

BACKGROUND TO MODULE 2

Recognising that natural hinterlands – or “functional territories” – do not adhere to man-made boundaries and thus neither do the functions of local government, there is a growing awareness among the councils in the Irish border region that enhanced collaboration and joint work on common priorities must move up their agendas. Public sector collaboration in the Irish border region can be significantly enhanced through strengthened leadership skills, access to innovative practices and opportunities to build knowledge networks among colleagues. The ICLRD’s experience is that high-level training and animation can help both senior officials and elected representatives in local authorities to have a better understanding of how their development opportunities are linked and fit into a larger strategic context.

The Executive Training and Animation Programme for cross-border region councils, using the successful ICLRD model linking training and animation developed under CroSPlaN I, targets the 22 Councils involved in the three local authority-led cross-border networks, namely:

- Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN);
- North West Region Cross Border Group; and
- East Border Region Ltd.

The programme will be delivered through a programme of plenary sessions, seminars, discussion forums and working groups.

As demonstrated in CroSPlaN I, this programme will improve the quality of cross-border cooperation and provide a critical forum to bring together cross-border councils, selected cross-border bodies and central government departments to support joint solutions supported by collaborative agreements.

The programme will consist of 10 modules; with post module reports to be prepared for the initial five plenary sessions.

Please see the training website for information on upcoming modules and readings
<http://iclrd.org/training-crosplan/>

INTRODUCTION

This module considers the influence of the EU on local government working. It assesses the impact of EU sectoral policies and development principles on local government policy; with a particular emphasis being placed on the concepts of territorial cohesion, cohesion policy and subsidiarity. It will debate the current top-down / bottom-up arrangements in terms of the inter-relationship between central, regional and local government - and the scope for improving policy delivery through more coordinated action across spatial scales.

To assist in our understanding of these strategic issues, and the need for consistency and follow-through in policy objectives, this module will consider these issues through the case study of river basin management plans which are a requirement under the EU Water Framework Directive.

SESSION 1: The EU and Its Influence on National and Local Policies

Prof. Simin Davoudi, Professor of Environmental Planning and Policy, Newcastle University

Within systems of governance, there are complex webs of actors and institutions at play. Governance means multi-level working; it entails a proliferation of agencies, interests, service deliverers and regulatory systems coming together through horizontal and vertical self-organisation. At a national level, there is a hollowing-out of 'state'; with power increasing moving upwards towards the EU...and indeed sideways to the private sector. Yet, national government is still a powerful concept if it is recognised as a network governance with overlapping competencies that is in many ways being shaped by the EU. For example, the EU is increasing its competence in the areas of environmental protection. And where the EU has no competencies, it still wields influence through inter-governmental bargaining; for example EU employment strategy. Europe is shifting towards being a 'Europe of Regions' rather than a 'Europe of Nations'; with member states being active players rather than mere spectators..

The EU is largely supporting multi-level governance through funding programmes such as INTERREG. To engage in this system of 'network governance', questions of legitimacy and accountability must be addressed; the benefits to engage need to outweigh the disadvantages. In terms of territorial cohesion (the manifestation of the European social model), the *European Spatial Development Perspective* (ESDP) is an elaborate example of how the EU engages in intergovernmental processes through soft measures; it mobilised member states to produce draft ESDP's in the shape of spatial strategies. This was a voluntary action by member states but yet the process was steered by the EU.

A core ethos of the policies of the EU are that people should not be disadvantaged by wherever they happen to live or work in the European Union. In terms of territorial cohesion, it is increasingly recognise by Europe that peoples life choices are shaped not only be social

processes but also spatial processes (geography). Territorial cohesion policies, therefore, focus on reducing regional disparities. A growing challenge in this regard is the decoupling of social integration from economic integration - esp. during these austere times.

A challenge for not only national government but also local government is how they can operationalise EU policies at the local level - especially at this point in time when policies are heavily weighted towards economic development and growth which by their nature encourage regional disparities.

Dr. Neale Blair, School of the Built Environment, University of Ulster & ICLRD

The 2000 Water Framework Directive (WFD) applies to every member state; which, in effect, establishes new governance systems for water management. It requires the preparation of river basin management plans and in many ways reflects how planning is changing. There is an inter-relationship between the objectives of river basin management plans and spatial planning documents such as county/area development plans - which is often not recognised - or at least followed through on.

The river basin management plans manage water in an integrated way; there are over 100 water districts across the EU - with one-third of these being international in nature (i.e. they span a national border). Across the island of Ireland, there are eight river basin districts - with three of these being cross-boundary in nature.

While member states did not have to implement river basin management plans until 2009 - nine years after the Directive was first introduced - this timeline proved difficult to meet on an inter-jurisdictional basis...the delays demonstrating the complexity of adoption given the range of stakeholders involved and the monitoring required.

In the case of international river basin districts, the EU preference was for one single plan to be developed for these cross-boundary districts. In the case of the island of Ireland, two plans were produced for the three cross-boundary river basin districts - with the plans linked by a working paper called 'Working Together' - albeit this was never ratified..

The plans call for stakeholder engagement - recognising that integrated water management is not possible by government alone. To this end a series of public consultation events were held around each of the plans. Yet water management historically has not been a priority issue for the island of Ireland - and this is a mindset that will be slow to change.

To assist in this, there is a growing effort to link spatial planning policy with river basin management; an initiative recognised as central to achieving 'good status' in terms of water quality. River basin management is now recognised as an additional tool in making policy decisions.

A challenge for inter-jurisdictional management of river basins arises when the policies and laws of the adjoining jurisdictions do not match-up. In Ireland, the EPA Code 2009 gives guidance on the site suitability of one-off houses including as it impacts on groundwater; while in Northern Ireland, there is currently no specific policy around water management and planning.

Water management is a significant issue in that it impacts on not only planning but also on tourism, environmental management, renewable projects, etc. The river basin management plans will enter their second cycle in 2015 - and there are indeed lessons to be learned from the first iteration of these plans..for all players concerned.

Q&A with Prof. Davoudi & Dr. Blair

In addition to personal statements and reflections, participants also posed a number of questions. These are paraphrased below along with the speakers' responses in *italics*

Both speakers were asked if there are any mechanisms that can be employed which prevent elected representatives being used for the purpose of consultation only - rather than their being viewed as integral stakeholders to the process of river basin management?

A question was also posed about whether having diverse sets of objectives within such plans (river management and wider spatial planning policy documents) is not a positive thing?

Prof. Davoudi responded that a core objective of territorial cohesion is fairness (not sameness); with fairness in this instance not being about the fair distribution of benefits but more focused on the recognition of diversity. Diversity is regarded as a strength within the EU and member states are encouraged to embrace diversity to strength their position.

The speakers were asked whether they felt the concept of territorial cohesion was getting enough attention in the EU funding programmes.

Prof. Davoudi concurred that the EU funding mechanisms do get in the way of collaboration and that the bureaucracy associated with these programmes is heavy. This is increasingly causing bodies to question whether participation in such programmes is worthwhile.

In relation to river basin management, it was noted by one councillor that it is not clear who is / should be taking the lead in their implementation. There are also issues around accountability and where this actually 'lies'.

Systems are increasingly process driven - with an emphasis on value for money rather than outcomes. systems are increasingly bureaucratic with aspirational policies but operationally, this approach is failing.

SESSION 2: EU Funding Programmes 2014-2020 and Local Government

Ms. Lorraine McCourt, Director Joint Technical Secretariat, Special EU Programmes Body

Ms. McCourt noted that the new programmes are being developed in a very changed economic scenario; which raises questions around the type of themes / priorities to pursue over the period 2014-2020. The EU recognises the impact of the economic crisis; this led to the publication of EU 20200 which argues that member states need to find conditions for growth that are smarter, more sustainable and more inclusive. Northern Ireland, for example, has the lowest rate of research and innovation in the EU - how can this be enhanced?



It is also expected that the intervention rate will change - which will be significant for potential applicants to these funds. It is currently expected that the funding rate will stand between 75-85% under the new fund. There will be thematic concentration - with budgets being reduced, there will be fewer number of areas to spend money in. The EU is indicating that the new INTERREG programme, for example, must be results orientated - and this is more difficult to achieve than one might expect. Projects will have to demonstrate impact of what they are doing. In line with this, a greater emphasis will be placed on monitoring - which, to the delight of many potential applicants, should in turn lead to simplification of delivery.

The SEUPB agree that the level of bureaucracy is terrible - but this is difficult to change; the organisation must adhere to EU regulations, the regulations of two member states (Ireland,

Northern Ireland and Scotland) and satisfy each jurisdiction. Under the new programmes, there is likely to be flat rates for overheads, a focus on unit costs and lump sum payments.

For the Irish border region, future projects must demonstrate a fit with 'community planning' - and fit with the reform agendas of local government in both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland.

The new PEACE IV programme is not yet finalised - though initial indications highlight the themes as being:

- Investing in children and young people
- Shared spaces
- Civic leadership.

Under INTERREG V, there are currently five themes being highlighted - although this is likely to reduce to four:

- Research and innovation
- Environment
- Social inclusion
- Sustainable transport
- Low carbon.

The OPs for these programmes are currently being devised; and a consultation phase is expected in late autumn for presentation then to Europe in Spring 2014. all going to plan, there will be call issued at end 2015, with projects to begin in Spring 2015.

Ms. Carrie Small, Project Manager - EU Programmes, InterTradelreland

EU2020 supports a vision of an innovative Union with an emphasis on job creation and growth. Horizon 2020, as a funding programme, emerges from this vision - with its emphasis being on research and innovation (rather than the traditional focus of research and development).

The programme will launch in January 2014; it will have a budget of over €70million over 6 years. Projects must involve a minimum of three member states - and must be based within the EU's strategy for jobs and growth. Core themes include:

- Excellent science (incl. training and development of future and emerging technologies)
- Better society - with a focus on an identified set of 7 EU / global challenges such as SMART transport, demographic well-being, food security, climate action, etc.)/
- Competitive industries

(with cross-cutting themes of ICT and societal challenges).

To assist councils and indeed businesses and other interested parties in exploring opportunities under this programme, a number of national contact points have been appointed by theme. InterTradelreland, for example, are an active member of the networks of contact points and national delegates who have an influence over the theme / focus of funding calls.

For Councils, the emphasis being placed on smart cities is one clear opportunity for engagement with this programme; and participants of this programme are encouraged to sign up to the InterTrade App and other mediums to 'stay in touch' with this programme.

Q&A with Ms. McCourt & Ms. Small

Participants largely commented on the information imparted during the course of the previous presentations - rather than asking direct questions of the presenters. There was a sense of frustration at the introduction of sustainable transport - recognising that this is coming from government departments and indeed, is aimed at them.

SESSION 3: Local Government Priorities - What have we got in common?

Mr. Andy Pollak, Project Manager, Border Development Zone

Mr. Pollak outlined the Border Development Zone project currently being rolled out by the Centre for Cross Border Studies (CCBS) and the ICLRD in association with InterTradeIreland under the INTERREG IV funded programme, INICCO II. The purpose of this initiative is to explore the potential of a joint economic development approach across the whole Irish and Northern Irish cross-border region. Previous CCBS and ICLRD research has shown that this region has been cut off from the organic links that exist between more centralised regions in both Irish jurisdictions. This project will investigate ways of tackling its unique double challenge of peripherality and the border, and how the whole region can be re-integrated into the Northern Irish, Irish and island-wide economies. It will identify how key regional actors, such as local authorities, might lead this approach.

The need for a 'Border Development Zone' approach to the economic problems of the Irish cross-border region was outlined in the INICCO-1 research project *Cross-Border Economic Renewal: Rethinking Regional Policy in Ireland*, by two internationally distinguished economists, Dr John Bradley and Professor Michael Best.

The project is initially focusing on four sectoral themes; with researchers having been commissioned to develop strategies around each:

- SME enterprises in goods & services (with export potential)
- Tourism & recreation
- Agriculture, food & fish processing
- Low carbon initiatives, energy saving and renewable energies.

The results of this research -including discussion on next steps - will form the basis of the joint CCBS / ICLRD conference in January 2014. The resulting papers will be made available via the CCBS website once completed.

Discussion

Under Strand 2 of this Executive Training Programme, Councils will be meeting in smaller working groups that are theme-specific - with the themes based on identified areas of priority action. Modules 6-9 will be tailored to address these themes.

To identify these themes or areas of common interest to groupings of councils, delegates entered into discussions to consider if the themes of the BDZ were the themes that they would like to focus on during Strand 2.

During the course of discussions, Councils widened the focus of these sectoral interest groups, and proposed two others. Strand 2 of this programme will therefore focus on six themes:

- SME enterprises in goods & services(with export potential)
- Tourism & recreation
- Agriculture, food & fish processing
- Low carbon initiatives, energy saving and renewable energies
- Urban regeneration
- Community planning.

MODULE CLOSE

Ms. Creamer closed the module by thanking the attendees for their participation and looked forward in anticipation to their active participation in Module 3 on 17th October 2013.

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