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Area-Based Partnerships and Social Welfare: Innovations and Challenges

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1. Introduction

Partnership is one of the most repeatedly used terms and concepts in public policy. Yet its meanings and interpretations vary, and despite its apparent popularity, some policy-makers and agencies are inclined to be fearful of the whole notion of partnership. What began as a proposal for a more effective way of supporting subsidiarity in decision-making about three decades ago, has now developed into sets of institutional arrangements and frameworks, whereby government, the social partners and the community and voluntary sector come together to address issues of mutual and common concern. This chapter looks at the growing importance of partnership and endogenous approaches to aspects of social welfare. It notes how partnerships have piloted new methods of social welfare provision and service delivery, based on local flexibilities and tailored responses to client needs and potential. Over time, many pilot approaches have become mainstreamed, and lessons from the local have come to impact on and influence the national. Other partnership initiatives have however faltered and waned, mainly due to the inabilities of agencies to make the transition from traditional and hierarchical government to multi-lateral and flexible governance processes and arrangements. Across Europe, partnership governance is most imbedded in institutions at the regional and sub-regional tiers, and Area-Based Partnership organisations tend to provide social welfare services as part of a suite of local development actions that include training and up-skilling local populations, supporting new enterprise development and animating the community and voluntary sector. Thus, social welfare has become integrated into broader territorial development strategies.

In several European states, a shift towards endogenous approaches to social service and welfare provision in tandem with local development interventions has yielded considerable successes in promoting social inclusion and reducing levels of dependency. Italy has a long tradition in endogenous development, which was brought into sharp focus with the economic crisis of the 1970s. A concentration on diversifying local economies based on optimising endogenous resources has enabled Emilia-Romagna to become one of the most developed regions in Europe with consistently low levels of unemployment (Mazzonis, 1997; Noya, 2009). Producer co-operatives and social enterprises in Spain provide job opportunities for persons unable to access mainstream commercial employment. These grassroots activities also provide essential local services and ensure that produced capital is retained locally. Furthermore, co-operative banks such as *Mondragón* have enabled people to

invest their savings locally and access credit on favourable terms. Such movements serve to alleviate poverty and support community development (Briscoe and Ward, 2005), and their successes at local level have had the effect of enticing statutory bodies and the productive sector to engage in collaborative structures with civil society.

Global economic trends associated with the increased mobility of capital, trade liberalisation and the growing significance of regional and territorial conditions in determining macro and micro-economic performance (Vázquez-Barquero, 1997; Sternberg, 2000; 392 and Stimson et al. 2009), accelerated the willingness of businesses to engage in partnership with trade unions, statutory and regional agencies, local government and the community and voluntary sector. These factors, together with a recognition of the limitations on central governments motivated the state to become a gradual, if somewhat reluctant advocate of partnership approaches[1]. In addition, the EU has provided a critical impetus to the development of partnership processes specifically through initiatives such as INTERREG, which targets cross-border collaboration among cities and regions, and LEADER, which is a strongly bottom-up approach to rural development. The EU has also promoted dedicated Community Initiatives in the area of social policy such as URBAN (targeted at disadvantaged urban communities) NOW (New Opportunities for Women) and EQUAL (which sought to promote equality of access to the labour market, with specific targeting of marginalised groups). Thus, national (state level) and supranational factors have had a significant influence on the evolution of partnerships and the emergence of varied and multi-level approaches to social welfare provision. The OECD has noted that "support for endogenous development can be highly effective in supporting long-term development through measures such as support for entrepreneurship, developing human capital, spreading innovation, and building local institutions and firm network" (1999: 32-33).

The burgeoning of partnership structures and mechanisms has propelled a shift in the management and delivery of social welfare, whereby traditional state-led schemes (universal and / or means-tested) are either being replaced by or complemented with service provision models that are more tailored to addressing individual client needs and potential and are more territorially differentiated. Consequently, social welfare is increasingly viewed not just as a safety net for those experiencing poverty or disadvantage, but as part of a suite of interventions designed to promote social inclusion, empowerment and community cohesion and development (NESC, 2005; McEwen, 2011). New and emerging approaches to social welfare provision and actors' perspectives thereof raise a number of challenges and questions that this chapter seeks to elucidate. The role of beneficiaries in shaping and influencing the delivery of supports and the degree to which service users are actually empowered is a key issue. Allied to the change in the perception of welfare recipients from clients to customers and their increased participation in making decisions about the orientation of social welfare services, is the complex issue of governance. Partnership governance implies that agencies share power with other stakeholders, including representatives of the beneficiaries (Douglas and O'Keeffe, 2009, Stimson et al, 2009). New power structures and networked decision-making arrangements (Herrschel and

[1] The European Foundation (2003: 14 and 2005) provides further examples of what it describes as "grassroots initiatives" that have stimulated the development of partnerships in Germany, Portugal and Austria. Noya (2009) and Noya and Clarence (2007) provide case study analysis of social economy contributions to local economic development in Canada and Europe.

Tallberg, 2011) mark a reduction in the power held by top-down agencies as partnerships allow for inputs from service-users, communities, unions, employers, producers and local government. Thus, challenges emerge in respect of the capacity of endogenous efforts to generate innovation, the interfaces and dynamics between representative and participative democracy, accessing resources for development, determining the appropriate spatial scales of intervention and the ability of partnerships to effect long-term change in mainstream policies and systems.

This chapter draws on experiences in social welfare service delivery across four European states. It outlines and assesses how Area-Based Partnership organisations in Ireland, Finland, Spain and Sweden have approached social welfare provision. The specific case studies that are elaborated here demonstrate how partnerships have integrated social welfare into local development actions. They have done so to varying degrees and with variable levels of success. Their approaches have been shaped not just by national and local policies and systems, but by the levels of collaboration or conflict between agencies involved in the partnership itself. The selected case studies for this chapter are all located in predominantly rural areas. Thus, they provide insights into outreach delivery of welfare services, and they reveal how agencies responded to issues such as accessibility, transport provision and information dissemination. The case studies also address how rural partnerships seek to support progression to employment in the context of a narrow local economic base.

The chapter opens with a review of the emerging and increasing roles that Area-Based / territorial Partnerships play in social welfare services generally. It examines the drivers of such processes and how these have manifested themselves in different locations and contexts. The chapter describes partnerships as development agencies with a social welfare brief, and it presents and discusses their composition, structures and operations. Subsequently, the chapter considers the outputs and impacts of Area-Based Partnerships' approaches to social welfare, including stakeholder participation and the degrees of innovation, the extent to which initiatives have become mainstreamed, and the ways in which regional and national policies and practices may have been amended as a result of local pilots and lessons. The chapter also assesses the limitations of area-based approaches, and it questions the significance of factors such as the lack of long-term funding streams, shortcomings in enforcement and limited information dissemination.

2. Emergence and evolution of area-based partnerships

Collaborative partnerships have been part of the political landscape for several decades. Corporatist or national-level partnerships involving governments and the productive sector have ensured social stability in Scandinavia and in the Alpine States since the 1950s. Enterprise and issue-based partnerships have proven adept at rehabilitating districts affected by economic re-structuring and de-industrialisation notably in cities of the UK, France and Belgium. Joint venture companies and strategic partnerships have enabled agencies to tap into expertise from industry and the education sector in areas such as heritage, landscape management and ecology among others. The most prolific and significant model of partnership that has emerged in Europe over recent decades can be classified as Local Development or Area-Based Partnerships. These can be defined as formally-agreed organisational frameworks that bring together representatives of the

statutory, social partner and community sectors, to agree and implement a strategic work plan for the development of a particular area, usually at the sub-regional / inter-municipal scale. Their remit is multi-sectoral, and there is a high degree of emphasis on citizen participation and social inclusion.

2.1 Features of partnership

The proliferation of Area-Based Partnerships is associated with the state embracing the capacities of the productive sector and civil society to contribute to shaping and delivering public policy. As McEwen (2011; 81) contends, collaborative approaches to social welfare have the potential to provide "greater opportunities to develop welfare systems suited to local preferences and needs, and can create an institutional environment which is conducive to social policy innovation." The effectiveness of partnerships is enhanced by power-sharing, decentralisation, subsidiarity, a sharing of responsibilities, joint-initiatives between the partners, attention to and investment in building the capacity of partners, and commitments to delivering agreed work programmes, which are subject to review and evaluation. Intra-partner dynamics involve elements of endogenous and exogenous approaches to development. They oblige partners to consult with the stakeholders, whom they represent. Negotiations, trade-offs and compromises are part and parcel of the decision-making process within partnership, which have the advantage of ensuring greater acceptance of decisions made, but the disadvantage of being cumbersome and time-consuming. Partnerships are required to be innovative, and to demonstrate the flexibility to respond to local needs and requirements in ways that hierarchical exogenous bodies are not.

Although partnership approaches have frequently been presented as offering an alternative to traditional exogenous development (Hughes et al. 1998), they can also be seen as complementing the neo-conservative policies of central governments (Todaro, 1994; Geoghegan and Powell, 2009). Through their activities in the provision of services to the unemployed, the enhancement of community infrastructure and the promotion of new enterprise development among others, partnerships are fulfilling re-distribution functions that were previously undertaken through state welfare systems or by statutory bodies (O'Keeffe and Douglas, 2009). Yet, as Ray (2006) notes, the re-distribution associated with partnership is less direct than that pursued through processes associated with Keynesian models. Instead, the potential beneficiaries are charged with a degree of responsibility in the re-distribution process, and their ability to organise themselves enables them to take greater advantage thereof. Thus, contemporary partnership approaches marry top-down concerns, namely a need for effective re-distribution and cost management (e.g. out-sourcing) with bottom-up concerns – specifically communities' needs to access resources and the stimulation of local potential. They do so by putting the notion of territory and space at the centre of development; hence, the area-based approach underpins partnerships' strategies and activities. *Post-Fordist* restructuring, the development of ICT (Information and Communications Technology) and the emergence of endogenous and multi-level governance structures places an onus on regional and local actors to pursue policies of territorial resource development, although this pursuit can be assisted by the centre. Thus, the role of the territory as the space, within which resources are located, accessed, organised and manipulated or conserved, assumes an increased significance (AEIDL, 1999; Douglas, 1995 and 2005).

Among the defining characteristics of Area-Based Partnerships are their endogenous structures and processes, their locally-defined and accessible base in terms of remit and membership, their multi-sectoral operations, a large degree of financial and decision-making autonomy, and above all, a participative structure, decision-making and implementation process. As described by the OECD:

> *"Partnerships help bring synergies between different actors operating within the local area, and a level of co-ordination between agencies and policies that was not achieved with nationally designed, segmented and sectoral policies… (they) have the flexibility to adjust to different local conditions or to react quickly when local conditions changed"* (1999: 36).

The evidence presented in the literature and the evaluations of partnership (OECD, 2001; Ó Broin and Kirby, 2009; Pike et al., 2011), suggests that:

- Partnership arrangements and structures involving the community, social partner and statutory sectors can be varied to respond to local conditions and needs.
- Partnerships need to be sufficiently flexible and autonomous to respond innovatively to emerging challenges and opportunities for development.
- Partnership structures ought to have mechanisms that ensure participation and shared-power for the mutual benefit of members and the target population.
- Partnership is a development process, and it involves on-going animation and capacity-building of partners, and the development of inter-partner linkages and collaboration.
- Inter-partner collaboration represents the most desirable level of interaction.

The following table (adapted from AEIDL, 1999) synthesises, definitions of Area-Based Partnership. These converge around a vision of bottom-up oriented and participative mechanisms and processes, in which arrangements remain suitably flexible, and the remit is sufficiently broad so as to deal with the multiplicity of needs, and respond to the various opportunities that arise in dedicated areas. The principles of integration and co-ordination, more than the exact models are transferable. As the table shows, partnership approaches to development incorporate many of the features of bottom-up development. These include the valorisation of local dimensions, citizen participation and empowerment, collective community-based action and mobilisation of local resources. However, unlike approaches that are exclusively endogenous, most Area-Based Partnerships in practice do not seek to exclude the exogenous. Rather they seek to promote linkages, co-operation and collaboration between bottom-up and top-down agents of development, giving effect to what Ray (2006) describes as neo-endogenous development.

2.2 Drivers of area-based partnership

Area-Based Partnerships embody the bottom-up approach to development, which involves high levels of citizen participation, so that local actors are implicitly involved in developing local resources and stimulating the productive restructuring process, and so improve the level of employment and well-being of the population (Vázquez-Barquero, 1997; OECD, 2001; Márquez-Domínguez, 2009). Advocates of endogenous strategies consider all territories as having development potential based on their own resources, and they favour a departure from classical and neo-classical economic approaches, which, like traditional models of social welfare provision were directed by the centre, and universally applied (Malecki, 1997). Endogenous policies have been on the ascendancy since the mid-1980s.

	Area-Based Partnerships	Traditional Exogenous
Organisational Structure.	Broadly-Based membership, with an emphasis on citizen participation. Complex Structures reflect participative democracy, and opportunities for inputs. Specific structures and actions to target and animate participation by socially excluded groups. Inclusive information sharing and feedback mechanisms, based on horizontal structures. Positive Equality Proofing, with gender and social class mix.	Narrow membership, recruited from specific experts or political appointees. Simple structures reflect representative democracy, with representatives or appointees mandated to act on behalf of the population/ citizens. No targeting of any specific sectors. Hierarchical reporting procedures via vertical mechanisms. No proofing; male and middle class domination.
Decision-Making.	Processes are inclusive and participatory, but may be time-consuming. Local knowledge and conditions, and qualitative/ anecdotal evidence influences decision-making. Quantitative data and projections are also taken into account. Partnerships enjoy a high degree of autonomy.	Processes are regulated, time-efficient and may be taken by an appointed group, acting on behalf of the whole body. Statistical data, external reports and quantifiable targets play significant roles in informing decision-making. The degree of autonomy may be limited by the need to report to a local authority, national or government bodies, or to a minister.
Spatial Remit.	Locally-defined and respected boundaries that have economic as well as social and cultural relevance and application.	Pre-defined boundaries, based on political or administrative units.
Resource Allocation.	Resources are targeted spatially and sectorally, and influenced by social inclusion needs. Applications for funding are animated.	Resources are allocated on the 'value for money' of the projects submitted. Applications are processed on first come, - first served basis.
Financing.	Arrangements are ad hoc. Allocations are made through competitive tender, and based on area/business plans submitted to funding agencies. Allocations are relatively small in the overall (territorial development) context.	Arrangements are more permanent, and linked to the fixed-term budgets of government departments. Allocations are relatively sizeable.

Relationship with Citizens.	It is based on participation. There is considerable interfacing with the citizen at community level and through group structures. Accountability rests with a Board of Directors, part-elected, part-nominated, part-appointed/ co-opted. Financial information is published and disseminated.	Citizen participation is viewed as unnecessary, as skills can be contracted in. Information may be circulated to citizens about particular projects. Accountability is ultimately to directly-elected politicians. Financial information may be available from central sources.
Resource-base.	Local knowledge and experiences form the basis for strategic decisions.	Experts in particular fields of knowledge are recruited or contracted.
Activities.	Multi-Sectoral. May also operate as a catalyst to influence or seek to affect actions in other arenas that impact on its own work.	Uni-sectoral. Implements Policy / Service.
Key Performance Indicators.	Client and Project through-put. Economic Output. Innovation. Levels of Participation. Extent of Networking, Co-operation and Collaboration. Social Inclusion. Sustainable Development	Client and Project through-put Economic Output.

Table 1. Features of Area-Based Partnerships, compared with those of Exogenous Agents of Development

They are based on the theories of neo-Schumpeterian innovation, industrial districts and the innovative milieu (Vázquez-Barquero, 1997; Sternberg, 2000). They emphasise regional and local innovation, and view multi-sectoral, inter-business and inter-agency networking as essential in stimulating development potential. The territory or *locale* emerges as a place of co-ordination and learning (Malecki, 1997; Márquez-Domínguez, 2009), while networking (Cook, 1996; Phillips, 1998), inter-actor and agency collaboration (Douglas, 2010) enable "a shift away from redistribution and subsidies in favour of measures to increase the productivity of enterprises and encourage private investment, including an emphasis on endogenous assets" (OECD, 2005b; 8). The consequence for social welfare systems is that regional and territorial variations emerge in respect of their application within states (McEwen, 2011).

There is a strong body of literature among geographers espousing the merits of territorial approaches to development and public service provision that bring stakeholders together in collaborative structures to identify and stimulate local potential and promote social inclusion. Moseley (2003) notes that partnership arrangements can bring 'added value' to development initiatives, and enable the realisation of synergies that would not be possible

where an agency or organisation acted alone. Similar contentions can be found in economic political science literatures. Craig and McKeon (1994) describe how collective effort through partnership can attract external resources into an area or a project, either through direct programme support or by securing additional resources from other local and non-local sources, with public, private and community / voluntary sectors all having the capacity to contribute, albeit not necessarily with the same means. Having reviewed Area-Based Partnerships in a number of different territorial contexts, Meldon et al. (2002: 9) note, "development is a multi-dimensional process incorporating economic, social and environmental objectives, which can only be successfully delivered through direct participative governance and cross-sectoral partnerships."

By creating mechanisms that allow for multiple inputs into decision-making and service delivery, partnerships introduce greater complexity relative to traditional top-down structures. However, by giving voice to a multiplicity of experiences and perspectives, they generate new synergies, and as Douglas (2010; 170) observes, based on extensive case study research in Canada, "traditional and top-down and command-and-control mechanisms… have had their successes in dealing with problems, they do not have the capacity to deal with the complex problems, which require continuous vigilance and changes in the behaviour of stakeholders and managers, as well as in the approach to management." This thesis is supported by Turok (2011), who argues the need to move away from welfare-to-work approaches, and towards inclusive growth strategies that involve inputs from diverse interests around a common agenda, thereby generating "more dynamic and effective interventions, being rooted in place allow for greater sensitivity to local needs and circumstances and a richer understanding of shifting circumstances" (2011; 85).

2.3 Partnership governance

The drive towards the establishment of collaborative partnerships, and the accompanying renewed focus on the territorial is occurring in multiple political and economic contexts. In all cases it has implications for decision-making and for the ways in which public bodies operate. The formation and evolution of Area-Based Partnerships represent what several commentators (Moseley 2003; Douglas and O'Keeffe, 2009) refer to as a fundamental paradigm shift from a system of government where decision-making and political power were centralised, to a system of multi-level governance where power is shared, and where organisations and institutions that share objectives, must also share resources, responsibility and authority in order to achieve their collective goals. Area-Based Partnerships provide a vehicle through which the community and voluntary sector interfaces directly with the state, and through which agreed cross-sectoral programmes are delivered, in a way that responds with flexibility to meeting local needs and fostering opportunities. Some commentators refer to multi-level governance as ushering in a hollowing-out of the state (Adshead, 2006), while others see it as potentially enabling the state to off-load responsibilities to citizens (Ó Broin and Kirby, 2009). In any event, the state plays an important role as a power-broker and distributor of resources, and power and resource struggles are frequently foremost on the agendas of partnerships (Crouch, 2011).

One of the more significant challenges for partnership governance structures is the promotion of information-sharing and subsequent collaboration between agents, particularly those in the public sector who, as a consequence of experiencing the transition

from traditional government to multi-level or partnership governance, find themselves interfacing horizontally with and referring more to locally-based coalitions rather than relating vertically to government bureaucracy. The heightened degree of multi-actor agency (in France and elsewhere) has led some observers to claim that governance relations are no longer structured through bureaucratic hierarchies but through a series of overlapping networks (Nicholls, 2005; 783). As inter-agency interfacing and collaboration with local citizens become more prominent among public institutions, their roles in promoting community development, citizen-empowerment, collective and inclusive decision-making and the development of social capital are increasingly significant (Scott, 2004; Walsh and Meldon, 2004; OECD, 2001, 2005; European Foundation, 2005).

Several commentators (Bennett and Krebs, 1991; Kooiman, 1993; Hughes, 1998; Walsh and Meldon, 2004, ESPON, 2006) describe the emerging forms of governance as fluid, somewhat chaotic and based on interdependence between organisations, and continuing interactions within inter-organisational networks. Partnership governance arrangements and the ensuing actions will invariably vary from one location to the next, but are characterised by the core principles of:

- high levels of participation by local citizenry;
- a degree of flexibility in decision-making and resource allocation processes;
- the capacity to respond to local needs and opportunities;
- the embodiment of top-down and bottom-up approaches to development.

As well as presenting challenges and opportunities for statutory bodies and government agencies, the transition from government to governance (Davoudi, 2005; O'Keeffe and Douglas, 2009) presents civil society with a platform for continuous participation in local decision-making, and brings with it increased responsibilities. Traditional government and democracy that is based exclusively on representative processes is characterised by:

- The dominance of state power;
- Organisation through formal public sector agencies and bureaucratic procedures;
- Neat and usually simple dividing lines between formal government relations and agents.

This implies that – through systems of representative democracy - citizens and communities are charged with electing political representatives to make decisions on their behalves.

Partnership or multi-stakeholder governance, operating in the context of representative democracy is characterised by:

- A proliferation of agencies, service deliverers and regulatory systems in decision-making processes;
- Horizontal self-organisation among mutually independent actors;
- Increased emphasis on territorial, rather than sectoral approaches to policy making, service delivery and economic competitiveness.

Through their involvement in partnerships, civil society organisations become absorbed into the decision-making apparatus, with the potential to be either subsumed into it, or to give effect to real change, whereby structures become more inclusive, and policy changes are realised.

2.4 Social capital and beneficiary participation

Davoudi (2005) argues that the shift from government to governance has expanded the policy-making space, broadened the range of actors involved in decision-making and has diffused the locus of power downwards. The responsibilities that come with giving effect to participative democracy place considerable onus on partnerships, as they are expected to animate and support widespread community involvement and citizen participation, while also securing buy-in to citizen engagement on the parts of agencies more accustomed to relying exclusively on the channels of representative democracy. Emerging developmental approaches to the provision of social welfare and public services increasingly involve "new forms of public-voluntary and public-private partnerships … and the possibility for local actors of greater autonomy and security in funding" (NESC, 2005: xxi). Such economic and institutional evolution requires local development partnerships to fine-tune their ability to target services, articulate local needs and incorporate participative approaches into the delivery of local services.

In order to optimise the contributions of all stakeholders involved, partnerships must, as recommended by Birch (2008; 66), promote goodwill trust that extends beyond existing relationships, so as to promote "empowerment of the local community… [and] sustainable, local regeneration." This confers on partnerships a role in promoting social capital, whereby community spirit and volunteerism are engendered and the community and voluntary sector enhances its capacity to partake in public policy formulation and implementation. The challenge in this respect is to ensure that community organisations are inclusive (Humphreys and Dineen, 2006).

Similarly, Donnelly (2004) and Turok (2011) contend that meaningful partnership and a genuine sharing of power are pre-requisites to tackling inequality and social exclusion. Indeed, there is a growing body of evidence that demonstrates how endogenous-led initiatives, promoted through Area-Based Partnerships have been particularly effective in engaging vulnerable and disadvantaged communities such as Roma, the long-term unemployed and those with little formal education, although the extent to which they do so is determined by governance arrangements and intra-partnership dynamics and the levels of social capital generated as much as by external factors (Esparcia et al., 2000; Pobal, 2001 and 2006; Carnegie Commission, 2010; Nardone et al., 2010). Some partnerships have been proactive in targeting socially excluded and vulnerable members of society and enabling them to participate in local decision-making through participative fora, thereby stimulating local social capital (O'Keeffe, 2009), while others appear to be less effective in reaching out to communities, and can actually serve to reinforce local hierarchies (Furmankiewicz et al., 2010). Almost universally, Area-Based Partnerships that engage local citizens through participative mechanisms and integrate service provision into community animation and development strategies are more likely to add value to the promotion of social inclusion than are partnerships that are dominated by a single agency and that fail to promote outreach actions and community empowerment.

3. Assessing the contributions of area-based partnerships to social welfare services

The review of partnership features, dynamics and issues presented in this chapter highlights key performance areas including the role of local actors in initiating partnership, the extent of power-sharing between stakeholders, the mechanisms for beneficiary participation, innovation

in service delivery and the impacts of local lessons and experiences on mainstream practices and policies. The EQUAL Community Initiative, which was initially rolled out by the EU in the 1990s, has provided a funding, support and co-ordinating mechanism to enable Area-Based Partnerships to deliver innovative approaches in promoting social inclusion and encouraging participation in the workforce. Funded by DG Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion up to 2008, several elements of EQUAL are currently supported by national and regional governments. Its stated aim is "to promote new means of combating all forms of discrimination and inequalities in connection with the labour market" (Commission of the European Communities, 2000; 2). Citing the title in the Amsterdam Treaty on employment, the Commission advocates action at "the local and regional level, in urban and rural districts – that is to say at the level of territories able to generate local co-operation" (op. cit. 2-3), and it went on to state that EQUAL would be implemented by Development Partnerships (DPs). By virtue of their roles in stimulating access to the labour force, addressing social exclusion and discrimination, piloting innovations, disseminating good practices and promoting inter-agency and inter-territorial collaboration, EQUAL Development Partnerships provide a useful case study from which to draw lessons about the effectiveness or otherwise of partnership approaches to social welfare provision and development.

The specific case studies referred to here relate to experiences in Finland, Ireland, Spain and Sweden. Experiences from the Finnish case demonstrate the importance of transport services and the outreach delivery of supports in rural communities with low population densities. The Irish case study deals with three LEADER Local Action Groups who came together to promote progression to employment of beneficiaries from a range of defined target groups including refugees, lone-parents, low-income smallholders, older unemployed people and people with disabilities. Lessons from this case study point to the importance of tailored one-to-one supports to individuals. The case studies from Spain reveal how social economy enterprises can play a supportive role in facilitating individuals to make a transition from exclusion to mainstream employment. In Sweden, collaboration with local employers emerges as a means of providing opportunities for unemployed people to access work experience and training. Such holistic methodologies are enabled through endogenous approaches, the localised nature of the delivery agencies, and their linkages with civil society. The partnership agencies in all cases have established structures to enable client group participation in decision-making, as part of the process of tailoring interventions and empowering beneficiaries. Thus, they provide some insights into social welfare governance.

Data were collected in the five case study locations by means of a survey questionnaire among all beneficiaries, in-depth face-to-face interviews with a sample of beneficiaries, meetings with household members of some beneficiaries to provide a holistic appraisal of social welfare interventions, interviews with frontline staff and DP (Development Partnership) members and facilitated workshops with all stakeholders. The findings show that partnerships' approaches have enabled innovations in accessing and empowering clients. The flexibility implicit in local development approaches transfers well to the provision of social welfare supports, as interventions, particularly in respect of personal development and vocational training were tailored to suit individuals' needs and their progression potential. The approach of all DPs focused very strongly on the empowerment of individual clients, and several fora were convened to enable beneficiaries to input into local decision-making. Statutory or traditional mainstream providers proved to be generally open to taking on board ideas, suggestions and

good practices that emerged from the bottom-up, but some were less forthcoming in committing funding to particular pilot initiatives. The Development Partnerships have compiled and articulated specific policy recommendations, but their work in having these fully implemented remains on-going. As well as delivering EQUAL in their respective local contexts, each of the Development Partnerships participated together in a transnational partnership called WORKLINKS, which enabled them to share experiences and seek to promote best practice and mainstreaming.

The following table presents an overview of the respective Development Partnerships.

Member State	Development Partnership	DP (Development Partnership) Members[2]	Main Beneficiaries (Client Groups)
Ireland (Irl)	Rural Options	4 LEADER Area-Partnerships, Ministry for Social Welfare, National Training and Employment Authority, National Farm Advisory Agency, Employers' Bodies, Local (County) Government.	People with Disabilities, People parenting alone, Refugees and Asylum Seekers, Long-term Unemployed aged over 40, Low-Income Smallholders.
Spain (Esp)	Res Laboris	Regional and Municipal Authorities, Voluntary Associations, Education Providers, Employers' Organisation, National Women's Network, Youth Association.	Unemployed Youth, Immigrants, Long-term Unemployed Persons,
	Aproxímate	Municipal Authorities, Social Economy Enterprises, Vocational Education Providers,	Drug-Abusers, People with Disabilities, Women over 40.
Finland (Fi)	Operation Work	NGO 'After Eight' working with marginalised youth, Community Groups, Municipal Authorities, University, Vocational Education Providers.	Unemployed Young People, Unemployed Women aged 25 – 45, Long-term Unemployed Persons.
Sweden (Se)	Success	Municipal Authorities, Third Level Sector, Social Insurance Office, Social Economy Enterprises, Vocational Training Providers.	People on Long-term Sickness Benefit.

Table 2. Locations and Features of the Case Study Partnerships

[2] Each Development Partnership also provided for representation on its board from among the beneficiaries.

3.1 Engaging beneficiaries – localisation and endogenous approaches

Unlike mainstream agencies, which have to deal with all those who present claims for social welfare supports, the Development Partnerships in this study have had the facility to focus on a limited number of beneficiary types. This has allowed them to pursue a more personalised approach to welfare provision than any of the beneficiaries would have previously experienced. It has also enabled the Development Partnerships to work with individuals to address non-economic obstacles and barriers (such as low literacy levels, domestic violence, addictions, mental ill-health) that had inhibited their self-development. Having a range of agencies represented on their Boards of Directors, Development Partnerships were well-positioned to draw on the knowledge and expertise of personnel such as counsellors, medics and educators, and through their linkages with employers, the partnerships were able to arrange tailored and taster work-experience programmes for their clients.

Consultations with social welfare recipients who participated in this study revealed that there was seldom one factor that prevented them coming off social welfare and making the transition to employment. Institutional and structural barriers such as a lack of transport services, rural isolation, limited childcare options and unavailability of services, particularly health and social services emerged as significant barriers to client empowerment and progression. Barriers also exist at local community level and clients in all four countries reported that the attitudes of family members, neighbours and peers emerge as significant factors. In this context, negative attitudes on the part of other people may reduce the self-confidence and self-esteem of a client, such that he/ she can face additional difficulties in coming forward to access support. By the same token, a supportive family and community can play an important role in client empowerment. Drug abusers from the Aproxímate (Esp) catchment area recounted how prejudices and fears, either on the part of employers or other workers, caused them to be hesitant in coming forward to access supports. Many articulated that they were more comfortable approaching a partnership than a government agency, due to their past experiences of state systems.

Research in each of the five case study locations reveals specific barriers faced by women in the rural context. In these cases, as well as in many rural areas throughout Europe, most job opportunities have traditionally been in the fields of agriculture, quarrying, forestry, fishing and construction, all of which have tended to be male dominated. Women tend to be less likely to have the skills or the desire to take up employment in these areas, and therefore face more acute difficulties in accessing the jobs that may emerge in their municipalities. Clients have also reported varying degrees of prejudiced attitudes towards females, where women are somehow perceived 'less able' to carry-out certain tasks. While the interventions made through the Development Partnerships have made considerable progress in enabling many females to deal with prejudices on an individual level, there is a need for a more extensive approach to challenging all forms of prejudice and potential discrimination.

Experiences in each of the study locations are definitive on the significance of the bottom-up approach; being endogenous organisations with established links to the local communities, Development Partnerships have an independence and autonomy that enables clients to approach them with greater confidence. Working through local development structures (services operate in the offices / bases of community development organisations), means that supports are present at a community level that would be impossible if the initiative

were administered through state bureaucracy or large institutions. Some clients have reported that approaching a local and bottom-up organisation removes fears they may have had about losing welfare benefits. Clients in Sweden were particularly vocal in articulating the merits of accessing services locally, as some claimed to have had negative experiences of government offices. Consequenlty, those working with the SUCCESS DP (Se) have had to build-up rapport and co-operation with those in the statutory sector, as well as with the client.

Each of the partnerships has demonstrated how they have succeeded in disseminating information to clients via community and local networks. Aproxímate and Res Laboris (Esp) each cover extensive catchment areas over several municipalities. Recognising that outreach offices alone have a limited impact in terms of engaging with those most in need of assistance, the DPs have developed linkages with several community associations and charitable bodies. Each of these bodies is informed of the supports available, and undertakes to disseminate information in its own municipality. Indeed, many of the clients assisted by Aproxímate were initially referred to it by local charities and associations.

The case studies reveal how the development partnerships have been proactive in following up with clients. This contrasts with clients' experiences of larger organisations that have tended to place the entire onus on the client to chase up opportunities, as was particularly the case in Ireland and Spain. The local partnerships contrast further with traditional agencies in that they do not seek to categorise or label clients and 'diagnose' based on that categorisation. Instead, each individual is assessed and supported based on his / her own life situation, skills, likes / dislikes, interests and ultimate goals in life. Such an approach is time-consuming and requires a large degree of commitment on the part of support staff. Indeed, the research findings are clear on the need for frontline Job Coaches and Facilitators to have community development skills, so as to maximise the effectiveness of bottom-up approaches.

3.2 Beneficiaries' experiences of area-based partnerships

Observations by clients and support staff alike confirm the importance of confidentiality, trust and understanding between both parties. Jobs' Facilitators / Coaches report how they have refined their listening and inter-personal skills in enabling clients to deal with life challenges, and to set attainable goals for themselves. While the intensive one-to-one approach applied by EQUAL DPs incorporates many of the features of traditional job coaching and mediation, it extends far beyond either. The case studies underscore the need for the process of client support to be based as much on empowerment as on employment progression.

The experience of those affected by drug dependencies supported by Aproxímate (Esp) spells out the need to:

- Provide the client/ beneficiary with complete information,
- Detail the benefits to him/ her,
- Promote the active participation of the client/ beneficiary,
- Empathise with the beneficiary and create a relationship of mutual trust.

Reporting on experience of working with clients, one Facilitator has describes how "the work done will be collectively agreed upon at all times, although the client is considered the

main protagonist who sets the objectives and carries out the tasks." The Aproxímate experience underpins the need for a constant focus on developing the clients' self-esteem, and the need to work on aspects such as "abilities, skills and capacities." Support structures, such as those provided by Ideum (House of Ideas, Se) represent a suitable context in which the individual can gain confidence and develop his/her skills. As one participant described Ideum:

> *"No one knows anything about the other. You choose what you want to tell about yourself. Everyone knows that they are respected for who they are … Ideum is a greenhouse where you are allowed to grow in your own tempo."*

The approach taken by SUCCESS (Se) and Rural Options (Irl) proposes that the facilitator/ mediator work with the client to formulate a personal plan that is based on the following:

- What goals and expectations has the participant?
- What does the participant think about the agencies' goals and his/her personal goals?
- The participant's description of his/ her current situation
- Mapping of the resources, possibilities and limitations.

Res Laboris (Esp) applies a similar approach, and has developed an extensive template, which the client and facilitator can use to identify skills, abilities, preferences, opportunities, gaps, challenges, needs, resources and potential. Moreover, the Res Laboris Centre provides a specific programme for those who lack work experience and qualifications. Funded by Res Laboris, this programme enables employers to taken on social welfare dependents, and to provide them with in-house training and employment for a dedicated period of time. This arrangement does not require any financial contribution from the employer, and has no impact on the rights of clients to retain their social welfare benefits.

The Rural Options (Irl) approach is also motivated by removing the barriers to equality, that impede the client's self-development. Therefore, while the facilitator / coach may be working face-to-face with a client to improve his/ her abilities, he/ she also works with colleagues within the LEADER[3] Partnerships to address the broader support issues that are essential to client progression. Linkages between EQUAL and various Rural Transport Programmes operated by the Partnerships have been essential in enabling clients to access training and employment. Community development structures, including lone-parents' groups and networks of people with disabilities have provided clients with a social outlet, and have also served as vehicles through which structural inequalities are being addressed.

3.3 Beneficiaries' perspectives

When asked to rate the extent to which the intensive one-to-one approach pursued by Development Partnerships had lived up to their expectations, the clients replied as follows:

[3] LEADER, which began in 1991, is a European Union Community initiative to promote rural development. Current (2007 – 2013) rural development policy in Europe (Regulation 1698/2005) requires that strategies and actions are promoted by means of the LEADER method – namely encouraging the implementation of integrated, high-quality and original strategies for sustainable development with a strong focus on partnership and networks of exchange of experience.

To a large extent: 71%
To some extent: 14.5%
Not Sure / Too Early: 14.5%

These responses indicate a very high level of satisfaction among clients. Many clients commented that they valued having access to a facilitator who was willing to allocate the necessary time to addressing their issues. When asked whether or not they had been allocated sufficient time, 86% replied that they had. Clients were also asked to identify the main benefits that had accrued to them personally as a result of the one-to-one approach. The following diagram presents the results.

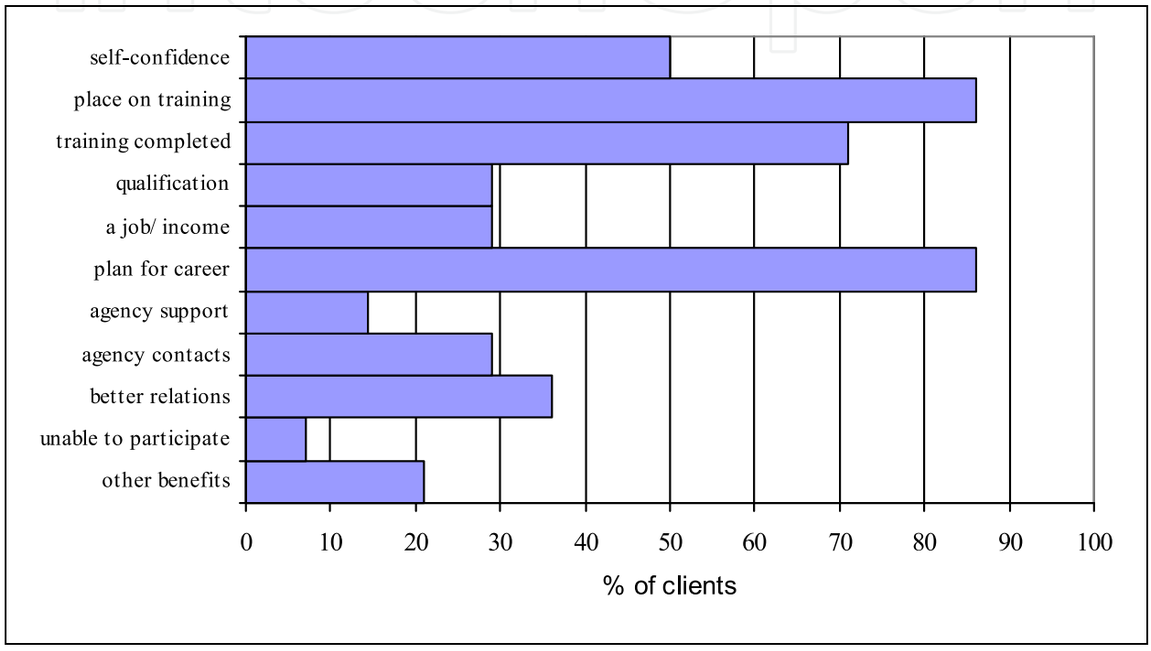


Fig. 1. Main Personal Benefits as identified by Clients

The majority of clients identified more than one benefit. The most frequently cited benefits were:

- I have a plan or a sense of what I want to do with my career / life, and
- I got a place on a training programme.

While the latter reveals little difference between the outputs of Area-Based Partnerships and those of exogenous agencies, the former highlights a substantial difference, and is reflective of the holistic approach that is enabled through collaborative partnership and client empowerment.

At the time of the survey, over 70% of clients had completed at least one training programme. Half the clients surveyed stated they have gained greater self-confidence as a result of their participation in employment and training supports, while 36% claimed that they enjoy better relations with their family and friends, relative to before their engagement with the DP. When asked to identify the most positive aspects of the DP service, the following were the most frequently cited:

- The facilitators' skills and approach,
- Facilitator's understanding,
- Counselling support,
- Building up a relationship of trust,
- Opening up doors to other organisations.

When asked to suggest changes to the type of support provided, clients identified the need for:

- More training
- Work Experience
- Personal Assistant Allowances (especially for people with disabilities)
- Continuity.

The high levels of satisfaction with the one-to-one approach are also reflected in the following table. The table presents the views expressed by clients regarding the potential to expand the approach to other contexts.

	Agree	Don't Know/ No Opinion	Disagree
The one-to-one approach is better than any previous experience I had in relation to employment.	**91%**	**9%**	
The one-to-one approach focused on my personal development and abilities.	**100%**		
Other agencies need to adopt the one-to-one approach	**86%**	**14%**	
The one-to-one approach would be too intensive for most people.		**22%**	**78%**

Table 3. Clients' Assessment of the One-to-One Approach

Each of the five DPs has promoted a high degree of integration and complementarity between EQUAL and the other actions promoted by them. Over 78% clients reported having had contact with another member of the Partnership staff, with the most frequent interfaces being with training officers / co-ordinators. Thus, the multi-stakeholder composition of partnerships, and the integration of social welfare with other developmental supports lend themselves to the optimisation of progression opportunities for clients.

3.4 Innovation

Localisation, bottom-up and partnership have combined to create conditions that are favourable to innovative, flexible, integrated and holistic approaches to client progression and the realisation of equal opportunities. The development of employment opportunities in the social economy or third sector in parallel with job coaching maximises the probability of client progression. Linkages with local employers have encouraged innovations in the ways in which workplaces respond to the integration of new entrants. Government agencies have generally responded positively to the need for vocational training, and have provided DPs with the resources to run tailored programmes for clients. Agencies have however been more reticent about sharing data with one another, and territorialism on the part of some agency personnel remains a barrier to innovation.

Social Economy enterprises have provided a very valuable training and employment outlet for many clients. The highest rates of uptake of employment in this sector occur in Spain, most notably in the Aproxímate catchment area. For many clients, a placement in a social economy setting provides the opportunity to (re)gain their self-confidence, get a taste for work, and/ or to adjust to the routine and responsibilities that go with having a job. Thus, a flexible approach on the part of social economy enterprises provides clients with a mechanism for making the transition to mainstream employment. For other clients, the social economy has provided the most appropriate form of employment. The lessons from the Spanish experience have transferred well to the Irish context, and since 2010, the Irish partners have expanded their own social economy enterprises, including a community food centre and a furniture restoration business, which predominantly employs people with mental ill-health[4]. Indeed, many members of this client group do not come within the statutory agency definition of a 'person with a disability,' but at the same time, many are incapable of holding down a mainstream job.

The five partnerships have each demonstrated a positive and pro-active approach to meeting the needs of those who live in rural areas and have responded through a variety of outreach mechanisms. One Jobs Coach operates from a cattle mart one day each week, so as to promote engagement by low-income smallholders and their families, while others operate part time from community and youth drop-in centres. Interestingly, the DP members and staff did not see their outreach actions are being particularly innovative in themselves, but they mark a very clear departure from the approaches pursued by exogenous social welfare delivery agencies.

When asked about innovation specifically, DP members tended to speak extensively about their work in changing attitudes among, and arrangements with local employers. They have sought to promote flexible approaches to work placements, and members of the SUCCESS (Se) and Res Laboris (Esp) DPs have made arrangements with local employers to provide beneficiaries with transport and with staggered working times so as to enable them to gradually make the transition from welfare dependency to part-time work. In order to support employers to 'take the risk' involved in employing a client who has been distant from the labour force, the Actíva Foundation (Se), in conjunction with the social insurance office implements a scheme under which the worker is placed with the employer, but where Actíva manages the employment, pays the wages, ensures that the employee completes his/her tasks and advances in terms of his/her personal progression. This innovation is also being promoted in Finland, and it demonstrates the added value that can be generated from inter-agency interfacing through partnership.

In Arvidsjaur (a municipality in Northern Sweden) a special method called "personal coordinator" is being developed that gives the client – due to a joint agreement between the different local authorities involved with the client – the opportunity to choose one person, from a certain number of civil servants representing the authorities, who will accompany the client through the whole rehabilitation process. This means the establishment of a better and more reliable relation between the client and the person giving support that will lead to a smoother and shorter rehabilitation process with the clear focus on the clients' real needs; the individual approach.

[4] These particular social enterprises are operated by one of the LEADER Local Action Groups in the Irish DP – IRD Duhallow. Further details are available on www.irdduhallow.com.

It is evident from the DP experiences to date that the more universal national social security systems in Finland and Sweden relative to those in Ireland and Spain (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009) allow for greater flexibility and innovation on the parts of partnership. In particular, the mechanisms to enable sick-listed persons to resume employment on a temporary or phased basis have the potential to operate in other member states. Thus, the abilities of partnerships to effect policy change is determined not just by internal dynamics, but by the willingness or otherwise of statutory agencies to take risks and embrace innovation. However, most public service systems are risk-averse and functionaries are not incentivised to innovate. Indeed, within many bureaucracies staff members are, despite the demonstrative benefits of partnership, more likely to be rewarded for client throughput rather than their achievements through collaborative partnerships.

3.5 Beneficiary empowerment

The tripartite structure of Area-Based Partnerships (i.e. involving the statutory, social partners and community sectors) seeks to create synergies by capitalising on the expertise, experiences and perspectives of multiple stakeholders while simultaneously promoting participative democracy and social capital and client inputs into decision-making. The following diagram outlines the core partnership structure on which the DPs are based.

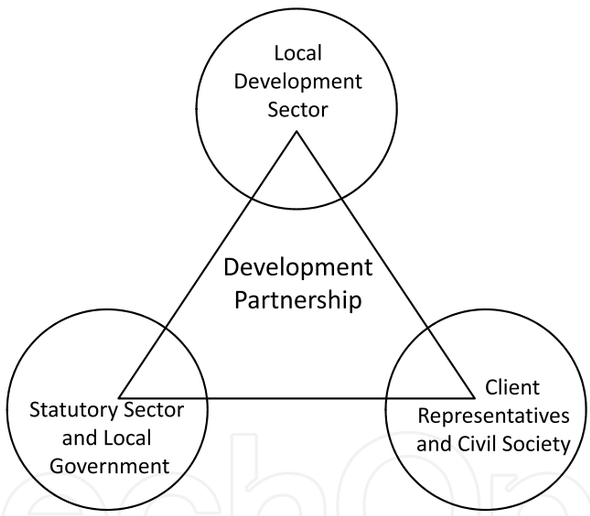


Fig. 2. Development Partnership Structure

In the case of Rural Options (Irl), the local development sector plays a strong role. This has ensured a high degree of integration and complementarity between EQUAL and local development actions, including LEADER. As a result, clients and beneficiaries have enjoyed access not just to employment facilitators / jobs' coaches, but to a range of supports in the areas of education, training, personal development, job-coaching, enterprise supports, mentoring and the promotion of the equality agenda at community level.

Both Spanish DPs have secured strong representation from the local government sector. Res Laboris brings together representatives from several municipalities. This ensures that EQUAL has a presence throughout an extensive area. It has also facilitated the development of outreach services. The DP is closely linked to the Local Action Group (ADI El Záncara)

which is responsible for implementing the Spanish national LEADER Programme (PRODER[5]). This ensures complementarity between EQUAL and activities in the areas of community and enterprise development. It has also enabled the DP to garnish greater support from employers and the social partners. Res Laboris works to ensure high levels of employer participation. The DP contracts a development officer (*vendedor de empleo*), who is responsible for liasing with local businesses and noting their human resource requirements. This informs both the staff and the clients, and enables clients to direct their efforts towards specific and tangible opportunities.

The DP Aproxímate also demonstrates strong participation by the local authority sector. Ten municipalities are represented on the DP. The town of Antequerra in central Andalucía provides a clear example of where municipal authorities responded to overtures from the DP by setting up a forum of people with disabilities to advise them on streetscape design. As a result, clients and the local community have benefited from the town's enhanced physical layout. In addition to municipal representation, the County Council of Málaga and the Regional Government (Junta de Andalucía) have one representative each on the DP. Participation by the latter has ensured that lessons emerging at a local level are taken on board regionally and that the DP has an input into economic and employment strategies such as the regional research and industrial plans.

Each of the partnerships has made efforts to include clients on its Steering Committee / Board of Directors, thereby giving effect to the principles of participative democracy referred to earlier in this chapter. However, they have had mixed success in this respect. Rural Options (Irl) established five client networks to provide mechanisms for client consultation and representation drawn from smallholders, people with disabilities, people parenting alone, asylum seekers and the long-term unemployed aged over forty. Each network has elected a representative to the Rural Options DP, who is charged with representing the network, and with providing two-way feedback between the clients and the DP. While the clients contribute actively to the DP Board, they are all volunteers and lack the required resources to provide comprehensive feedback to the broad category of persons they represent. Thus, they tend to rely on newsletters produced by the DP and its constituent partners, and their visibility among the public is low. Similar experiences are reported from the other DP locations, although agency representatives report that they benefit from being able to float ideas with beneficiaries through the mechanism of the DP. The DPs' shortcomings in this respect are indicative of a widespread weakness among partnerships, as articulated by Ó Broin (2009; 124), "representatives of marginalised groups lack the power of the employers', trade unions' or farmers' groups. They do not have the same ability to hold up the implementation of decisions agreed during the social partnership process."

3.6 Inter-agency collaboration

Collaboration with the statutory sector has been a strong feature of all the DPs. At SUCCESS (Se), mediators have been pro-active in developing linkages with the social welfare services,

[5] PRODER, established in 1996, is a programme created to support national rural development in Spain. The Spanish government and the EU co-financed the initiative. It promotes rural development and is delivered locally by Local Action Groups, which are multi-stakeholder partnerships, similar to LEADER Groups.

and have encouraged a more personalised and tailored approach to enabling EQUAL clients to progress towards employment. Similar collaborations have been pursued between DP Aproxímate and 'Andalucía Orienta' (the Andalucian Employment Services). These have delivered job-insertion programmes, specialised counselling, job-monitoring and work-experience placements. In the case of Rural Options, collaboration with Teagasc (the state agricultural advisory service) has provided smallholders with enhanced access to a tailored programme designed to promote complementary off-farm employment.

Collaboration with the social partners, and in particular with employers has seen Rural Options implement a total employability programme. This programme was developed through collaboration between the DP, the national training and employment agency (FÁS) and a large employer in the area. It comprised a specific training programme designed to enable EQUAL clients to access jobs that had been ring-fenced for them in a new factory. As a result, ten clients have taken-up employment.

Collaboration with community and voluntary associations, and with the third sector has been important in maximising the accessibility of EQUAL in Spain. In Málaga, for example, collaboration between Aproxímate and the drug-addition centre; C.E.R.A.L. has been essential in enabling clients to overcome their personal fears and to embark on training and development programmes. Other community-based associations, such as the Centre for Women in Ronda, play a vital role in referring clients to EQUAL, and in providing complementary supports. Co-ordination between Aproxímate and the Association for People with Disabilities (Fidelis et Fortis) has provided clients with additional opportunities to develop their social skills and self-confidence.

Although there is consensus among the DPs on the value of partnership and collaboration, it is recognised that some agencies have been slower than others to buy into collaborative processes. In such circumstances, the DPs have responded by pursuing direct approaches to key personnel. Mediators working with SUCCESS (Se) report having had to take the lead in pursuing contacts with the Labour Office and Social Insurance Office in the interest of promoting a collaborative approach to supporting the client. In the case of Rural Options (Irl), the project co-ordinator and individual members of the DP Board of Directors have had to press upon the offices of local government to encourage some public agencies to engage with policy development.

3.7 Mainstreaming

Their local focus, endogenous nature, strong links with civil society and third sector organisations and innovations in their approaches to service delivery have contributed to each of the DPs exceeding their targets in respect of the number of clients supported, trained and placed in employment. The partnership approach has also contributed to engendering more positive attitudes towards social welfare beneficiaries, and it has fostered a more supportive environment in which they have been empowered to promote self-actualisation. However, the fluidity of the policy environment in which partnerships operate, and the ad hoc nature of some funding streams implies restrictions on the number of clients with which DPs can engage. Moreover, the current tightening of financial resources affecting government agencies is delimiting the abilities of Partnerships to broker resources and commitments from them. Thus, while Area-Based Partnerships emerge as efficient and

innovative agents in the delivery social welfare services, they face challenges in realising and effecting longer-term institutional change.

Working with clients to enable them to overcome the structural and institutional barriers to progression has heightened the DPs' awareness of the need for policy changes. Partnerships' internal evaluations have also pointed to the need for what Scott (2004) describes as a greater emphasis on mainstreaming, while national Managing Authorities for EQUAL convened information-exchanges and encouraged partnerships to "identify best practice and lessons learned… with a view to their integration into local, regional, national and European employment and human resource policies and practices in the context of achieving a labour market open to all (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment 2004; iv). Partnerships have responded by expanding statutory sector participation on their boards and working groups / sub-committees, convening bilateral meetings with key agencies and by disseminating information to agencies and elected political representatives. They have also held seminars on policy mainstreaming, and in this respect the transnational co-operation strand within EQUAL has proven to be effective in sensitising agencies to innovations in labour market supports and interventions. The EU's stewardship of EQUAL up to 2008 was a key enabler of transnational collaboration and the dissemination and transfer of good practices. Since then however, the EU has stepped back from funding the initiative and transnational contacts have been considerably reduced, and there is less discussion of policy development.

Among the policy innovations arising from the DPs' experiences are:

- Providing social welfare clients with access to a trained multi-disciplinary team, so as to address the totality of needs in an integrated and holistic manner,
- Delivering progression supports to social welfare clients as part of the suite of local development actions that enable community empowerment and territorial regeneration, so as to encourage accessibility and preventive approaches to inter-generational welfare dependency,
- Outreaching the delivery of tailored training programmes to community facilities in conjunction with civil society organisations so as to encourage participation and to counter stigmas associated with some institutional training facilities and offices, and
- Providing accessible counselling supports in parallel to the roll-out of interventions to enable client progression.

While elements of these innovations are transferrable to existing exogenous agencies, to do so without any accompanying institutional reform would fail to generate the level of benefits to social welfare clients that can be realised through collaborative area-based partnership structures and methodologies. Delivering services through partnerships in which civil society and client groups are key stakeholders and power-brokers allows for interventions to be tailored to meeting the long-term needs of those on social welfare. Removing the structural barriers associated with cumulative disadvantage in deprived neighbourhoods underscores the merits of area-based approaches and the integration of social welfare into community development strategies. Thus, while state agencies cannot expect to be able to replace or subsume Area-Based Partnerships, they must ensure they do not usurp them either. It behoves the state therefore to go beyond resource provision, and to work with communities and beneficiaries in a holistic manner, with the goal of

empowerment. In this respect, specific recommendations for national and regional authorities can be advanced drawing on the experiences of the DPs in this research:

- Proofing legislation to ensure that it does not discriminate against rural and marginal communities and citizens,
- Enabling agencies to access one another's data-bases so that information on clients is shared in an empowering way that promotes their integration into the labour market or social enterprise,
- Increasing supports for social economy / third sector employment and personal development opportunities for those most distant from the commercial labour market.

The current austerity measures being introduced by governments bring into sharp focus the need for innovation in social welfare systems. As agency budgets are reduced and payments to clients are curtailed, the onus on policy makers and functionaries to engage in lateral thinking and multi-stakeholder collaboration becomes all the greater. In this context, partnership processes can no longer be viewed as pilot programmes operating in parallel to the mainstream, partnership itself needs to become the mainstream.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Evaluations of the five Development Partnerships reveal that they have had considerable positive impact in delivering social welfare services and in shaping the local contexts in which they operate. They have:

- developed and promoted accessible support services,
- exceeded their targets for client placement in training and employment,
- increased awareness of the issues faced by those excluded from the labour force (among social partners and the statutory sector), and enabled innovative responses from the productive sector,
- established representative structures that serve to empower the client groups, and give them a voice in local decision-making,
- involved local, regional and national-level actors in changing attitudes and in undertaking initiatives that promote the realisation of equality,
- identified and broken down barriers that prevent welfare clients from accessing proper support that would enable their progression, and
- articulated policy changes so as to redress discrimination and inequalities, so that all persons are empowered to access appropriate services.

The achievements of the partnerships profiled here bear out the arguments advanced by Turok (2011) that locally-oriented strategies with multi-stakeholder inputs contribute to the realisation of inclusive growth and more effective and dynamic interventions. Their experiences also support the recommendations put forward by Birch (2008) and by Noya and Clarence (2007) that the promotion of social enterprises advances the social inclusion agenda within communities and improves quality of life. Challenges persist for the partnerships in refining their organisational structures so as to enable maximum client group participation, and the generation of local social capital. They also need to pay attention to ensuring that in the mainstreaming of partnership they avoid what Crouch (2011; 301) describes as the "depart from universalism of the historical modern state, selecting privileged interlocutors from among the institutions in the territory."

The Development Partnerships themselves stress their defining features, and they emphasise the merits of what they perceive as their client-centred, holistic and tailored set of interventions relative to the constrained approaches that characterise bureaucratic agencies. As one of their working documents states:

> *"…we have developed another perspective. We promote an individual and holistic approach, which takes into account not only the personal problems presented, but also the structural or policy-related issues. Intensive one-to-one support has demonstrated that problems or difficulties initially considered personal to the participant are often far more complex … In working with participants in this fashion, it is crucial to communicate all barriers detected; structural as well as cultural, to relevant statutory agencies and organisations, so that they can become aware of the problem and take appropriate action in a co-ordinated fashion."*

The experiences of the DPs have demonstrated the merits of providing social welfare supports that are locally based, delivered in collaboration with civil society, integrated into community development strategies, and which are characterised by flexibility and openness to innovation. Partnership has yielded considerable benefits for individuals in terms of improved access to employment, training and enhanced quality of life. It has revealed that in several cases, particularly among the long-term unemployed, failure to access employment or training had little to do with an individual's personal ability or disposition, and much to do with pre-existing and inflexible structures, procedures, schemes, practices, attitudes, prejudices and/ or policies that directly or indirectly prevent a willing individual from achieving self-development. The DPs' experiences demonstrate as McEwen (2011; 80) illustrates with respect to regional devolution of social welfare policy and functions, that multi-level government increases "the number of access points for pro-welfare advocates, not just to defend existing social programmes but to get new policy ideas on the agenda and to facilitate social policy innovation." They underscore the advantages of neo-endogenous collaboration over single agency delivery and provide a model for the roll-out and advancement of social welfare in increasingly straitened times.

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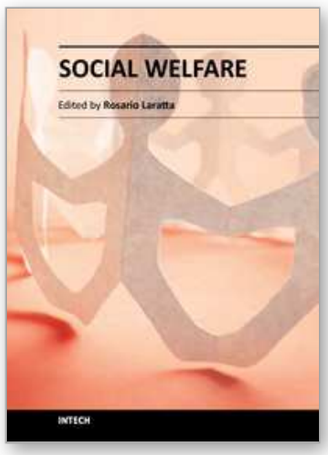
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