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EU cohesion policy and the changing patterns of governance in Central and Eastern European member states: the case of Poland

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CERI-Sciences Po

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- Diffusion of multi-level mode of governance through imposition of the partnership principle
- Partnership principle: close cooperation between various levels of government and non-state actors at all stages of SF administration
- One of the key aspects of added value of EU cohesion policy
- Different approaches to partnership across the EU depending on the degree of decentralisation of the state and the presence (or absence) of traditions of multi-level and cross-sectoral cooperation – different scope for transferring the partnership approach across the member states
- Doubts about the learning capacity of administrative actors in the new member states due to the legacy of the past: centralisation, lack of trust, weak civil society, corruption and clientelism

- What is the scope for institutionalisation of the multi-level and inclusive mode of governance in the new member states?
- What is the impact of the partnership principle on the patterns of sub-national governance in these countries?
- What are the mechanisms and the 'depth' of the sub-national actors' adjustment to the partnership principle?

Findings from a study in Polish regions: Lower Silesia and Lubelskie

1. Vertical partnership in implementation of the SF in Poland: towards multi-level governance?

New environment which favours exchange of knowledge between the institutions and cooperation to tackle policy issues in a more integrated manner:

“The hugely important effect of the implementation of the Structural Funds is that a network of institutions was established, with more interaction between them [...] This creates a certain sense of partnership between these different institutions. One can therefore talk about a certain change of mindset towards common efforts to solve common issues.”

(Official at the Ministry of Regional Development)

- Shift from a centralised mode of governance with very limited sub-national involvement towards a poly-centric one

2004-2006 Integrated Regional Operating Programme :

- Centralised system of implementation of the SF: regional authorities' role limited to selection of projects to receive funding as part of the IROP
- Improvement of capacity at the regional level: learning by doing despite the limited role of regions in programming and implementation
- New interactions across the levels of administration and within regions
- Conflicts with governmental administration (Marshal VS Voivod, regions VS government) underpinned by political rivalries

2007-2013 – Regional Operating Programmes:



- Regional authorities gain new responsibilities in terms of administration of the SF: opportunity to acquire experience in preparation and management of ROPs, important partners of the central government
- Greater investment capacity thanks to the SF – regions less dependent on funding from the central government and more capable of fulfilling their statutory role of architects of regional development policy
- Governmental administration marginalised in management of ROPs: no more rivals at the regional level
- Regional authorities as the nexus of regional governance

However...

- Only the sixteen ROPs are administered by the regional authorities (25% of funds). Other sectoral programmes remain centrally designed and managed
- Government imposed guidelines regarding ROPs
- Persisting problem: limited own financial resources of regional authorities (unfinished decentralisation)

2. Horizontal partnership: towards participative regional governance?



Regional Steering Committees – partnership in project appraisal:

- Partnership bodies with voting rights participating in project appraisal (advisory role, final decisions taken by the Marshal)
- Offered new channels for participation of regional stakeholders in project appraisal and delivery of development policy
- Platform for fostering new links between stakeholders
- Yet, criticised for being *façade* institutions prone to clientelistic and political pressures

- Local officials' participation in the RSCs was interest-driven as they hoped to help their Communes acquire more funds → lack of understanding of partnership and disillusionment
- RSCs were perceived by the regional authorities as a 'necessary evil' that hindered swift absorption of the SF → example of 'shallow' change
- Failed experiment, which was eagerly abandoned in 2007-2013 period

Monitoring Committees – partnership in programme monitoring:

- Insufficient preparation of participants
- ...but created a further new channel for participation of regional stakeholders in policy process
- Positive perceptions: 63% of officials involved expressing positive opinions about their effectiveness (EGO S.C., 2010)

Consultations of OPs – partnership in programming:



- Limited consultations of IROP, but widespread consultations of ROPs 2007-2013 creating genuine opportunities for regional stakeholders to express their views and influence the contents of the programmes
- Perceived by the regional authorities as a useful means of gathering valuable information and enhancing the ROPs → partnership in programme formulation internalised because it was in-line with the interests and preferences of the actors involved
- Positive perceptions of consultations among the local authorities

- Mobilisation and cooperation between local actors to formulate joint recommendations regarding the ROP
- Consultation of stakeholders is increasingly used by regional and local authorities, perceived as ‘normal’ practice
- ... however, these are still consultations rather than partnership (EPRC, 2010)

3. Project level partnership: necessary evil or useful development tool?



- Availability of the SF prompted the local authorities to cooperate as part of joint EU-funded projects → new form of horizontal cooperation
- Limited popularity of partnership projects in 2004-2006: few incentives, fierce competition for funding, no partnership experience, reluctance to cooperate and perception of cooperation as a hassle

“Most often one Commune builds two kilometers of a road here, another one 3 kilometers there [...] That is because people just did not understand the idea of partnership. Everyone preferred investing in their own backyard to make the inhabitants happy and boost the popularity of the local government.”

(Official at Voivod Office, Lower Silesia)

- Situation changed in 2007-2013: growing number of partnership projects resulting from introduction of incentives for inter-communal projects into ROPs
- Additional points for partnership in project appraisal and higher thresholds for projects' impact → local authorities encouraged to prepare partnership projects in order to boost their chances for obtaining a grant
- Dynamics of social learning despite the initially interest-driven involvement in partnerships: in some cases, continuing cooperation after the completion of a joint project and use of the partnership approach beyond the implementation of EU-funded projects

Concluding remarks



- Widespread impact of partnership: stimulating vertical cooperation and creating new channels for stakeholder participation in the policy process
- Pragmatic approach to partnership among the domestic policy actors: taking onboard what suits their interests and ‘superficial’ compliance with those aspects of partnership that are perceived as an obstacle to pursuing one’s interests
- ‘Carrot and stick’ approach of the SF can be effective in promoting the partnership approach thanks to the learning dynamics that it stimulates: in countries such as Poland, partnership-based policy may lack the social capital to draw upon, but **over time** it can create conditions conducive to its development

- Growing emphasis on ‘place-based’ EU cohesion policy: can this work in CEECs (particularly in more centralised states, e.g. Hungary, Bulgaria)?
- Is there capacity to deliver a partnership-based regional development policy tailored to developmental challenges and opportunities of a given territory? What measures can be envisaged to improve this capacity?
- How to promote cooperation at project level: more stringent conditionality VS increased support for learning and raising awareness of benefits of cooperation?

Thank you for your attention

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What Future for Cohesion Policy?

An Academic and Policy Debate

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Conference papers available at:

<http://www.regional-studies-assoc.ac.uk/events/future.asp>