MAKING PARTNERSHIP WORK: IMPELEMENTATION OF COHESION POLICY IN THE NEW EU MEMBER STATES

BY

ANDREY DEMIDOV

PhD Candidate,
Department of Public Policy
Central European University

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Work in progress!!!
Comments and suggestions are very welcome to
demidov_andrey-anatolievich@ceu-budapest.edu

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INTRODUCTION

Searching for appropriate means to make implementation of its policies even more efficient, the EU introduces new policy instruments. The partnership principle which assumes "close cooperation" of all interested stakeholders is an instrument required to be implemented for more efficient allocation of the Structural Funds, a financial mechanism of the cohesion policy. Thus far, despite the pressure from the Commission, partnership has not become a central implementation mechanism universally adopted across the EU member states, especially in the EU10. Given the purpose of the cohesion policy, the second biggest line in the Community budget, its obvious salience for ordinary Europeans and its political importance for elites and domestic administrations, member states' inertia regarding adopting efficiency-enhancing instruments looks puzzling. Considering this, it is extremely important to investigate why partnership has not become a policy implementation mode consistently utilized across member states or has only been formalistically approached as another Commission's requirement.

The idea of partnership hinges on a particular EU approach towards policy implementation and reflects on Commission's political ideal of "regulated capitalism" advancement of which the EU cohesion policy, a redistributive mechanism for reducing national disparities, has always been designed for. The idea of "stakeholders' cooperation" to ensure better growth and creation of more jobs has also been endorsed by the Lisbon Agenda. By the new 2007-2013 programming period the partnership principle has been considerably expanded to include non-state actors such as social partners and civil society organisations.

Nevertheless, despite strict legal binding and noticeable effort of the Commission in promotion of partnership, existing reports and evaluations of implementation of the principle signal a visible lack of progress in the new member states. The Commission has recognized that application of the partnership in the new member states is far from making the most out of this approach to the allocation of the Structural Funds. New members' attempts to comply with the requirement are, at best, assessed as formal or as reminding mere "window-dressing". Commission's ideal of "close collaboration" of partners as active stakeholders falls short in many member states although formally partnership has been enforced and ensured. This brings about an interesting puzzle about conditions under which partnership mechanism can be wound up, partners become active participants and, what is even more important, whether this can be done everywhere.

Despite expanding research on implementation of cohesion policy and even more intent attention to partnership principle an in-depth systematic analysis of the reasons behind failures and success in its implementation has been lacking so far. Not only do existing explanations focus on such macro-level structural and institutional factors as entrenched historical traditions and institutional arrangements which either hinder or provide some space for the model of partnership due to its proximity, but they also test these hypotheses on the material of the old member states. However, existing accounts have rarely focused on other driving forces of partnership such as partners themselves, their input in making partnership work and specificities of policy areas within which partnership is expected to unfold. Moreover, variables introduced by existing studies have rarely been properly operationalised and concomitant causal mechanisms have hardly been defined let alone testing of these hypotheses in a

specific context of the enlarged EU. Studies of the “thick” accounts of partnership functioning are almost non-existent.

The present project will address these issues through empirical investigation, based on qualitative methodology, of the praxis of partnership principle in three new member states during 2007-2013 programming period. Examination of partnership principle implementation will link it to on-going debates on Europeanisation, cohesion policy implementation and its role and effects on civil society development in the new member states.

SECTION I. THE PUZZLE OF THE PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLE

The EU cohesion policy implementation is heavily regulated and required to be carried out in accordance with several principles, such as programming, additionality, co-financing and partnership (Begg, 2010). The central idea behind the partnership is "close cooperation" of all stakeholders on the issues of the allocation of the Structural Funds "with each party acting as a partner in pursuit of a common good" (European Commission, 2006). Such cooperation is expected to penetrate all stages of the Funds implementation cycle: planning and programming, operational management and evaluation and monitoring. In practical terms this means involvement of all parties which are, in one or another way, affected by the policy or represent interests of those who are affected.

The major justifications behind the partnership evolved throughout the history of this instrument (Bache 2010). Introduced in 1988 with a purely technocratic vision of greater efficiency that partnership can potentially add to the process of the Funds allocation, it evolved into an instrument laden with several political and normative ideas that reflected on particular Commission's vision of policy implementation. Widening of partnership through inclusion of a range of new actors, such as social partners was the major political component of the social democratic or regulated capitalism vision of socio-economic governance promoted by the Commission and complemented by the ideas of "social dialogue" [1] (Bache, 2001, 2010a; Hooghe, 1998). However, later, by the new 2007-2013 programming period the Article 11 of the Regulations on Structural Funds allocation was even further enriched by the clause requiring the allocation process to be carried out "with authorities and bodies such as competent regional, local, urban authorities, economic and social partners, any other body representing civil society, environmental partners, non-governmental organisations, and bodies responsible for promoting equality between men and women" (European Commission, 2006). The Commission pushed further technocratic rationales to a political vision of governance as cooperation of state and civil society with an emphasis on participation of the latter, thus incorporating its own approach to civil society as a necessary stakeholder (Kohler-Koch, 2009). It is participation of non-state and civil society actors in partnership structures that later became the main criterion against which success, efficiency and quality of partnership was assessed by the Commission.

Soon it turned out that partnership as a model is, first, not applied in the same manner and evenly across member states and, secondly, functions differently in terms of participation of non-state actors. Numerous evaluation reports, prepared by the Commission and other research institutes and organisations, demonstrate easily noticeable variation in application of the principle (SFteam 2009; Commission 2005; Kelleher, Batterbury, and Stern 1999; Commission 2003; Batchler and McMaster 2008). In some countries partnership boosted empowerment of non-state actors (CSOs) both in terms of their inclusion as partners and endowment them with certain rights and responsibilities and in terms of meaningfulness of their participation and inclusion; it kick-started forms of cooperative governance thus contributing to emergence and entrenchment of multi-level governance (Bache, 2010b; Bache & Olsson,

[1] It is clear that there is more behind this sketchy description. For more detailed accounts, please refer to an article by Ian Bache (Bache 2010).

2001; Jordan, 2003). At the same time evaluation reports and further research registered compliance problems in the old member states, where it did not used to be a problem, as well as difficulties in filling partnerships with real meaning in terms of partners' roles (Batory & Cartwright, 2011; Cartwright & Batory, 2011; Piattoni, 2006). In some cases partnership was claimed to be working efficiently both in terms of institutionalisation of partners' participation and meaningfullness of it while in others the EU reports refered to it as "window-dressing", "rubber-stamping" and pure formalism regarding both aspects under scrutiny (Bache and Olsson 2001). Most often, though, the latter, namely, meaningfullness of non-state actors' participation was absent with their roles marginalised, opinions not heard and influence on the allocation not exerted.

This puzzling variation has been found in the old member states although the principle was introduced in 1988 and they were exposed to it for quite a long time. As for the new member states, most often they are considered as lagging behind in complying with this requirement which may seem more puzzling given that they went through an enormous external pressure in the form of conditionality.

The table composed by Kalman Dezseri as a result of a comprehesive study of practices of partnershhip implementation in the new member states convincingly shows that there is variation in application of partnership, first of all, along the institutional dimension or, in other words, in terms of institutionalisation of partnership practice through endowment of partners with particular rights and obligations (see Table 1 in the Appendix 1). Some countries like Slovenia, Poland or Latvia are often portrayed as sucessful leaders in use of the partnership instrument while others, like Slovakia and Czech Republic are regarded as obvious laggards. However, more in-depth inquiries into "thick" accounts of partnerships across the new member states, carried out by other scholars and during the period of preliminary fieldwork, additionally demonstrate that there are noticeable malfunctions in efficiency of partnership. These can be found even in countries which are viewed as good implementers of the "letter" of the EU Regulations, like Hungary where procedural application of partnership principle was carried out very seriously from the perspective of inclusion of all types of partners that the Regulations is referring to (Batory and Cartwright 2011)[2]. However, partnership turns out not to "live up either to normative expectations suggested by the EU regulation….or the expectations of civil society organisations themselves" (Batory and Cartwright 2011).[3]

[2] In April 2011 and October-November I conducted some preliminary fieldwork in Hunagry, Slovenia and Slovakia on the quality of partnership functioning. The fieldwork included interviews with representatives of civil society organisations (CSOs) and state officials involved in the process of the allocation of the Structural Funds at any stage (programming, planning, monitoring and evaluation) either through participation in the consultation process or via membership in the Monitoring Committees. The major goal was to inquire into quality of participation of CSOs' in partnerships within several different Operational Programmes. The questions asked covered a range of topics related to CSOs' perceptions regarding partnership, its roles and effects, their expected roles and anticipations. Transcripts of the interviews are available upon request.

[3] Agnes Batory and Andrew Cartwright, however, focused on just one manifestation of partnership, namely, Monitoring Committees and did not examine closer partnership at other stages of the of the allocation process (Batory and Cartwright 2011).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The model so actively promoted and imposed by the Commission is implemented quite formally and does not seem to be working as designed. Thus, the central research question that guides the present project is **why does the partnership principle not work consistently across member states?** Why does implementation of partnership not deliver "close collaboration" of all partners in pursuit of a common goal? Why does it most often stop at the stage of formal compliance in the form of consultation and barely goes further to real collaboration with incorporation of partners input in the form of knowledge, expertise and opinons into the process of allocation? Why does this state of affairs persist despite easily-detectable "thick" learning or deep internalisation of the idea of partnership as an appropriate and useful policy tool?

Since success/failure of partnership as a policy instrument is analysed with a focus on non-state actors participation, which is the core aspect of partnership, the central question can be complemented and clarified as:

- **how is partnership impelemented across the new member states in terms of forms, modalities, practices and content of state/non-state actors cooperation?**
- **what factors facilitate or constrain involvement of non-state actors and can established theoretical perspectives provide a full account of failures of their involvement and participation?**
- **under what conditions do partners become active participants of partnership arrangements?**
- **does implementation of partnership depend on differences across policy issues, types of partners and stages of the cohesion policy implementation process?**

Preliminary argument is that implementation of partnership in the new member states only partially depends on structural and institutional macro-factors such as historical legacies, institutional arrangements around interest intermediation and cohesion policy implementation. Existing studies of partnership draw almost exclusively on these strands of literature. Yet, these factors provide very little explanation why and how partners cooperate and whether this cooperation is developing in accordance with Commission's ideal of "close cooperation" in pursuit of common goal. Some important insights regarding the policy content of the Structural Funds allocation process and properties of non-state partners themselves are still missing and possibilities for theoretical synthesis of some of existing approaches are not explored. It is assumed that none of existing perspectives can offer a stand-alone answer to the identified puzzle due to some important ommissions of the context and contents of partnership functioning. A new empirical research would put existing explanations to test through comparison in a new context with a view to look for possible ways of integrating them through review of initial assumptions and adding omitted ones.

The next Section will explore how the identified puzzle is addressed in existing literature and whether it is capable to fully account for variation found in the new member states.

SECTION II. EXISITING ACCOUNTS OF PARTNERSHIP AND HYPOTHESES

Several strands of research literature could offer explanations of what might affect implementation of the partnership principle.

1.1. HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONALISM ACCOUNTS

Historical institutionalism accounts would enter the debates on partnership efficiency in the new member states through, basically, two points of entry - partners and the state – as the crucial agents upon whom implementation of partnership is contingent. In analysing why partnership fails to function as a policy instrument, it would employ the well-known notions of path dependency and historical legacies as major obstacles to partnership's functioning. The literature would emphasize weakness of both partners and state, inhereted from the time of communism and preventing them to have productive relationships as implied by partnership (Borragán, 2006; Börzel & Buzogány, 2010; Gąsior-Niemiec, 2010). From this perspective, research would focus on weakness of partners (Howard 2003). Non-state actors in the CEE states are seen as structurally underdeloped. This prevents them from successful working on articulation and defence of citizens' interests. Low levels of citizens' participation, low volunteering input, insufficient social capital and low capacity are most often mentioned underdeveloped properties (Kutter & Trappmann, 2010; Lane, 2010; Sissenich, 2010). This negative legacy is complemented and goes hand in hand with traditionally weak states lagging behind Western counterparts in terms of quality of governance (Sissenich 2010). The new member states represent quite a coherent group on both these dimesnions: these are weak states and co-exist with weak non-state actors. Approaching partnership as an arangement that requires these actors to be capable and willing to cooperate, these accounts are quite pessimistic about prospects of successful cooperation. Partners are unable to fullfill their roles and provide expected inpiut (expertise, knowledge, advice etc.) whereas the state fails to act as the key enterpreuner in this process due to lack of administrative capacity. Likewise, any prospect of CEE non-state actors' being involved in any modes of governance promoted by the EU, be it at the EU level or at the domestic one, is critically assesed as slim.

Although sometimes providing convincing arguments this literature is problematic both in terms of its exclusive focus on failures of public-private cooperation (partnership, in our case) and due to its empirical inadequacy. Operating with a blurry and ill-defined notion of "weakness" (and viewing it quite essentialistically with respect to the new Member States) the approach remains disarmed when left to explain successful practices. The literature does not base its conclusions on and lacks clear, transparent and universal criteria of "weakness". It focuses instead on such measurements of weakness as, for example, "sustainability" of organisational forms (such as NGOs, for example) which are seen as the most crucial empirical manifestations of actors' strength. This reveals extremely narrow approach to the problem and its perfunctory focus on institutional and structural side of non-state actors development (participation and membership rates, financial sustainability of organisations etc.). Whether these quantitative measures truly reveal weakness/strength remains a highly debated issue. The approach, though, does not look at normative and thicker accounts such as identities, beliefs, self-perceptions as well as entrenched discourses. The latter is especially important issue taking into consideration the story of non-state actors (re)emergence and (re)discovery in the CEE countries. Moreover, are CEE countries coherent when it comes to strength of non-state partners? This literature would probably be unable to explain such outliers as Slovenia which has been for a long time praised for its breathtaking non-state actors developments (Fink-Hafner, 2001; Frege, 2002). It also cannot explain cases of partnerhsip success, idenified by both non-state actors and state authorities, across the new member states where

one would predict the claimed "weakness" to be automatically in place.[4] Likewise, it would be unable to explain failures of partnerhsip in countries with strong and well-capacitated non-state actors who, as preliminary fieldwork demonstrates, are the ones who enter partnership arrangements (Laszlo Bruszt & Vedres, n d; Carmin, 2010; Stark, Vedres, & Laszlo Bruszt, 2006a, 2006b).

Accounts of historical institutionalism, though, still remain quite useful in shedding some light on practices of partnership in the new member states. Some potential historical hypotheses have not beed addressed in existing studies and tested by looking at the new member states. In the present projects several "histories" matter: emergence and evolution of non-state actors in the CEE countries and evolution of the EU pre-accession aid. Despite the fact that the CEE countries are most often seen as coherent when it comes to strength of non-state actors, one can see differences across them. Thus, one can hypothesize:

> H1: implementation and variability of partnership depends on capacity/properties of involved non-state partners.

This assumption resonates with the ones of interest groups and social movements literature, namely, in their attention to the "structure of political opportunities". Scholars working in this tradition look at endogenous political opportunities or, in other words, abilities of participating actors (resourcefullness, capacities etc.) to make use of existing exogenous opportunities undertsood as structural openess of political system for exerting influence (Beyers & Kerremans, 2007; Princen & Kerremans, 2008).

Scholars, looking at partnership as a mode of governance, claim that the EU pre-accession aid has a direct effect on its implementation as the EU pre-accession aid policy has a similar design and requirements to cohesion policy and, thus, similar effects through the mechanism of learning (Bache 2010). Thus, the hypothesis drawn from this broad body of literature would be:

> H2: past exposure (prior experience with) to the EU pre-accession aid programmes impacts quality of implementation of the partnership principle through learning and socialisation mechanisms.

It is quite difficult to hypothesize about the direction of this relationship unless one knows more about the practices that emerged and got entrenched during the period of pre-accession.

1.2. Structural- Institutionalist accounts: interest intermediation modes and regionalisation

Studies within this broad approach place the emphasis on structural properties of political systems within which non-state actors act and in this sense echo such concepts as Europeanisation,

[4] During the fieldwork CSOs in Hungary always referred to the Hungarian NUTS2 region of Western Transdanubia as an example where partnership was working "very successfully" and where CSOs were "not only invited but listened to and heard". Likewise all claims about weakness of civil societies in the region can be easily refuted by giving such examples of successful civil society's actions as formation of massive NGO Coalition "NGOs for the Publicity of the National Development Plan" in Hungary or a massive boycott campaign against government plans regarding allocation of the Structural Funds launched by NGOs in Slovakia. Both cases are examples of triumphant achievement of their goals by civil societies.

especially in its neoinstitutionalism-driven attention to issues of fit/misfit, and the concept of structure of political opportunities, this time understood as exogenous opportunities (Dabrowski, 2007; Olsen, 2002; Princen & Kerremans, 2008; Radaelli, 2008; Sedelmeier, 2011).

In the context of cohesion policy and partnership principle two particular arrangements are taken into account as bearing potential effect on implementation of the latter: interest intermediation mode and degree of decentralization as determining actors' motivations behind applying partnership (Bache and Olsson 2001). With regards the first one scholars tend to draw on the literature on Europeanisation of interest groups, in particular the question whether and how the EU alters domestic practices of interest intermediation through its policy requirements such as partnership (Eising 2008; Beyers and Kerremans 2007). They contend that the effect of partnership can be either blocked or, conversely, enhanced depending on already existing deep-entrenched practices, be it corporatism, pluralism or statism. Participating actors would react to changing structure of political opportunities (Falkner, 2000). Partnership is seen as requiring less adaptation on the part of actors and, consequently, resistance in countries with (neo)corporatist traditions than in those where pluralism or statism are prevaling modes. However, an obvious pitfall of this explanation is that the new member states are most often portrayed as difficult to group in terms of existing interest intermediation modes, although such attempts have been made (Bohle & Greskovits, 2007). It also remains silent about whether and how any available typology, elaborated predominantly on the material of social policy-making in welfare states, reflects interest intermediation around different policy issues which are intensively brought forward by cohesion policy, such as transport, environment etc. In other words, do well-known typologies of interest intermediation cut across policy issues? This literature remains silent about mechanisms through which practices of interest intermediation that exist in a certain sphere, be it industrial policy or social policy, trickle down to, get reproduced and spill over other areas. However, the hypotheses on the relationship between interest intermediation mode and efficiency of partnership still needs to be tested in the context of the new member states. The next hypothesis is therefore:

> H3: variation in partnership principle implementation depends on existing practices and modes of interest intermediation and is more efficient in the member states with interest intermediation modes close to corporatist-like type.

Other changes in structure of political opportunities occuring due to the EU requirements and pressures are believed to have some impact on partnership practices. Here existing studies focus on one aspect: the strength of different institutional actors (national, regional and local) as a result of adoption of a particular cohesion policy management style. Cohesion policy is seen as creating the whole bunch of new political dynamics at the domestic level as it alters the whole structure of political opportunities empowering some actors through introduction of new governance tiers (Borzel 1999). As a result, the whole architecure of actors' relationships in the member states alters due to emerging of opportunities for regional and local authorities (Bauer, 2002; László Bruszt, 2008; Liesbet & Gary, 2003). When speaking about partnership this literature helps to, first of all, explain why it can potentially become a very widely used instrument. The departure point is interests of the actors, both public and private. Partnership structures can be actively used by non-state actors themselves who will see in them additional opportunities of exerting influence on domestic policies and, likewise, by public authorities,

especially at the regional level, who might use it for increasing their influence.[5] Partners can, thus, be seen as additional sources of legitimacy necessary for conducting regional development policies (Keller, 2011). Scholars argue that the latter was the trend which took place in Germany where it was federal-land relationships that determined flourishing of partnership (Bauer, 2002). There are a number of studies (though on the material of the old members) which demonstrate that introduction of partnership principle triggered intensification of inter-actor collaboration at the regional level, even in countries traditionally described as statist, like the UK (Chapman, 2006).

However, these explanations suffer from two inter-related problems: they underplay complex dynamics of the cohesion policy itself but slightly overemphasize the role of these dynamics at the domestic level in the new member states. One would, first of all, challenge the thesis that cohesion policy gives rise to excessive regional autonomy. To the contrary, recent studies claim that the trend of "renationalisation" of cohesion policy is occuring these days (Batchler and McMaster 2008; Smyrl 1997). Additionally, the process of regionalisation in the new member states is hard to see as completed: EU conditionality yielded various responses in the CEE members as well as led to different outcomes and results most often referred to as "incomplete regionalisation" with minimal transfer of competences from center to the regions (Bauer, 2002; Hughes, Sasse, & Gordon, 2004). Thus, if these explanations seem to be relevant for some countries like Poland and Czech Republic where regionalisation was carried out in accordance with the initial plans of the Commission, it says a little about other member states, such as Hungary, where, following the logic of these explanations, one would expect zero positive partnership experience due to severe underdevelopment of regional autonomy but where it can still be found. Finally, with regards to participation of various partners, some studies indicate that it is hard to expect regionalisation/decentralisation to foster their participation in cohesion policy implementation because of the mismatch between the levels at which they are best structured and "the level at which they are requested to act" (Piattoni 2006).

With regards to partnership this literature also helps to formulate the hypothesis:

H4: variation in implementation of partnership depends on existing cohesion policy management style and is more efficient in the member states with stronger regional actors.

1.4. NON-STATE ACTORS LITERATURE (S)

Partnership assumes "close cooperation" between public and private actors. The latter, however, according to the Regulations compose quite a diverse group of non-state actors which are traditionally examined by a broad body of literature on non-state actors.

Looking at activities of non-state actors and, more specifically, at trajectories of their collaboration with public and governmental actors, this literature would, first of all, emphasize existing differences between types of non-state actors (civil society organisations, economic and social partners)

[5] These hypotheses are also supported by the literature on policy instruments which view them as arenas where power relations unfold and develop. Policy instruments are believed to be constructed and used by actors not out of sheer technocratic practicality but to achieve particular objectives (Kassim and Le Gales 2010; Lascoumes and Le Gales 2007)

on a wide range of parameters: resource-endowment, proximity to power centers, level of embedededdness in political and institutional structures etc. The major line of division, though, would be drawn in relation to pursued goals. In this sense non-state actors, most often referred to as organised interests, would be seen as representing diffuse or specific interests. The criterion for this classification is constituency on whose behalf mobilisation is taking place: concentrated and well-delineated for specific interests and broad and general segments of society for diffuse interests (Beyers, 2004; Eising, 2008; Mahoney, n d). The former are believed to be acting in defence of interests directly linked to their constituencies whereas the latter are claimed to be defending general or public interests. Outcomes of their activities also serve as a criterion for distinction: policy changes promoted by specific interests accrue to members who participated in their promotion whereas diffuse interests mainly act for general public benefits (Dunleavy 1988). Apart from goals these types of non-state actors or organised interests are believed to be using different strategies of seeking access to center of policy-making: diffuse interests are politically more disadvantaged due to their structural weaknesses compared to specific ones (Beyers, 2002; Greenwood, 2007; Knodt, Greenwood, & Quittkat, 2011). Thus, according to this simple typology, collaboration with power-holders will unfold differently for these two types of non-state actors.

It is clearly seen that this division resulted in internal split of the literature on non-state actors into interest groups and civil society streams. Although both concepts are highly contested up to a point when any boundaries between interest groups and civil society organisations are claimed to be non-existent, there is some academic consensus regarding differentiating between them. This internal divide significantly complicates the picture by adding a normative dimension unfolding it in application to one type of actors only – diffuse interests. Most often above-mentioned diffuse vs. specific interests typology turns into civil society vs. interest groups one which may have its imprint on practices of collaboration between public and private actors since along with the label “civil society” a bunch of normative expectations with regards to political roles and actions of those labelled as civil society is brought about. Additionally, these expectations get internalised by actors themselves and start directing and shaping their activities and get embodied in a particular political praxis, relations with public authorities in our case.

For practices of partnership this division plays a very important role. It is expected that partners belonging to the above-mentioned types will be pursuing, first, different goals and strategies towards partnerhsip, and will be perceiving partnership and their own roles differently. For the present project literature on non-state actors brings about the following hypothesis:

> H5: implementation of partnership principle varies depending on types of participating non-state partners and policy domains of their activities.

Looking at differences between these two types of non-state actors inevitably brings a huge debate around civil society up to the front of proposed research and contributes to another theoretical expectation regarding factors behind partnership success, namely, that it may be linked to circulating discources and meanings-in-use of civil society contested and reproduced by all three major actors within partnership: the Commission, domestic authorities and non-state partners themselves (Bache, 2001; Kohler-Koch, 2009). Partnership appears as a particular Commission’s vision of civil society and its role in public policy which would inevitably interact with existing notions and visions which, in their turn, pose several important questions: “who is in and who is out” and what is civil society’s ultimate goal

(Fagan, 2005; Lane, 2010; Zimmer, n d). It is assumed that actors will approach and interprete partnership using these frames and understandings which may influence both their expectations about it and actions towards it.

1.5. LITERATURE REVIEW REFLECTIONS

All studies, presented above, draw on various literatures in their attempts to explain success of the exercise of partnership. It is also easily seen that, although approaching the central question from different perspectives, the state-of-the-art in partnership research still predominantly revolves around structural factors regarding them as the main mediating variables. However, at the same time none of them gives totally convincing explanation of the outcome. Surprisingly little has been done to integrate non-state actors, with an emphasis on their properties, attributes and strategies, within proposed frameworks and to adjust existing explanations to the complicated nature and content of cohesion policy which inevitably would question some of theoretical guidelines provided by the above-mentioned perspectives.

Such flaws of existing accounts as, for example, inability of debates about low capacity of non-state actors to come up with a concrete and clear-cut criteria of "high" capacity makes this explanation extremely ill-equipped to be applied to partnership reality. Similar problem exists with an account placing emphasis on interest intermedation modes that simply tries to look at partnership practice through the lenses of existing typology of interest politics and misses an important point that these modes evolved around one sphere, namely, social policy whereas partnership in cohesion policy is destined to address other polisy issues too.

Thus, what, obviously, is missing is, first of all, a revised understanding of how capable of explaining functioning (both successful and failed) of partnership existing accounts are. Secondly, a more comprehesive explanatory picture of factors behind partnership implementation which would not only focus on structural accounts, related to institutional context, arrangements and legacies but would incorporate better understandings of non-state actors themselves and peculiarities of policy issues. This represents the major theoretical challenge of the project and its main contribution – theoretical integration of approaches that look at the phenomena from similar grounds but rarely communicate to each other.

The present project seeks to, first of all, systematically empirically test existing hypotheses in a new context of the CEE member states in order to identify their explanatory strength and power and, secondly, offer a refined theoretical framework based on incorporation and theoretical synthesis.

SECTION III. RESEARCH DESIGN

1.1. CONCEPTS AND VARIABLES

In order to find an answer to the central research question empirical research aims to delve into the practices of partnership across three member states, policy areas and stages of implementation process.

The formulation of the research question makes (successful/efficient) partnership a **dependent variable**. Operationalisation of this variable is a challenge in itself and is a separate task of the present project. However, at this point it is clear that two particular dimensions of partnership are taken for analysis: **institutionalisation** and **partners' participation**. These two aspects are the major criteria against which implementation is tested by the Structural Funds Regulations. These variables also reflect on the so-called process-oriented operationalisation of partnership, as emphazied by the literature on

partnerships in public policy and as opposed to the outcome-oriented dimension which is not in focus of the present project (Dowling, Powell, and Glendinning 2004; Vining and Boardman 2008).

The first dimension is pure procedural one and involves analysis of such aspects as: composition (key actors) and formal structure of partnership, internal procedures and implementation mechanisms. In this respect, success/quality of partnership implementation is assessed by looking at how much space for exerting influence on the allocation process is provided for non-public partners by existing partnership arrangement.

Operationalisation of the second dimension is a more difficult task due to multidimensionality of the category of "participation". What is, so far, in focus of the present project is quality of non-state actors' participation analysed through **influence** of non-state partners on the allocation process. The main assumption, so far, is that partnership can be considered as successful and efficient if invited non-state actors can exert some influence on thematic and spending priorities. The major problem with taking influence as an indicator of successful partnership is methodological problems related to measurement of its degree. The present project draws on a suggestion of the literature on interest groups to overcome the problem of measurement through triangulation of methods (Dur 2008; Michalowitz 2007). Process-tracing and assessing attributed influence are the methods mentioned in discussions around measurement non-state actors' influence and are the ones that are going to be applied in the present project.

1.2. CASE SELECTION

The core part of the dissertation research will be case studies of the application of the partnership principle in the new member states. Since project's research question assumes an in-depth and extensive description, examination and analysis of practices of partnership principle implementation, the method of case study research seems to be the most appropriate instrument (Yin 2009).

Selecting cases on the dependent variable – success of partnership principle implementation – would be one option with Slovenia and Slovakia taken as two polar cases. However, there are some methodological flaws with this scenario. First of all, these countries also differ on some independent variables such as interest intermediation mode and cohesion policy management. Selecting them would not allow for testing the impact of these factors. Secondly, success of partnership implementation is still a very blurred notion approached differently by different evaluators. There is very little justification as to which criteria the success is tested and measured against. It seems that existing reports and studies approach this from a pure institutional dimension and only register the degree of institutionalization of partnership without taking into account actual efficiency of partnership as close collaboration of different actors.

Based on this, it seems that the most justified approach would be to select cases to ensure some variation on independent variables. This is a difficult task because the new member states represent quite a coherent group on some variables, like, for example, the EU pre-accession aid, since all of them were exposed to it and, thus, it can be held constant. However, it is quite possible to select countries that differ from each other on some important parameters which could have its effect on implementation of partnership. First of all, although CEE member states are often portrayed as scoring low on the degree of civil society development and although selection itself is quite a hard task due to

absence of any reliable measures capturing such a complex phenomenon as civil society, it is still possible to group CEE member states with regards to this parameter. The most (and perhaps the only) reliable proxy for this is NGO sustainability index elaborated and used by USAID.[6] Its main imperfection is that it measures only one side of civil society, namely, its institutional face sustained through NGOs, and misses some important characteristics of civil society. However, such a focus is rather welcome than the opposite since, as preliminary fieldwork demonstrated, participation of partners in partnership is also a matter of their capacity.

Another criterion for case selection is meant to reflect on one of the proposed IVs, namely, cohesion policy management style seen through the lenses of regional autonomy in implementation of policy. The most suitable proxy for this variable is the Regional Authority Index elaborated by Liesbeth Hooghe and Gary Marks for their cross-national study of regionalization in 42 countries.[7] It seems to capture the sought-for attribute, namely, share of power and competence in allocation of the Funds between central and regional institutions which, as hypothesized, adds some dynamics to partnership implementation and, thus, can have some impact on it. The task of selecting cases on this parameter is, consequently, to ensure variation in the level of regional decentralization.

Finally, the last criterion for selection could be entrenchment of a particular interest intermediation mode in a country which, as also hypothesized, can affect partnership implementation. Here classification elaborated by Bela Greskovics and Dorothee Bohle could be of some help. They group CEE member states into three "families" of socio-economic governance or capitalist regimes: neoliberal Baltic countries, embedded neoliberal Visegrad countries and neo-corporatist Slovenia (Greskovics and Bohle 2007). Although predominantly dealing with issues of economic governance and trying to explain the variation in emerged "capitalisms" and although not speaking directly about types of interest politics, the authors touch upon practices of interest intermediation and claim that in CEE countries they are distinct (Greskovics and Bohle 2007). Their claims are also confirmed by existing literature on corporatism in CEE (Ost 2000; Iankova 2002). Although grouping CEE member states into distinct families of interest intermediation modes is a highly contested exercise because of absence of any clear, measurable and parsimonious criteria, it seems justified to select cases so that countries representing these three "families" were presented.

The table 3 (Appendix 1) represents how the CEE member states score on the two discussed indices and which socio-economic governance group they belong. It helps to select cases which would vary on three chosen parameters. There are two possible scenarios. According to the first one Poland, Lithuania and Slovenia could be picked for further case analysis.[8] These three countries score differently on strength of civil society (they, actually, represent two "polar" cases, Poland and Slovenia, and one in-between case, Lithuania), they all score differently on Regional Authority index (again two "polar" cases

[6] Another well-known measure of civil society strength is CIVICUS index. However, it is not taken into consideration because, first, only four CEE countries are assessed with that index (Poland, Bulgaria, Slovenia and Czech Republic).

[7] Regional authority is measured along eight dimensions: institutional depth, policy scope, fiscal autonomy, representation, law making, executive control, fiscal control, constitutional reform.

[8] As is seen from the Table Romania, Bulgaria, Cyprus and Malta have been excluded from potential cases. The reasons behind that are, first of all, absence of any kind of data on the Mediterranean members and less experience of cohesion policy implementation in Romania and Bulgaria who entered the EU in 2007.

of Lithuania and Poland[9]) and they all belong to three different socio-economic governance types. However, Poland is assessed as performing worse than Hungary in terms of Regional Authority. Nevertheless, Polish decentralization differs from Hungarian one in one crucial aspect: Polish regional authorities are elected whereas in Hungary regionalization never went that far. Given that the index was calculated by 2006, before the start of the present 2007-2013 programming period, Poland is expected to have even greater regional autonomy than Hungary which is also confirmed in the literature (Dabrowski 2008).

Selecting Lithuania can also be justified by the mere fact that research on cohesion policy implementation, let alone partnership principle, in the Baltic countries is very scarce and a deep case study of one of the Baltic countries could widen existing knowledge.

What policy areas?

The EU cohesion policy is structured around policy issues that traditionally belong to different policy areas. Yet Structural Funds interventions do not cut across policy areas and remain quite sector-specific. Thus, one could assume that implementation of partnership, although expected to be universally applied to allocation of the Funds, will also vary across policy sectors reflecting existing system of public-private interactions that emerged and developed within particular policy areas.

Another thing that needs to be taken into consideration is close correspondence and link between the EU and national policies which goes as far as to the point when "all national policy networks are nowadays affected by the impact of the specific corresponding EU policy and the relevant network there" (Falkner, 2000). Scholars point that the EU is extremely sectoralised system with "inter-sectoral difference in patterns of public-private interaction" that, as assumed in the existing literature, trickle down to the national level (Falkner, 2000; Jarman, 2011; Knodt, 2011; Knodt et al., 2011). Studies focus on "brokering" role of the Commission who creates different dynamics for each policy area depending on a number of factors such as, for example, power/competence distribution between the Commission and national authorities. This inevitably affects participating actors who are believed to be replicating these experience and practices and incorporating them into their actions.10 Thus, one could hypothesize that implementation of partnership for a particular policy sector/area, in a sense what, how actively, how closely and widely non-state actors are involved and what roles they play, would, first, reflect properties and features of a policy sector/area, and, second, bear an impact of specificities of corresponding processes within a sector/area at the EU level.

For the purposes of the present project environmental, social and agricultural policies are selected for investigation of partnership practices. All three policy areas reflect the major spending priorities of the cohesion policy: all the member states have either sectoral Operational Programmes solely devoted to each policy or sections in regional programmes. Preliminary analysis of composition of partnership structures, such as the Monitoring Committees shows that all types of actors will be involved in the

[9] The literature on regionalization in CEE member states as well as official EU reports demonstrate that the process in Slovenia is even further from the EU ideal. By 2008 Slovenian government was still negotiating with the Commission creation of two NUTS2 regions to decentralize regional and cohesion policy.

[10] Gerda Falkner mentions three mechanisms: cognitive, normative and strategic changes; transfer of norms; feedback effects of the EU-level strategic alliances at the national level (Falkner 2000: 104)

allocation process for these policy areas. Equally one would not expect to have such a full picture when looking, for example, at transport policy, a very narrow sector not "populated" by many non-state actors in the CEE countries. Finally, all three policy areas are quite distinct both in terms of constellations of actors and modes of interaction at the EU and national levels.

1.3. METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION

The data for analysis is going to be generated mainly through qualitative methods. The central method of analysis would be process-tracing as it is the method that allows for an in-depth within-case analysis.[11] The choice of qualitative methods, in general, and process-tracing, in particular, is determined by peculiarity of the main research question and phenomenon under scrutiny. Partnership is a complex phenomenon whose implementation is contingent on a plethora of factors influence of which is very difficult to capture using rigorous formal methods or models. Moreover, identified factors (independent variables) are quite difficult to formally operationalise without losing some of their substance. To uncover what causes the outcome is, thus, almost impossible without close examination of the causal process itself. Process-tracing, in this light, seems to be the most convenient method of identifying causal chains and mechanisms: it would allow to take into consideration all factors and other rival explanations. Equally, focus on success of partnership through analysis of partners' influence requires process-tracing to uncover whether this influence was exerted.

The major method of data collection would be in-depth and semi-structured interviews. This would be triangulated with document analysis[12], aimed at collection of background empirical material on implementation of partnership and future cross-checking the data collected through interviews, and a survey of actors' involved. Semi-structured interviews would inevitably give deeper insights into developments that cannot be gained through document analysis or surveys. Interviewing will be used at all stages of data collection: for analysis of Commission's idea of partnership as a background against which "on –the – spot" implementation is going to be tested and for in-depth case-studies of partnership practices in chosen countries.

However, being aware of the problems a researcher encounters when reliying on interviewing only (interviewing of those who are readily available, for example, might result in a bias), it is required this method should be complemented by others. Furthermore, choosing influence of non-state partners as an indication of partnership success, requires a more reliable mesurement which is not achieved exclusively through process-tracing. The literature on interest groups influence suggests using the method of attirbuted influence which is usually measured through surveys. The method is relatively simple although its usage is also limited (one needs to ensure sufficient response rate, for instance). Nontheless, it allows for quite an efficient cross-checking of data collected through interviews, especially in researching on whether partners can exert any influence as an indication of efficient partnership as opposed to "window-dressing".

[11] Appendix 2 contains preliminary methodological guidelines of planned case-studies.

[12] The Commission requires on-line publishing of the minutes of partnership meetings. They can be easily accessed via Internet.

APPENDIX 1. AUXILIARY DATA.

Table 1. Experience of civil society organisations in practicing partnership in cohesion policy in the new member states

	CZ	HU	PL	SL	SK	ES	LT	LI
A) Programming								
National rules on public participation in programming	NO	YES	YES	YES	Partly	Partly	Partly	Partly
Were CSOs involved in the planning? (members of planning teams)	Partly*	NO	Partly	Partly	Partly	Partly	Partly	Partly
Consultations on the drafts of OPs	Partly	YES	YES	YES	Partly	YES	YES	YES
Public hearing at the end of programming	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES
Has CSOs' participation been arranged through any country-wide CSOs platform?	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO
B) Operation Management								
Are CSOs members of project selection committees?	Unclear	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO	Unclear	NO
C) Monitoring								
CSOs in Monitoring Committees	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

*The category "partly" was described by the author as "existing but not working instance of civil society involvement". In other words, existing rules do not fully work.

Source: Dezseri K., (2008) Civil society participation in the structural and cohesion policies in the central-European new member states, Paper presented at the international workshop "Towards increased policy effectiveness", Brussels, 1-2 October.

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Table 2. Case selection data.

	Poland	Czech Republic	Hungary	Slovakia	Slovenia	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania
NGO sustainability*	2,2	2,7	2,8	2,7	3,8	2,0	2,7	2,8
Regional authority**	8	7	9	6	-	-	-	4
Interest intermediation mode	e/n***	e/n	e/n	e/n	neo(c)	neo(l)	neo(l)	neo(l)

*The data on NGO Sustainability Index is available for 2009. Source: 2009 NGO sustainability index for Eastern Europe and Eurasia, 13th edition. The average score was 2,7.

**The data for Regional Authority index is available for 2006. Source: http://www.unc.edu/~hooghe/data_ra.php

*** e/n- embedded neoliberal type, neo(c)- neocorporatism, neo(l)- neo-liberal type

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