

a. Members of government ministries, government institutions and offices:

- Ministry of the Economy and technological development (6)
- Ministry of Finance (1)
- Ministry of agriculture and environment (2)
- Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning (2)
- Ministry of infrastructure and space (2)
- Ministry of Education, Science and Sports (3)
- Ministry of Culture (1)
- Institute of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development of the Republic of Slovenia (1)
- Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (1)

b. Local authorities, NGOs and other partners:

- Chamber of Commerce (1)
- Chamber of Craft and Small Business of Slovenia (1)
- Chamber for Agriculture and Forestry (1)
- Confederation of Free Trade Unions (Zveza svobodnih sindikatov) (1)
- KNSS – Trade Union (1)

- PERGAM Trade Union Confederation (1)
- Association of Employers of Slovenia (ZDS) (1)
- Representative of NGO for protection of the environment and sustainable development (3)
- Representative of NGO for gender equality (1)
- Community of Municipalities (2)
- Association of Municipalities (2)
- National Council of Disability Organisations (1)

The members of the MC have voting rights mainly pertaining to changes of the OP, reports and plans (Interview MA). According to the MA, the MC performs the following tasks:

- They approve the criteria for selecting the operations financed
- The MC approves any revision of those criteria in accordance with programming needs
- They periodically review the progress made towards achieving the specific targets of the OP on the basis of documents submitted by the MA
- They review the results, particularly the achievement of the targets set for each priority axis and the evaluations referred to in paragraph 48 of Regulation 1083/2006/EC
- The MC considers and approves the annual and final reports on the implementation of 67 of Regulation 1083/2006/EC
- They are informed of the annual control report
- They propose revisions or examinations of the OP in order to make possible the attainment of the objectives of the third of Regulation 1083/2006/EC, or to improve its management
- They consider and approve proposals to amend the Commission decision on the contribution from the Funds.

The MC member confirmed in the questionnaire that all OP documents are well disseminated and are accessible online also for the wider public (Questionnaire MC).

Perceived assessment of the MC meetings

According to the MA the MC meetings facilitate a better understanding and shared ownership of the OP objectives; however it is also a widely appreciated opportunity for partners to voice their opinions and perspectives on the debated topics. The participation of various partners in the MC meetings contributes to an efficient implementation (Interview MA).

The CA even reinforces the fact that different partners see the participation in the MC meetings as a chance to promote their own interests. However, they also stated that the participation in MC meetings is useful for transparency. The CA itself also uses the platform of the MC meetings to emphasize on the need to improve fund absorption (Interview CA).

Quality of the debate

In the opinion of the MA the partners are content with the level and quality of information provided about the performance of the OP and outcome of MC meetings (Interview MA). The CA confirms this but perceives the quality of monitoring data reported in MC meetings and Annual Implementation Reports as too complex (Interview CA).

According to the MC member, the MC meetings serve as a platform for approving pre-decided issues. "They tend to be more for the purpose of satisfying the rules than to facilitate a better understanding and shared ownership of OP objectives" (Interview MC Member). The interviewee argues that most important issues are decided outside of those meetings and the MC members cannot actually make a difference. For the same reason the interviewee does not argue that the complexity is increased as a result of involving numerous partners but at the same time does not observe a real contribution of her institution to the OP development (Questionnaire MC).

8.7 Evaluation

According to the OP document, ex-ante- and ongoing evaluations lie within the responsibility of Slovenia whereas the final evaluation, which will be finalised by 31 December 2015, is solely the responsibility of the European Commission (Government Office for Local Self-Government and Regional Policy 2007). The MA is responsible for the implementation and coordination of evaluations as well as for the establishment of an interdisciplinary steering group consisting of the representatives of the MA, the ministries and other bodies of the state administration who monitor the achievement of the Lisbon process at national level (Government Office for Local Self-Government and Regional Policy 2007).

Evaluations in Slovenia have been introduced only as a result of Structural Funds requirements (Kavaš 2012). For the period 2007-2013 the following evaluations have been carried out (ibid.):

- One evaluation of the "Regional development" priority axis of the case study OP "Strengthening Regional Development potentials", completed in April 2009
- One mid-term evaluation of the OP "Development of environment and transport infrastructure", completed in October 2010
- In the years 2011-2012 one evaluation was implemented concerning the "entrepreneurship and competitiveness policy carried out in 2004-2009 and proposals for new measures and indicators"

According to the Country Report on the "Achievements of Cohesion policy", the evaluations conducted throughout the period of 2007-2013 have had no influence on policy design so far, but they are expected to be used in the framework of the preparation of the strategic documents for the next programming period (Kavaš 2012). In the upcoming years the MA is planning to continue the implementation of the evaluation plan (Interview MA).

Involvement of partners in decision making

The MA has a say on the evaluations' set up and process (Interview MA). The MC members vote on the annual implementation plan and discuss the evaluation report (ibid.). The CA interviewee confirmed that the evaluation outcomes are presented in the MC meetings (Interview CA). The MC member confirmed that they approve the evaluation outcomes in the MC meetings but no room is given to discussions (Questionnaire MC).

8.8 Outlook

In the Country Report on the "Achievements of Cohesion policy" it is recommended that the MA and the IBs should focus more on the content of development priorities and less on the formal control of projects (Kavaš 2012). Therefore "leadership, flexibility and cooperation between the MA, IBs, Payment Authority (PA) and Audit Authority are needed in order to successfully implement OPs". In addition it is recommended to strengthen monitoring and evaluation of ongoing projects in order to enable effective and efficient programming for the period 2014-2020 (ibid.)

Involvement of different actors

According to the MA, although it does result in additional burden (time-consuming processes especially in the programming period), the involvement of different partners is a key to policy ownership and a necessary preparation for future involvement in the implementation phase. The MA aims to intensify partnerships and has involved stakeholders during all phases of programming for the next period (Interview MA).

While the CA was not involved in the programming process of the current period, for the period of 2014-2020, they will not only be involved in the programming process but also in the preparation of strategic documents and recommendations for Slovenia. In their own words, the main reason for a future involvement is the possibility to avoid problems with implementation from an early stage on upon the recommendation of the court of audit (Interview CA). The future involvement of the CA in the OP implementation should also be improved through the establishment of a more flexible IT system (Interview CA).

For the future the MC member – who represents an NGO – hopes that in future her organisation will be taken "more seriously". Additionally they wish for a closer cooperation with the MA on OP management (Questionnaire MC). At the moment, the interviewee has the feeling to be perceived as a "disturbing factor" by the majority of the governmental bodies and hence her views are rarely, if ever, taken into consideration. It is also criticised that most of the decisions on open issues are made "by other actors outside of the MC meetings" (Questionnaire MC).

Project level

The interviewed project Lead Partner states that the organisation is planning to apply for EU support again in the period of 2014-2020. In general, the principle of partnership is unquestionably essential in the Lead Partner's opinion, but its effectiveness simply depends on a case-by-case basis on the partners themselves (Questionnaire project Lead Partner).

8.9 References

- European Commission, DG Regio Website, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/country/prordn/details_new.cfm?gv_PAY=SI&gv_reg=ALL&gv_PGM=1227&LAN=7&gv_per=2&gv_defL=7, last accessed on 14.08.2013.
- Government Office for Local Self-Government and Regional Policy (2007): Operational Programme for Strengthening Regional Development Potentials for Period 2007-2013. Unofficial Translation, Ljubljana, 26 July, 2007.
- Kavaš, Damjan (2012): Country Report on Achievement of Cohesion policy in Slovenia, Expert evaluation network delivering policy analysis on the performance of Cohesion policy 2007-2013, year 2 – 2012, Version: Final. Institut of Economic Research, JIubljana.

8.10 Interviews and Questionnaires

Managing Authority	Iba Zupancic, Head of Department, Managing Authority, Ministry of economic development and technology, interview conducted on 09.08.2013
Horizontal Partner: CA	Mateja Mahkovec, Head of CA, Ministry of Finance, interview conducted on 19.07.2013
Monitoring Committee	Lidija Živčič, Senior Expert in Focus, MC member, Focus Association for Sustainable Development, NGO, Questionnaire from 17.07.2013
Project Lead Partner	Branka Bensa, project manager of the project "WEP – Water is Environmental Pearl, Protection and management of natural water resources through revitalization, land development and stimulation of public awareness", Eko-park d.o.o. Lendava, questionnaire from 06.08.2013

9. ERDF Southern Finland OP (Etelä-Suomi OP)

9.1 Characteristics of OP

Southern Finland ERDF OP for 2007-2013 is a Regional Competitiveness and Employment programme which covers the Finnish regions of Southwest Finland; Häme, Päijät-Häme, Kymenlaakso, Uusimaa and South Karelia. The total budget of the programme is around €345.2m and Community assistance through ERDF amounts to €138.1m, accounting for approximately 21% of the total amount invested in Finland during the 2007-13 programme period. Around half of the Finnish population (2.7m) lives in Southern Finland and the area is at the cutting edge of development in Finland, forming the main artery for Finnish exports and imports. Two main urban centres are located in the programme area, Helsinki Metropolitan region and Turku region (EC 2013). The OP is implemented through five priority axis, in which thematic development at regional level (priority 5), Promotion of Business activity (priority 1), Promotion of innovation activity and networking, and reinforcing knowledge structures (priority 2), improving regional accessibility and operational environments (priority 3) are the most important in financial terms (EC 2013).

9.2 Multilevel governance arrangements in Cohesion policy

In Finland, the responsibility for regional development rests with State and regional councils. The regional councils are made up of representatives of the municipalities, which have thus continued to manage functions related to regional development. Responsibilities for regional development are defined in the law of Structural Funds (Structural Fund Act 1401/2006) and in the act on regional development (Act on regional development 1651/2009).

At central government level, the main responsibility of domestic regional development policy and Structural Funds programmes lies in Ministry of Employment and the Economy (MEE). In 2007-2013 programme period, the MEE is the dedicated Managing Authority and CA of Finnish Structural Funds programmes. The Ministry of Finance is the Control Authority of the programmes. The intermediaries at national level are relevant ministries and state authorities (e.g. Finnvera, Tekes).

In Finland, OPs are implemented at NUTS 2 level, which covers several Finnish regions (NUTS 3). In practice, these NUTS 2 level programmes are implemented at NUTS 3 level, where the Structural Funds together with other ESI Funds and domestic measures execute Regional Development Strategies. The intermediary bodies at NUTS 3 level are regional councils and central government regional administration; Centres for Economic Development, Transport and Environment (ELY-centres) and Regional State Administrative Agencies.

In Finland, Structural Funds and regional development administration is based on broad involvement of partners. At the national level, the main platform for involvement of different partners and a coordination mechanism for domestic and structural funds measures is the delegation for regional and structural policy (ARNE). At regional level (NUTS 3), Regional Management Committee (MYR) has similar responsibilities (Table 1).

Table 1: Key coordination mechanisms (all policy stages)

NAME	PARTICIPANTS	TASKS RELATED TO STRUCTURAL FUNDS
Delegation for Regional and Structural policy, ARNE⁶	MA, sector ministries, Regional Councils, ELY-centres, social and economic interest organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure coordination and alignment of structural funds in central government and between different funds. • Coordinate the objectives and implementation of structural funds and domestic regional development. • Facilitate information exchange on implementation of Structural Funds and domestic programmes. • Make proposals for MA and monitoring committees regarding improving coordination and implementation of Structural Funds and domestic regional development programmes. • Monitor effectiveness of Structural Funds from national perspective (whereas monitoring committees monitor individual OPs).
Regional Management Committee, MYR	Regional Councils, state authorities, social and economic partners and labour market organisations (8+8+8+chair)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus and target Structural Funds in the development needs of the regions • Coordinate the use of Structural Funds with EAFRD, EFF and domestic regional development measures • Coordinate ERDF and ESF programmes through Regional Cooperation Agreement (MYAK) • Discusses and approves the annual implementation plan of Regional Development Strategy, which includes Structural Funds and domestic regional development activities • Give an approval for the large and regionally significant SF projects

9.3 Preparation/programming of the OP

In Finland, the Ministry of Interior as a MA had the formal responsibility but in practice the Finnish Structural Funds Programmes 2007-2013 were prepared at the NUTS 2 level. In Southern Finland, the responsibility for drafting the OP was given to an alliance of regions in Southern Finland (Southern Finland Alliance, ELLI) and the lead on preparations was taken by a dedicated regional council; Päijät-Häme Regional Council An OP drafting group "EU-working group" was set up to support the programming. This OP drafting group was

⁶ Delegation for Regional policy and delegation for structural policy were amalgamated in 2009. The composition of the delegation is defined on act of Structural Funds (311/2007), §18.

formed from representatives of public regional development authorities; MA, regional councils of the programme area, Southern Finland Alliance, employment and economy centres of the programme area, Environment centre (Lounais-Suomi) and the county council of Southern Finland (Southern Finland OP 2006.)

Although only the public regional development bodies had a representation in the OP drafting group, other social and economic partners and bodies representing civil society (involved in Regional Management Committees) were also involved in the programming process. This involvement was mainly informal; information exchange and discussions with the OP drafting group and Regional Council leading the preparations. In addition, there were organised informal meetings which focused on drafting content for individual priorities and were open to the key stakeholders and experts of each priority. In addition to the informal information exchange, these meetings were the main forum for the actors involved in regional development in the region to contribute to the content of the OP (Kuparinen 2013). Also the draft OPs were discussed and approved in the Regional Councils and Regional Management Committees, which brings together all the regional development actors in the region, before submitting them to the Ministry of Interior (Southern Finland OP 2007).

Nevertheless, the partners involved in the OP drafting group were the most influential over the programming. The Ministry of Interior (MA) was the most influential, followed closely by Regional Councils (which represent the municipalities) and the Regional Centres for Employment and the Economy. Although the actual drafting was mainly done at the regional level, the MA guided the preparations by setting frames for the OP, namely through NSRF and defining programme indicators (Ahlgren 2013, Kuparinen 2013). The MA also finalised the OP and aligned all the four Finnish OPs with the NSRF. Finally, the Government approved the OPs before submitting them to the EC (Southern Finland OP 2006).

The programming process was seen to facilitate open information exchange and involvement of relevant partners in programming; the key regional development authorities through the formal working group and other relevant partners through Regional Management Committees and informal discussions. It was viewed, that the opportunity for wider public to contribute in the OP is best guaranteed by involving economic and social partners and bodies representing civil society in the programming. Nevertheless, there was organised also a large stakeholder meeting (for around 150 participants) to inform wider audience on the programming and a public hearing as a part of the impact assessment (Haapaniemi 2013; Kuparinen 2013.)

The involvement of a large group of actors in the programming was deemed to enable drafting an OP, which addresses well the development challenges of the region. The wide group of regional actors improved the quality of the OP through their regional expertise. The process also facilitated shared ownership of the OP objectives although many partners initially saw the programming as an opportunity to promote their own interest. This is not least because the Structural Funds grant plays a significant role at the regional level. Most partners had however capacity to co-operate and form a joint view. One reason for this is that actors are used to co-operative administration because of the established role of cooperation in the Finnish regional development administration (Kuparinen 2013).

The only concerns were over the capacity of some small regional actors and some social and economic partners/interest organisations to participate in the programming. It was viewed that the interest organisations see commonly the programming only as an

opportunity to promote their own interests and lack the understanding of the 'big picture'. Furthermore, accommodation of the interests of all these social and economic partners and regional development actors make it more difficult to draft a well-focused OP (Ahlgren 2013; Haapaniemi 2013).

9.4 Project selection

In Southern Finland, the project selection criteria approved by the Monitoring Committee was based on the indicative criteria listed in the OP. Although the MA had an important role in defining this list of indicative criteria, the Monitoring Committee of Southern Finland OP discussed and fine-tuned it before the approval (Haapaniemi 2013; Kuparinen 2013).

In addition to the Monitoring Committee, Regional Management Committees (and their secretaries) have an important role in project selection. First, although the Monitoring Committee approves the project selection criteria, the Management Committee may specify it (the criteria may be again further specified by the intermediary bodies). Second, the Regional Management Committees have a key role in defining development strategies in their regions, which the structural funds programmes implement. Third, the project applications of large and regionally significant projects are discussed and approved by Regional Management Committees (or by their secretary) in addition to Regional Councils. (Ramboll 2013). Although due to the involvement of Regional Management Committee the project selection process may require more time, it is seen to ensure selection of projects that meet the development needs. Furthermore, it improves the policy ownership and ensures that partners prioritise the funded projects together (Haapaniemi 2013; Kuparinen 2013).

In Southern Finland OP, Priority 5 differs from the others in terms of project selection. Priority 5 finances thematic umbrella projects crossing regional borders. In principle, project partners must come from more than one county and the projects have strategic importance for the whole area. The Regional Management Committees of Southern Finland make a joint decision on the thematic areas for each year and the joint EU-coordination unit prepares an open call on these themes. The project applications will be submitted to the joint EU unit, which brings together project partners from different regions (Ylimaakunnalliset hankkeet 2013). The project partners assess this networking and two stepped application process good; it has increased the number of projects and their effectiveness. The improved co-operation between regions has increased also future prospects for generating new projects. The projects are selected under priority 5 are based on predefined criteria and regions of Southern Finland prioritise the funded projects together and make a selection proposition for the Regional Council of Päijät-Häme (EU-coordination unit) (Ylimaakunnalliset hankkeet 2013).

In general, partners assessed that the co-operation between the funding bodies has been good and consultative in project preparation stage. However, the areas for improvement are communication and stakeholder events. The partners stated that it would be beneficial to organise events in the beginning of programme period, to inform stakeholders (particularly businesses) about the objectives of the whole programme as well as funding possibilities and the eligible project measures.

9.5 Programme management

The Ministry of Employment and the Economy is the Managing Authority of all four Finnish ERDF programmes in the 2007-2013 programme period. Some responsibilities of the MA have been delegated to NUTS 2 level, for one designated Regional Council in each OP area. In Southern Finland, these functions are tasked to Päijät-Häme Regional Council, which carries out:

- Preparation of a report on results of Operational Programmes and on progress towards objectives of each Priority;
- Preparation of annual implementation report;
- Preparation of proposals for programme changes.

In the Päijät-Häme Regional Council, the EU-coordination unit has the responsibility over these tasks. EU-coordination unit has also an important role in coordinating cooperation between the regions within Southern Finland and between Southern Finland and the MA and does close cooperation with intermediaries in the programme area. The close cooperation between intermediaries is facilitated through personal contacts (weekly phone, e-mail discussions) and meetings with Southern Finland OP coordinating and steering group (Kuparinen 2013). The coordinating group gathers together MA, EU-coordinator, representatives from all regional councils and ELY-centres (involved as experts). The Steering group gathers together the regional mayors of Southern Finland and decides on issues related to implementation and coordination of the programme, strategically important issues and selects projects crossing regional borders (priority 5) (Southern Finland AIR 2011).

In Southern Finland, delegating tasks of the MA closer to regional level has had some clear advantages. First, empowerment of regions improves their commitment and the shared ownership of the programme. Second, regional coordination facilitates closer cooperation with the intermediary bodies. This enables the regional coordination to advise intermediaries on project selection and to monitor their financial progress closely. Third, a more into-depth knowledge of the region helps the coordination "to see behind the numbers" ie. knowing the issues behind the financial progress of the programme. This is a clear advantage for example when writing the annual implementation reports (Ahlgren 2013; Kuparinen 2013). The main problem in delegating the tasks is the lack of capacity and will of the regions to communicate with the EC, because of differing viewpoints The MA thus has an important role in mediating this communication (Ahlgren 2013).

In general, also the project partners appreciated EU-coordination unit's input in programme management and assessed the co-operation good. In both of the projects reviewed, the participation of a group of partners had advanced achievement of project goals. On the other hand, the participation of these partners did not benefit the implementation of other stages in the project cycle and for example monitoring and preparation stages were burdensome for the leading organisation. One way to improve this would be to plan and budget co-operation activities already when preparing the projects.

9.6 Monitoring

The tasks and composition of the Monitoring Committee are defined in the law (Structural Fund Act 1401/2006) and decree (Decree on Structural Funds 311/2007) of Structural Funds. The following partners are represented in the Monitoring Committee of Southern Finland OP (Southern Finland AIR 2012):

- Ministries (Ministry of Employment and the Economy, chair),
- Regional Councils
- State regional authorities (ELY centres of Kaakkois-Suomi, Uusimaa)
- NGOs and interest organisations

Monitoring Committee has a secretary with representatives of the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, all regional councils of Southern Finland and state administration. Compared to programme period 2000-06, the Monitoring committee has a strong regional representation (Southern Finland AIR 2012).

The partners in the Monitoring Committee have voting right although in practice Monitoring Committee makes joint decisions and has not voted during the period. In general, there are some doubts over the actual capability of Monitoring Committee to influence on the OP, not least because the EU and national regulation, guiding of the MA and Regional Management Committees set a tight framework for the content of the programme. Therefore, in the last years, the committee has only had little impact on the implementation of the programme – the monitoring committee meets quite rarely and the issues discussed have been technical by their nature (Ahlgren 2013; Kuparinen 2013). It was also seen that not only the financial progress of the programme but also the progress in terms of results should be discussed in the Committee (Haapaniemi 2013). Nevertheless, Monitoring Committee enables monitoring of the programme and has initiated some changes. It is seen that the involvement of different partners in the monitoring committee improves implementation of the OP because:

- It enables information exchange between the European Commission and partners and facilitates better information flow in the regions;
- Southern Finland OP has broad objectives, which require broad presentation and expertise in the monitoring committee.
- The strong presentation of the regions in the committee has improved the commitment of the regions.

The monitoring information of Finnish ERDF programmes is collected in the internet based EURA2007 monitoring system. The numerous intermediary bodies have caused some in collecting monitoring data, mainly because of different interpretation of indicators and overlaps in recording indicator data (same new job/business has been recorded multiple times). Also for example Finnvera only registers the planned new jobs, without verifying in the end of the project how many jobs have been actually created (Ahlgren 2013; Southern Finland AIR 2011). However, in general partners were satisfied with the reporting of monitoring data in AIRs and considered the information distributed concerning the meetings of the Monitoring Committee sufficient (e.g. Haapaniemi 2013).

9.7 Evaluation

As the MA, the Ministry of employment and the Economy is responsible for organising programme evaluations. To plan, steer and coordinate evaluations carried out during the programme period, an ERDF –evaluation working group has been set up. The members of this group are relevant ministries and regional councils. It is deemed that the evaluation working group has good possibilities to influence on evaluation activities although gives this opportunity only to a narrow group of partners.

The main forum where the evaluation results are discussed with partners is the Monitoring Committee. Also in some regions the results are discussed in the Regional Management Committee. Furthermore, the MA organises “evaluation days”, in which all relevant partners involved in the programme implementation (e.g. members of regional management committees) can discuss with the evaluator from the evaluation results. It is seen that all relevant actors are well aware of the evaluation results (Haapaniemi 2013; Kuparinen 2013).

9.8 Outlook

The Southern Finland OP is considered effective from MLG perspective. The implementation of the OP has been transparent and involved all relevant partners. Particularly the programming process and delegating some the responsibilities of the MA to the regional level was seen to empower regions and guarantee that the OP fits to the development needs of the region. Also the priority 5, which funds projects crossing regional borders, was seen to encourage regions to cooperation, which would not otherwise exist.

In general, the number of Intermediary Bodies and whether they should be reduced has centred the discussions concerning administrative structures and multi-level governance in Finland. There have been discussions, if the Regional Councils should have a role of intermediary bodies in addition to state regional administration. Due to the large number of intermediaries there have been problems in collecting monitoring data and project applicants getting equal treatment. Also the evaluation of the administrative system of the Finnish ERDF programmes (2012) highlighted that although the cooperation of different actors involved in the programme works well and partners have good possibilities to contribute in the programme, intermediaries have done in some cases differing funding decisions and the guidance, information, administrative procedures and requirements of intermediaries differ. Nevertheless, the projects applicants assessed the administration system to be good and there is only little administrative burden for the beneficiaries. Particularly, the beneficiaries appreciate the closeness of the authorities to the level where project is implemented and the consultative project proposal and funding proposal stage. This was confirmed by the interviewed projects, which added that although project development and programme management have been good, there has been significant delays in the processing payment applications.

There are some concerns over involvement of different partners and moving to more centralised approach in the 2014-20 OP. In Finland, in the 2014-20 programme period, there will be only one national multi-fund programme uniting ERDF and ESF, which is prepared and implemented in two regions (Northern and Eastern Finland; Western and Southern Finland). There are concerns over this directing the implementation towards more centralised model, and thus involvement of all different partners in implementation, which can be seen already in the programming of the new OP.

The programming of the 2014-20 OP has been led by the Ministry of Employment and the Economy. There have been concerns (Kuparinen 2013 ; Haapaniemi 2013) over the sufficient involvement of partners in programming and the process has been criticised over lack of transparency and leadership (MDI 2013). This has been mainly because:

- At national level, the involvement of partners in the programming was facilitated through Cohesion 2013+ working group, which was planned to operate as an OP drafting group. Although the group facilitated good discussions between the partners and enabled them to contribute in the initial stages of programming, in the later stages it has been mainly a forum for the MA to inform the partners of the centrally made decisions. Indeed, the group has been criticised over operating as a 'pseudo influencing platform', where partners have had no real opportunity to influence on the programming. Particularly the economic and social partners have expressed their concern over lack of channels to influence (e.g. Kuparinen 2013).
- Two regional plans (Northern and Eastern Finland; Western and Southern Finland) were to feed into the OP. These plans were prepared in regions where a drafting group formed of regional councils and ELY-centres took the lead for preparations. Similarly as in 2007-2013, other regional partners were involved in drafting through informal discussions and Regional Management Committees and also project beneficiaries had an opportunity to participate in planning events. It is assessed that all relevant partners were involved in the drafting of these regional plans and the critiques relates to the unclear status and role of these plans in the final OP.
- The planned programme is inclusive and enabling. This is not least because of the public spending constrains and corresponding political pressure to advance objectives of domestic sector policies through Structural Funds. In relation to this the Ministry has been criticised over lacking a strong leadership over the programming, which would have facilitated more focused OP. In addition, concerns have been expressed that because of the increased interest of the sector ministries of Structural Funds, the interests of the regions have had a smaller role. On the other hand, enabling programme makes possibly implementing different types of measures in different regions and tailoring them in the regional needs. In general, it is seen that the draft OP fits well in the development needs of the regions (MDI 2013).

Because of the national programme, administration will be more centralised and there will be only one Monitoring Committee. The decision on naming regional coordination units is still bending, but generally delegating some tasks of MA to regional level has seen to facilitate better implementation of programme as it enables better regional coordination, monitoring and cooperation between MA and intermediaries. On the other hand, at the regional level, the regional management committees have seen their role strengthened as their recommendations for intermediaries on project selection becomes binding.

One concern particularly related to Southern Finland OP is, how to ensure that the cooperation between counties and the shared development vision that has formed under Priority 5 will continue in the next programme period as similar projects are not possible in the new programme. The priority 5 has been considered very progressive and successful (e.g Southern Finland AIR 2012) and also the projects see this co-operation very beneficial. The projects deemed that when the programme and co-operation area is wider, it is easier to partner up with organisations, which would advance achieving project objectives and help to overcome problems in local co-financing.

9.9 References

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9.10 Interviews and questionnaires

Managing Authority	Harri Ahlgren, Senior Inspector, Ministry of Employment and the Economy. Phone interview 12 August 2013.
Vertical Partner /Horizontal partner	Mari Kuparinen, Coordinator of Southern Finland OP, Regional Council of Päijät-Häme. Phone interview 3 July 2013.
Monitoring Committee	Juha Haapaniemi, Mayor of Kymenlaakso Region and a member of Southern Finland OP monitoring Committee. Phone interview 8 August 2013.
Project leader	Vesa Ijäs, project Leader of project "tetraedri", Ladec oy. Carola Wictorsson, project leader of project ESYLEP, Culminatium Oy.

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ISBN 978-92-823-5398-1
doi: 10.2861/53087