Local Partnerships for Rural Development

THE EUROPEAN EXPERIENCE

Edited by Malcolm J. Moseley
LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT
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Local Partnerships for Rural Development
The European Experience

Edited by

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Editor and coordinator of the PRIDE research project 1999–2001: Malcolm J. Moseley
Editor’s note

The above 27 co-authors of this book were all engaged as researchers on the PRIDE research project for some or all of the period February 1999 to January 2001. In that regard, all were involved in drafting and/or amending material that has ultimately come together in this book. Every chapter therefore is the product of a team effort and so individual chapters cannot be attributed to particular authors.
Preface

This book is an edited version of the unpublished final report of the cross-national PRIDE research project, which ran from February 1999 to January 2001 and was concerned with Partnerships for Rural Integrated Development in Europe. Four years have passed since the project was first conceived but rural development remains as crucial an issue in Europe today as it was in the mid–late 1990s – as do the hopes and expectations placed upon local partnerships as a tool for its promotion and management. Indeed, that statement is true not just within the borders of the EU but elsewhere in the world, where other governments and local communities struggle with the challenge of transforming essentially agricultural into more broadly based rural economies and of building tools of local governance that can facilitate that process in a way that is sympathetic to local circumstances and to a host of social, political, economic and cultural forces.

The research involved focusing on the rural development experience of six member states of the EU, namely, Finland, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden and the UK, with some additional contextual analysis of material from Ireland and Luxemburg. The six research teams were drawn from those six countries and, very broadly, the task involved empirical and analytical work being undertaken in parallel by each team in their home countries under the general coordination of the UK team.

The six research teams were:

- the Seinajoki Institute for Rural Training of the University of Helsinki in Finland;
the Institute of Spatial Planning of the University of Dortmund in Germany;
the Department of Sociology and Political Science of the University of Calabria in Italy;
the Department of Geography of the University of Valencia in Spain;
The Dalarna Research Institute in Falun, Sweden;
the Countryside and Community Research Unit of the University of Gloucestershire (formerly the Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education in the UK.

The research was funded by the EU under its FAIR Research Programme (contract FAIR6-CT98-4445) – though the contents of this book and the opinions expressed are solely the responsibility of its editor and his co-authors.

What was the purpose of the research? At one level its objective was quite simple: to explore how and how far the local partnership approach actually promotes rural development and to establish what might be done to improve the effectiveness of partnership in that respect. More specifically, the task was to survey both EU-funded and non-EU-funded local rural partnerships with regard to their context, initiation, organization, operation and effects; to assess the value added to local rural development by such partnerships; to seek causal relationships between the characteristics of local partnerships and rural development; to make proposals regarding the effectiveness of local partnerships; and to identify and communicate elements of good practice. The key questions were, in effect: Do local partnerships per se stimulate rural development? Do they really add value compared with other rural development delivery mechanisms and, if so, what is it about partnerships that generates that added value?

Five empirical exercises lay at the heart of the research. In sequence, they were:

an extensive literature review (managed by the Dalarna team);
the extensive survey – a postal questionnaire survey of 330 local rural partnerships located in the eight countries cited above (managed by the Valencia team);
the study of practice – a detailed field study of 24 of those partnerships, four in each of six countries, to better understand the practice of partnership (managed by the Calabria team);
the study of impact – a repeat field study of the same 24 partnerships to better understand the impact of partnership and the links between practice and impact (managed by the Dortmund team);
the feedback survey – a repeat postal survey of the same partnerships studied in the extensive survey about 15 months earlier (managed by the Seinajoki team).

Preface
The first three of those five exercises have already been written up separately and at some length (Westholm et al., 1999; Esparcia et al., 2000; Cavazzani and Moseley, 2001). In addition, six Good Practice Guides have been published or are in preparation to distil guidance for practitioners on the effective operation of rural development partnerships, based on the research in each of the six countries. They have been written mainly for national readerships and are therefore in the appropriate national languages only – English, German, Finnish, Spanish, Italian and Swedish.

The present book provides an extended summary of and reflection upon all of the work undertaken and in particular it publishes for the first time the innovative impact analysis (and the associated cross-national feedback survey, which in large measure validated its findings), which was developed primarily by the Dortmund team and carried out simultaneously in all six countries. We contend that that impact analysis successfully teased out the true value added by rural development partnerships, as distinct from the developmental consequences flowing simply from the funds that the partnerships were able to deploy – funds which could, of course, have been equally deployed by non-partnership means. That analysis, building on the earlier phases of the research, provided the main basis of the recommendations that were distilled for policy makers and practitioners and with which the book concludes.

Looking back, it is clear that great value was derived from two key features of the research. First, there was the decision to sandwich a phase of detailed qualitative work relating to just 24 case-study partnerships chronologically between two largely quantitative postal surveys of several hundred partnerships. Each approach complemented the other. Secondly there was the simultaneous execution by the six research teams of a common programme of research viewing local partnerships alongside the differing national histories of local governance and development. This enabled the filtering out of particular national or contextual features, the distillation of an underlying Europe-wide picture and the generation of conclusions and recommendations that would have wide validity.

This book is the collective work of six research teams over more than 2 years; their membership is indicated under ‘Contributors’. My thanks, as editor, to all of them. In the UK case, I would also like to thank Karen Wu, Jill Harper and Emmanuel Fitte, who have helped in the final stages. Thanks are due also to Mary Cawley and Jean-Pierre Dichter for help with our research in Ireland and Luxemburg respectively, and, of course, to the 600 or so people across the eight countries who filled in questionnaires or consented to be interviewed as the research progressed. Finally, I must not forget Muriel Huybrechts, Veronica Sabbag and Sjur Bardssen at the European Commission, who did at least try to untangle that institution’s bureaucracy.
As coordinator of the research and editor of the final report and of this subsequent book, I am grateful to them all.

Malcolm Moseley
University of Gloucestershire
July 2002
Summary

Objectives

The PRIDE research project was concerned with Partnerships for Rural Integrated Development in Europe. It explored how and how far the local partnership approach actually promotes rural development and what might be done to improve the effectiveness of partnerships in that respect. At the heart of the research was a concern to establish the genuine value added by rural development partnerships and the key sources of that added value. Clarification of this point would help policy makers decide whether partnerships *per se* help to generate development rather than simply the resources at their disposal and, if so, what elements of partnership operation are important.

More specifically the objectives of the research were:

- to survey both EU- and non-EU-funded rural partnerships and analyse variables affecting their performance;
- to characterize the practice of such partnerships in detail, i.e. their contexts, initiation, development, structure, links and operation;
- to assess the impact of rural partnerships on the partners themselves and on the economic, social, cultural, political and environmental development of their local areas;
- to identify those elements of local partnerships that induce or constrain rural development;
- to explain the causal relations between context, practice and impact of local partnerships;
to propose measures to improve the performance of local partnerships in rural integrated development and related local, regional, national and EU policy;

● to identify and communicate lessons and examples of good practice.

All of these objectives were in large measure achieved. For present purposes, four concise questions were distilled from them, with considered responses, drawing on evidence from each phase of the research, set out in Chapter 7 and in summary form below. These questions, which encapsulate the essence of the research, are as follows:

1. What are the key characteristics of rural development partnerships in the countries examined?
2. What impact have they had on rural development?
3. What factors have significantly influenced their effectiveness in this respect?
4. What measures would improve their effectiveness in this respect?

Description of Work

The working definition of a rural development partnership used in the research was:

a voluntary alliance of organizations from at least two societal sectors (state or public-sector organizations, private companies, civil associations) with a clear organizational structure, with ongoing and long-term activities that include more than one project, and which show an integrated approach to the promotion of the development of rural areas with no more than 100,000 inhabitants.

More specifically, the research focused on the experience of six EU countries, namely, Finland, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden and the UK (with some contextual work also undertaken on Ireland and Luxemburg). The six research teams were drawn from the same six countries and, very broadly, the research involved similar empirical and analytical work being undertaken by each team in their home country.

Five empirical exercises lay at the heart of the research. In sequence, they were:

● an extensive literature review;
● the extensive survey – a postal questionnaire survey of several hundred local rural partnerships in the eight countries cited above;
● the study of practice, involving the detailed field study of 24 of those partnerships (four in each of six countries) to better understand the practice of partnership;
the study of impact – i.e. a repeat field study of the same 24 partnerships to better understand the impact of partnership and the links between practice and impact;

- a feedback survey – an exploration of the general validity of the emerging conclusions, mainly by means of a repeat postal survey of the 300+ partnerships surveyed at the outset.

Figure 3.1 in Chapter 3 indicates how the various tasks fitted together over the 2-year period of the research. Working step by step down that diagram, we have the following.

**Research preparation**

The research preparation involved some technical preparatory work, namely, the preparation of an organization manual and a methodology manual to guide the subsequent work, but most of the effort went into a literature review, with the Dalarna Research Institute leading on this work. This review was designed to establish and appraise existing knowledge regarding the theory and practice of local partnerships and to clarify the conceptual framework and the key questions and hypotheses for the subsequent research. The experience of nine countries was examined (the six referred to above plus Ireland, Luxemburg and the USA), as was the EU’s 15-nation LEADER I and II programme for local rural development. In addition, relevant aspects of theory relating to rural and local development, to organization, management and social networks and to planning were appraised. In all, a substantial body of literature was considered and this is appraised in Chapter 2, with the references listed at the end of the text.

The literature review revealed the wide range of partnership experience across the EU and served to raise a number of concerns about the partnership phenomenon. These relate, *inter alia*, to the funding-driven nature of many partnerships, the fact that few of them are ‘locally grown’, the difficult questions of legitimacy and accountability, the limited experience of the partnerships in delivering integrated programmes rather than discrete projects, and the danger of their widening rather than narrowing social and economic disparities. It also revealed that little rigorous study had been undertaken of the value added by partnership operation *per se*, as distinct from the outputs arising from the expenditure of funds managed by the various partnerships.

**Extensive postal survey**

The extensive postal survey, coordinated by the University of Valencia, embraced a large number of rural partnerships located in eight EU
countries. Its main object was to better understand the characteristics, objectives, membership, organization, operation and achievements of a large sample of local rural development partnerships, some of them funded substantially from EU sources, some drawing mainly on more local sources of funding. A second object was to provide a sampling frame for the later case-study work.

Over 1000 partnerships apparently meeting our partnership definition were identified from an eclectic range of sources and surveyed. Eventually, 330 valid responses to a long questionnaire containing both closed and open questions were received and analysed. There were at least 40 responses in each of the six main countries. Most of the subsequent analysis (see Chapter 4) comprised the careful study of simple frequency distributions and cross tabulations, but a cluster analysis was also performed to see if particular groupings of similar partnerships emerged.

Various Europe-wide conclusions emerged, though of course national differences were also apparent and are discussed briefly in the main text. Briefly, these were as follows:

- Initiation and objectives: most of the surveyed partnerships saw their prime function as delivering projects in pursuit of local development and most had come into existence to take advantage of funding possibilities, though both local government and key individuals had often played an important role in their creation and subsequent development.
- Partnership operation: as well as funding discrete local projects, most partnerships attached high importance to disseminating information locally and to mobilizing the local community in various ways.
- Achievements: the partnerships claimed a wide range of achievements – the initiation of development projects, the reinforcement of cooperation links, community involvement and mobilization, the creation and consolidation of employment and businesses, etc.
- Strengths and weaknesses: the most commonly reported strength of partnership working was the mobilization of local human capital – skilled local actors willing to cooperate and work for the common good. As for problems, one was mentioned above all the others – the availability and continuity of funding and the bureaucracy often surrounding its distribution and management. ‘Less bureaucracy, more autonomy’ was the main cry of the respondents in almost all of the countries.

Study of the practice of partnership

The study of the practice of partnership began with the selection of 24 partnerships, four in each country, for detailed field study. While not
intended to be a statistically representative sample, the chosen partnerships all met minimum criteria, which required an explicit focus on integrated rural development, a population of less than 100,000 in the area served, at least 3 years of operation and a broad mix of partners. Collectively, they also presented a range of experience with regard to such factors as their initiation, funding, legal status, location and policy focus.

This stage of the research, coordinated by the University of Calabria, involved several days’ fieldwork in each of the 24 case-study areas, with a dozen or more interviews in each case, the assembly and analysis of documentation and participant observation, all designed to elucidate the origin, objectives, constitution, operation, activities and performance of the partnerships.

As Chapter 5 makes clear, certain national differences understandably emerged from this analysis, with, for example, active local communities playing an important role in the UK and Sweden, local government being important in Finland, Germany, Spain and the UK and collective associations being more dominant in Italy. The main text of the report presents the six national pictures in some depth, but here we can simply present the European picture that emerged with regard to three key issues.

First, it is clear that the degree of participation of the various partners in the partnership varied considerably. The following factors tended to increase partner involvement and commitment: the existence of coherent and relevant aims based on the recognition of common needs, strong but not overdominant leadership, good administrative and technical support, good user-friendly communication, the early achievement of visible benefits and direct experience of local development in other areas.

Secondly, the efficient and successful operation of the partnerships was fostered by the following factors: a well-defined and coherent organization and structure, efficient staff and management, the more or less equal participation in decision making of the various partners, an atmosphere of mutual trust, well-developed informal networking, and good contact with rural development programmes elsewhere.

Thirdly, the following tended to constrain the efficient working of partnerships: absent or ineffective management, role conflicts, the centralization of decision making, the dominance of a small group of partners, the excessive bureaucracy of some funding programmes, especially the EU and national ones, limited financial resources, the short time perspective of many programmes and poor evaluation procedures.

In addition, a generally positive picture emerged concerning the adding of value to rural development by partnership operation. But it was also clear, however, that many local partnerships operated tactically rather than strategically – even if the preparation of a strategy had