



Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

Final Report

Contract: 2014CE16BAT065

This is the Final Report of the study on the implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in the 2014-2020 ESI Funds (Contract: 2014CE16BAT065).

The study is led by Sweco and began in November 2014. It reviews the establishment of the partnership principle and multi-level governance during the 2014-2020 ESI Fund programming phase. The study will provide an analytical basis for further reflections on the future of the policy.

This report was prepared by Sweco in cooperation with Spatial Foresight and Nordregio. It is based on the work of national experts in all 28 Member States (Austria – ÖIR, Belgium VE Conseil, Croatia – Meta Consulting, Cyprus – LKN, Czech Republic – Berman Group, Germany – Spatial Foresight, Denmark – Nordregio, Estonia – Sweco, Spain – Infyde, Finland – MDI, France – t33, Greece – LKN, Hungary – MTAPTI, Ireland – EPRC, Italy – t33, Latvia – University of Latvia, Lithuania – BGI, Luxembourg – VE Conseil, Malta – Ecube, Netherlands – Spatial Foresight, Poland – Euroreg, Portugal – University of Lisbon, Romania – ACZ, Slovenia – IPoP, Slovakia – Aurex, Sweden – Sweco, UK – EPRC). Colleagues from EPRC, LSE and Nordregio are involved in the quality control of the work.

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Table of contents

Abstract	V
Extrait	V
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	VI
RÉSUMÉ	XI
INTRODUCTION.....	XVII
1 The Partnership Principle in the 2014-2020 Partnership Agreements and the ERDF / CF Programmes.....	1
1.1 The partnership principle and the European Code of Conduct on Partnership	1
1.2 European diversity of governance and partnership arrangements	2
2 Composition of the Partnerships.....	6
2.1 Balance of the partnership	6
2.2 Selection of the partnership.....	10
3 Partnerships in the Programming Phase	14
3.1 Involvement of partners.....	14
3.2 Transparent procedures and principles and best practice	18
3.3 Main points raised by partners and their integration	20
4 Partnerships in the Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation phase	22
4.1 Involvement of partners in the implementation process	22
4.2 Institutional capacity-building	25
4.3 Capacity-building in ESF-funded programmes.....	28
5 European Territorial Cooperation Programmes	30
5.1 Balance of the partnership.....	30
5.2 Selection of the partnership.....	31
5.3 Involvement of the partners in drafting	33
5.4 Transparent procedures and principles and best practice	34
5.5 Main points raised by the partnership and their integration.....	34
5.6 Involvement of partners in the implementation process	36
5.7 Institutional capacity building.....	36
6 General Assessment of Partnerships	38
6.1 Benefits and challenges of the partnerships	39
6.2 Comparison with the 2007-2013 period	42
6.3 Value of informal dialogue between the EC and the Member States	45
6.4 Assessment of partnership in EU Member States.....	47
7 Conclusions.....	50
Annex I: Methodology.....	56
1.1 Data collection and analysis	56
1.2 Survey	60
1.3 Interviews	65
1.4 Calculation of Performance indices based on survey and database results	68
ANNEX II: Additional figures.....	71
2. ANNEX III- database	
3. ANNEX IV – Member State factsheets	

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

Table of figures

Figure 1: Balance of partnership, programmes	8
Figure 2 : Balance of partnership, Partnership Agreement.....	8
Figure 3: Programmes, representativeness of partnerships	9
Figure 4: Transparent stakeholder selection by type of programme.....	11
Figure 5: Programmes, selection of partnership.....	12
Figure 6: Partnership Agreement, involvement of partners in the drafting stage	15
Figure 7: Involvement of partners by drafting stage and type of programme.....	16
Figure 8: Programmes, involvement of partners in the drafting process.....	17
Figure 9: Access to documents in time to participate in the Partnership Agreement development	19
Figure 10: Time span for public consultation of the Partnership Agreement.....	19
Figure 11: Share of programmes which mention comments and how these have been taken on board in the programme documents	21
Figure 12: Perceived over- or under-representation in the implementation process of different types of partners	22
Figure 13: Perceived future involvement of partners in the implementation process	23
Figure 14: Involvement of partners in the implementation of programmes.....	24
Figure 15: Share of programmes which mention capacity-building activities for partners	26
Figure 16: Institutional capacity-building, programmes	27
Figure 17: Number of ESF-funded programmes	29
Figure 18: ESF-funded programmes which allocate resource for capacity-building	29
Figure 19: Share of different types of partners in the partnership	31
Figure 20: Perceived representation of different types of partners.....	31
Figure 21: Identification of partnership according to the documents.....	32
Figure 22: Perceived identification of partnership according to the survey.....	32
Figure 23: Share of programmes where partners will be involved in committees/through consultation in the drafting process	33
Figure 24: Perceived involvement of partners in the drafting process	34
Figure 25: Share of programmes that mention comments and how these have been taken on board in the programme documents.....	35
Figure 26: Perceived equal treatment of inputs.....	35
Figure 27: Share of programmes where partners will be involved in committees/through consultation.....	36
Figure 28: Share of programmes which mention capacity-building actions	37
Figure 29: Main benefits, Partnership Agreement.....	39
Figure 30: Main benefits, programmes	40
Figure 31: Main challenges, Partnership Agreement	41
Figure 32: Main challenges, programmes.....	41
Figure 33: Perceived improvement compared to the 2007-2013 period; both regarding Partnership Agreement and programmes	42
Figure 34: Improvement compared to the 2007-2013 period, programmes.....	43
Figure 35: Usefulness of informal dialogue, Partnership Agreement	46
Figure 36: Usefulness of informal dialogue, programmes	46
Figure 37: Assessment of partnership in EU 28.....	50

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in
2014-2020 ESI Funds

Table of tables

Table 1: Governance dimensions and partnership arrangements.....	5
Table 2: Representation (%) of total number of partners in the Partnership Agreement.....	7
Table 3: Type of method used to identify and select partnerships in the Partnership Agreement	11
Table 4: Key Messages.....	53

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

Abbreviations

CBC	Cross Border Cooperation programmes
CEMR	Council of European Municipalities and Regions
CLLD	Community Led Local Development
CoC	European Code of Conduct on Partnership
CPR	Common Provisions Regulation (Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006)
CPMR	Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions
EC	European Commission
EGTC	European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESI	European Structural and Investment
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
EU	European Union
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IGJ	Investments in Growth and Jobs
IR	Interregional programmes
ITI	Integrated Territorial Investment
JTS	Joint Technical Secretariat
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership
MA	Managing Authority
NCB	National Coordinating Body
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NSRF	National Strategic Reference Framework
ÖROK	Austrian Conference on Spatial Planning
PA	Partnership Agreement
RDI	Research, Development and Innovation
TNC	Transnational Cooperation programmes
TO	Thematic Objective
ToR	Terms of Reference
UEAPME	European association of craft, small and medium-sized enterprises

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

ABSTRACT

In the legislative framework for the 2014-2020 ESI Funds the partnership principle has been strengthened. Article 5 of the Common Provision Regulation (CPR) makes it compulsory for each ESI Fund programme to organise a partnership at all programming stages and at all levels. A European Code of Conduct on Partnership (CoC) has been set up to support Member States to ensure that all partners are involved at all stages in the implementation of Partnership Agreements and programmes. Even though the partnership principle is not new for the 2014-2020 ESI Funds, more importance has been given to stakeholder involvement and influence. The aim of this study is to review the establishment of the partnership principle and the application of the CoC in the Partnership Agreements and programmes financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund (CF), including European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) programmes and multi-fund programmes co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF). The study analyses data collected by document analysis, web-survey and interviews.

The partnership principle has been satisfactorily respected in a wide range of countries and programmes. However, there are still challenges across a broad range of countries concerning the mobilisation of partners. Generally the modified legal framework was perceived as positive as it increased awareness and visibility of the partnership principle. The level of stakeholder involvement has improved since the 2007-2013 programming period, although there are sometimes differences between the content of the programming documents and the perception of stakeholders. Overall, the partnership principle adds value to the implementation of European public policies.

Key words: partnership principle, multi-level governance, involvement, Partnership Agreement, Operational programmes, European Territorial Cooperation programmes

EXTRAIT

Le principe de partenariat a été renforcé dans le cadre légal des Fonds ESI 2014-2020. L'article 5 du Règlement portant dispositions communes (RPDC) impose à tous les programmes des Fonds ESI d'organiser un partenariat à chaque étape de programmation et à tous les niveaux. Un code de conduite européen en matière de partenariat (CCEP) a été adopté afin d'aider les États membres à faire en sorte que l'ensemble des partenaires participe à chaque étape de la mise en œuvre des accords de partenariat et des programmes. Bien que le principe de partenariat ne soit pas une nouveauté pour les Fonds ESI 2014-2020, une plus grande importance a été accordée à la participation et à l'influence des parties prenantes. L'objectif de cette étude est de faire le bilan de la mise en place du principe de partenariat et l'application du CCEP dans les accords de partenariat et les programmes financés par le Fonds européen de développement régional (FEDER) et le Fonds de cohésion (FC), y compris les programmes de coopération territoriale européenne (CTE) et les programmes multi-fonds cofinancés par le Fonds social européen (FSE). L'étude analyse des données collectées par analyse documentaire, enquête en ligne et entretiens.

Dans de nombreux pays et programmes, le principe de partenariat a été correctement appliqué. Cependant, de nombreux pays ont du mal à obtenir des partenaires. De façon générale, le cadre juridique modifié a été perçu comme positif en ce qu'il a augmenté la connaissance et la visibilité du principe de partenariat. Le niveau de participation des parties prenantes a augmenté par rapport à la période de programmation 2007-2013, bien qu'il existe parfois des différences entre le contenu des documents de programmation et la perception des parties prenantes. Dans l'ensemble, le principe de partenariat apporte une valeur ajoutée à la mise en œuvre des politiques publiques européennes.

Mots clés : principe de partenariat, gouvernance à plusieurs niveaux, participation, accords de partenariat, programmes opérationnels, programmes de coopération territoriale européenne

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Partnership and multi-level governance in the legislative framework for the 2014-2020 ESI Funds

The legal basis for partnership and multi-level governance has been strengthened in the legislative framework for the 2014-2020 ESI Funds. Article 5 of the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) makes it compulsory for each Member State to organise, in accordance with its institutional and legal framework, a partnership for each Partnership Agreement and ESI Fund programme, at all programming stages and at all levels.

With a view to highlighting the importance of the partnership and multi-level governance principle, the CPR also empowers the Commission to provide for a **European Code of Conduct on Partnership** (CoC) through the adoption of a delegated act, in order to support and facilitate Member States in the organisation of partnership in accordance with article 5 of the Common Provisions Regulation (in particular paragraphs 1 and 2), throughout the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Partnership Agreements and programmes.

Officially introduced at the beginning of 2014, the CoC sets out the framework within which the Member States, in accordance with their institutional and legal framework as well as their national and regional competences, shall pursue the implementation of partnership.

The CoC, while fully respecting the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, lays down the following key principles:

- the partners selected should be the most representative of the relevant stakeholders;
- selection procedures should be transparent and take into account the different institutional and legal frameworks of the Member States and their national and regional competences;
- the partners should include public authorities, economic and social partners and bodies representing civil society, including environmental partners, community-based and voluntary organisations, which can significantly influence or be significantly affected by implementation of the Partnership Agreement and programmes;
- specific attention should be paid to including groups who may be affected by programmes but who find it difficult to influence them, in particular the most vulnerable and marginalised communities, which are at highest risk of discrimination or social exclusion, in particular persons with disabilities, migrants and Roma people;
- for the selection of partners, it is necessary to take into account the differences between Partnership Agreements and programmes;
- partners should be involved in the preparation and implementation of the Partnership Agreement and programmes, through timely, meaningful and transparent on the analysis of challenges and needs to be tackled, the selection of objectives and priorities to address them, and the coordination structures and multi-level governance agreements necessary for effective policy delivery;
- the partners should be represented on the monitoring committees of programmes. Through their active participation in the monitoring committees, the partners should be involved in assessing performance on the different priorities, the relevant reports on the programmes and, where appropriate, calls for proposals;
- effective partnership should be facilitated by helping the relevant partners to strengthen their institutional capacity in view of the preparation and implementation of programmes;
- the exchange of experience and mutual learning should be facilitated;
- the role of the partners in implementing the Partnership Agreements and the performance and effectiveness of the partnership in the programming period should be subject to assessment by the Member States¹.

¹ http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2014.074.01.0001.01.ENG

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

Objective of the study and methodological approach

The objective of the study is to review the establishment of the partnership principle and the application of the CoC in the Partnership Agreements and programmes financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund (CF), including European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) programmes and multi-fund programmes co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF).

In doing so, the analysis focused on the three topics specified in the Partnership Agreement and programmes: composition of the partnership, involvement in the drafting process of Partnership Agreements and programmes and the involvement of partners in the implementation of the programmes. Additionally, there is a chapter covering elements that concern all three previous topics, i.e. general benefits and challenges of partnerships, comparison with the 2007-2013 programming period, and value of informal dialogue between the Member States and the European Commission (EC). A separate chapter is exclusively addressing European Territorial Cooperation programmes (ETC).

The study integrates and analyses data collected through document analysis (e.g. what is written in the specified document), web-survey and interviews (e.g. the perception of the stakeholders, as reflected in their responses). In order to ensure comparability, the results presented in this report are exclusively based on the three above mentioned data sources. Hence, this report reflects the **perception of the stakeholders**, but it also has a strong **evidence-base**. However, the perception that respondents have of the processes is not always coherent with the information presented in the programme and Partnership Agreement documents.

The aim of the data collection and analysis was to provide a synthesis of how the provisions relating to partnership and multi-level governance have been reflected in Partnership Agreements and the programmes covered by the scope of the study. All 28 Partnership Agreements and 292 programmes have been analysed to that effect.

The aim of the online survey was to collect additional insights and perceptions regarding implementation of the partnership principle and multilevel governance in the 2014-2020 ESI-funds. It supplements the document analysis as it allows for insights in programmes that were not adopted at the moment when the analysis was performed; it also supplements the interviews by reaching a larger number of stakeholders.

The aim of the interviews was to obtain a better understanding of implementation rationale for the partnership principle. In total 88 interviews were carried out. There were approximately two interviews per Member State; one with the National Coordinating Body and one with a Managing Authority and/or the ex-ante evaluator. In countries with only one Operational Programme, only one interview was conducted. Representatives from six ETC programmes were also interviewed. In addition to Member State and ETC programme interviews, 18 interviews were performed with representatives of EU level interest organisations.

Chapter 1 – The Partnership Principle in the 2014-2020 Partnership Agreements and the ERDF/CF Programmes

The partnership principle has been, for a long time, one of the key principles used in the management of the European Cohesion policy Funds. In the legislative framework for the 2014-2020 ESI Funds, the legal basis for partnership and multi-level governance has been further strengthened. Nevertheless, the partnership principle is implemented very differently across the Member States, with the level and type of partner involvement often depending on national administrative structures and the existence of different cultures and historical legacies. The efficient implementation of the partnership principle is also dependent on the technical and financial capacity of the partners.

Chapter 2 – Composition of the Partnerships

In general, the partnerships for both Partnership Agreements and programmes involve all types of partners but variations do exist between Member States and between types of programmes. In Member States where the documents show that certain types of partners are missing, the partnership is not necessarily perceived as unbalanced. In Member States where there is a

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

perceived lack of some types of partner, this can, to some extent, be explained by high expectations in respect of the involvement of partners. The overall picture here is that the countries that joined the EU in 2004 or later have more often than not established new partnerships, both for programmes and Partnership Agreements, while the countries that joined before 2004 have instead tended to build on existing partnerships. It is important to note here that a number of exceptions exist to this general picture. There are also discrepancies between what is stated in the documents and what is perceived by the survey respondents.

Chapter 3 – Partnerships in the programming phase

Partner involvement has generally been high in most countries, both in Partnership Agreements and in the programmes, with partners being most commonly involved in the selection of thematic objectives/development of programme priorities and in the needs analyses. The precise ways in which specific partners have been involved and the types of contributions they made differs widely between the different Member States. Generally, both the partners and the MAs perceive that documents were accessible in time for partners to be involved and provide comments. In a number of Member States it has been a challenge to allow enough time for partner involvement even though the NCBs and MAs have made attempts to make the process more transparent. Inputs from partners are generally perceived to have been treated equally, but public authorities are generally more positive compared to other types of partners. The results for the Partnership Agreements indicate that partner concerns had usually been taken into account, although the documents seldom described how the various comments were handled at a more detailed level. In ETC and single fund programmes partners' input is generally better taken into account than in other types of programmes.

Chapter 4 – Partnerships in the Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation phase

Almost all programmes mention some sort of partner involvement during the implementation process, either through consultation actions or committee involvement. Programme partners will most often be involved through committees and only to a lesser degree through consultation actions. There are no major differences as regards the degree of involvement between different types of programmes. The main difference rather concerns the balance between public and non-public partners and how they will be involved. The general picture shows that public authorities, especially from the national and regional levels, are generally overrepresented at the expense of the general public, civil society and the social and economic partners. Substantial differences remain over what programme documents describe in respect of capacity building and the perception of the relevant stakeholders. In some cases this is explained by the fact that the capacity-building activities are described in entirely ESF funded programmes. Since these programmes are not covered by this study, these efforts are not visible in the document analysis. There is a substantial difference between regional IGJ programmes and national sector-oriented programmes, with the latter rarely mentioning capacity-building actions in the programme documents.

Chapter 5 – European Territorial Cooperation Programmes

The main messages deriving from the analysis concerning the composition of partnerships is that there is low involvement of civil society and social/economic partners and partnerships mainly build on already established structures. Partners were in general directly involved in the drafting process, even if some programmes mention a lack of institutional capacity and a low level of commitment among partners as limitations. Furthermore, procedures are mainly considered to be transparent and the uptake of comments from partners has worked in a satisfactory way. There are usually planned actions on how to involve partners during the implementation process, e.g. through topical or geographical expert groups.

Chapter 6 – General assessment of partnerships

The findings suggest that the partnership principle adds a threefold value to the implementation of European public policies. Firstly, it ensures that experience and technical know-how is considered during decision-making processes, enabling better thematic balance and focus. This can be exemplified through countries such as Estonia, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Ireland, Slovenia, Poland, Latvia and Malta. Secondly, the partnership principle brings commitment and ownership and thus facilitates policy implementation, such as could be observed in Estonia, Ireland, Bulgaria, Malta, Finland, Cyprus, Poland, the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Slovakia. Thirdly, the

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

interviews show that partnerships have brought about complementarities in respect of other policies, strategies and funding sources in Finland, Poland, Bulgaria, Spain and Slovenia.

Working in partnership on ESIF programmes or Partnership Agreements is generally perceived as a benefit. However, given the complexity of the topics at stake and of the diversity of partners involved it is not without challenges.

The main challenge has been the mobilisation of partners in a wide range of countries. These countries include Austria, Germany, Croatia, Finland, Latvia, Poland, the Netherlands, Ireland, Malta and Spain. Secondly, experience in Germany, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands, France, Poland, Slovenia, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic shows that it is difficult to develop balanced strategies when the stakeholders promote vested interests. Thirdly, the opportunities to engage in constructive dialogue seem to have been hampered by time constraints in the United Kingdom, France and Poland. Finally, concerns were expressed regarding the administrative rules of the consultation process. These rules were often perceived as being too standardised, leaving little room for national adjustments.

Both partners and MAs emphasise improved stakeholder involvement since the 2007-2013 programming period. This is especially applicable to national programmes addressing specific policy fields as well as Transnational /Interregional programmes.

Again, both partners and MAs underlined the importance of the modified legal framework, which increased awareness of the partnership principle while keeping the issue on the agenda throughout the programming process. Although the CoC came only in to place when programming had started and has no legally binding character, it is largely appreciated and served as benchmark, contributing to clarify the role of partnerships and the application of the partnership principle. The CoC provided clear guidance on how to work with partnerships and these have largely been followed. Indeed, the CoC is seen as integral part of the modified legal framework which is perceived positively.

Informal dialogue with the Commission is more often conducted, and was perceived as more useful, in the context of a programme rather than a Partnership Agreement. More specifically, the informal dialogue with the EC has facilitated the understanding of new requirements. Hence, such dialogues contributed to better adherence to best practices and to a better representation of all types of partners in the processes.

What needs to be underlined is that the perception respondents have of the processes is not always coherent with the views presented in the programmes and Partnership Agreement documents. To conduct a proper assessment of the performance of the Member States, the different sources of information have, to a certain degree, been treated separately while also being put in a wider context. Based on the survey results and the document analysis, two separate indices are calculated to assess the performance of the Member States regarding the partnership principle and multi-level governance. These two indices in combination illustrate both the documented information and the perception collected through the survey. The comparison provides an overview of both the documented information and the survey results and of the performance in respect of the partnership principle of the different Member States.

Conclusions and recommendations

Overall, the study shows that the application of the partnership principle has improved in the 2014-2020 ESIF period as compared to previous programming periods. This positive trend has been emphasised by both partners and MAs, and is supported by the findings from the document analysis.

The modified legal framework, including the CoC, is perceived as having contributed to it. Despite not having legally binding character, and although it came in to play after the programming had started, the CoC was largely followed and has been instrumental to this improvement, by clarifying the role of partnerships and the application of the partnership principle.

The study shows that working in partnership brings an added value. Among others, it ensures that experience and technical know-how is considered during decision-making processes, enabling better thematic balance and focus; strengthens commitment and ownership and thus facilitating

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

policy implementation; and introduces complementarities with other policies, strategies and funding sources.

Given the complexity of the topics at stake and of the diversity of partners involved, the implementation of the partnership principle is not without challenges. In particular the mobilisation of partners remains a challenge in many cases, but also conflicting interest between partners need to be managed.

Releasing the added value of the partnership work requires efforts, both to manage the partnerships and ensure that all partners have the capacities needed. Considering these costs and the benefits of the partnership approach, there may sometimes be a trade-off between effectiveness and efficiency, i.e. a fine balance to strike for each individual programme and Partnership Agreement.

Stakeholder involvement and working in partnership constantly need to be adjusted to changing cooperation circumstances. The following points for consideration for national and programme authorities derive from the present study:

- Partnerships providing added value for a programme need to be thoroughly managed. Accordingly, resources for the management are important – although this may involve a trade-off between efficiency and effectiveness.
- Planned actions to involve partners in the implementation process should be followed-up and assessed regularly to see whether things can be improved further.
- As the implementation moves on, the composition of the partnership may change and partnerships might benefit from taking on board new partners.
- Capacity building schemes for partners and a clear focus on the added value of the partnerships (both for the programmes and the individual partners) may help, especially when mobilising the relevant partners raises a challenge.
- Avoiding imbalances in the partnership both as regards its formal composition as well as the actual role and influence of partners can be crucial.
- The role of the partners and the competences required to fulfil this role varies throughout the programme lifecycle. Measures for capacity building for the partnership can help the partnership to adjust to its changing roles.
- Different means of stakeholder participation can be considered at different stages of the programme lifecycle. Creating the right mix and reaching out to the right people can help building a community of practice around the topics of the programme in the programme area.

These recommendations complement the key lessons summed up in the DG REGIO study 'Local and Regional Partners Contributing to Europe 2020: Multi-level governance in support of Europe 2020', published in 2015.

RÉSUMÉ

Partenariat et gouvernance à plusieurs niveaux dans le cadre législatif des Fonds ESI 2014-2020

La base juridique des partenariats et de la gouvernance à plusieurs niveaux dans le cadre législatif des Fonds ESI 2014-2020 a été renforcée. L'article 5 du Règlement portant dispositions communes (RPDC) impose à chaque État membre d'organiser, dans le respect de son cadre institutionnel et juridique, un partenariat pour chaque accord de partenariat et programme des Fonds ESI, à chaque étape de programmation et à tous les niveaux.

En vue de mettre en lumière l'importance du principe de partenariat et de gouvernance à plusieurs niveaux, le RPDC habilite la Commission à adopter un acte délégué en vue d'établir un **code de conduite européen en matière de partenariat (CCEP)** afin d'aider les États membres à établir des partenariats conformément à l'article 5 du Règlement portant dispositions communes (notamment les alinéas 1 et 2) au cours de la préparation, de la mise en œuvre, du contrôle et de l'évaluation des accords de partenariat et des programmes.

Introduit officiellement au début de l'année 2014, le CCEP détermine le cadre dans lequel les États membres, dans le respect de leur cadre institutionnel et juridique, ainsi que de leurs compétences nationales et régionales, mettent en place des partenariats.

Le CCEP, tout en respectant intégralement les principes de subsidiarité et de proportionnalité, pose les principes essentiels suivants:

- les partenaires sélectionnés doivent être les plus représentatifs des parties prenantes concernées;
- les procédures de sélection doivent être transparentes et prendre en compte les différents cadres institutionnels et juridiques des États membres, ainsi que leurs compétences nationales et régionales;
- parmi les partenaires doivent figurer des autorités publiques, des acteurs économiques et sociaux, des organismes représentant la société civile (notamment des partenaires environnementaux) et des organisations issues du milieu associatif et du bénévolat, qui soient susceptibles d'influer significativement la mise en œuvre des accords de partenariats et des programmes, ou d'être fortement concernées par ceux-ci;
- une attention particulière doit être apportée à l'inclusion des groupes qui peuvent être concernés par certains programmes mais qui éprouvent des difficultés à les influencer, en particulier les populations les plus vulnérables et les plus marginalisées, qui sont aussi les plus exposées au risque de discrimination ou d'exclusion sociale, comme c'est le cas, notamment, des personnes handicapées, des migrants et des Roms;
- lors de la sélection des partenaires, il est nécessaire de prendre en compte les différences entre les accords de partenariat et les programmes;
- les partenaires doivent être associés à l'élaboration et à la mise en œuvre des accords de partenariat et des programmes, au moyen de consultations utiles, transparentes, menées en temps opportun et portant sur l'analyse des défis à relever et des besoins à satisfaire, sur la sélection des objectifs et des priorités relatives à leur réalisation, ainsi que sur les structures de coordination et les accords de gouvernance à plusieurs niveaux nécessaires pour garantir l'efficacité des actions entreprises;
- les partenaires doivent être représentés dans les comités de suivi des programmes. Dans le cadre de leur participation active dans les comités de suivi, les partenaires doivent être impliqués dans l'évaluation des résultats relatifs aux différentes priorités, des rapports sur les programmes et, le cas échéant, des appels à propositions;
- le partenariat doit être rendu efficace en aidant les partenaires concernés à renforcer leurs capacités institutionnelles en vue de la préparation et de la mise en œuvre des programmes;
- les échanges d'expérience et les enseignements mutuels doivent être facilités;

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

- le rôle des partenaires dans la mise en œuvre des accords de partenariat ainsi que dans les résultats et l'efficacité du partenariat au cours de la période de programmation doit faire l'objet d'une évaluation de la part des États membres².

Objectifs de l'étude et approche méthodologique

L'objectif de cette étude est de faire le bilan de la mise en place du principe de partenariat et l'application du CCEP dans les accords de partenariat et les programmes financés par le Fonds européen de développement régional (FEDER) et le Fonds de cohésion (FC), y compris les programmes de coopération territoriale européenne (CTE) et les programmes multi-fonds cofinancés par le Fonds social européen (FSE).

Dans ce cadre, l'analyse se concentre sur les trois sujets mentionnés dans l'accord de partenariat et les programmes : la composition du partenariat, la participation au processus de rédaction des accords de partenariat et programmes, ainsi que l'implication des partenaires dans la mise en œuvre des programmes. En outre, un chapitre couvre les éléments communs aux trois sujets ci-dessus, soit : les avantages des partenariats et les difficultés rencontrées, la comparaison avec la période de programmation 2007-2013 et l'importance du dialogue informel entre les États membres et la Commission européenne (CE). Un chapitre distinct traite exclusivement des programmes de coopération territoriale européenne (CTE).

L'étude intègre et analyse des données collectées par l'analyse documentaire (notamment les informations qui figurent dans le document spécifié), les enquêtes et entretiens par Internet (notamment le point de vue des parties prenantes d'après leurs réponses). Afin de garantir la comparabilité des résultats présentés dans ce rapport, ceux-ci sont basés exclusivement sur les trois sources d'information mentionnées ci-dessus. Le présent rapport reflète ainsi le **point de vue des participants**, tout en étant **fondé sur des preuves solides**. Cependant, le point de vue que les répondants ont exprimé concernant les processus ne correspond pas toujours aux informations figurant dans les documents relatifs au programme et aux accords de partenariats.

L'objectif de cette collecte et analyse de données était de montrer, de façon synthétique, comment les dispositions applicables au partenariat et à la gouvernance à plusieurs niveaux se reflètent dans les accords de partenariats et les programmes couverts dans l'étude. À cette fin, l'ensemble des 28 accords de partenariats et 292 programmes a été analysé.

L'objet de l'enquête en ligne était de collecter des informations et perceptions supplémentaires concernant la mise en œuvre du principe de partenariat et de la gouvernance à plusieurs niveaux dans les Fonds ESI 2014-2020. Elle complète l'analyse documentaire réalisée en fournissant des informations sur des programmes qui n'étaient pas adoptés au moment de l'analyse et elle complète également les entretiens en permettant d'atteindre un plus grand nombre de parties prenantes.

L'objectif des entretiens était d'obtenir une meilleure compréhension des logiques de mise en œuvre du principe de partenariat. Au total, 88 entretiens ont été menés. Environ deux entretiens par État membre ont été menés, l'un avec l'organisme national de coordination, et l'autre avec l'autorité de gestion et/ou l'évaluateur ex-ante. Dans les pays où il n'existe qu'un programme opérationnel, un seul entretien a été mené. Les représentants de six programmes CTE ont également été interrogés. Outre les entretiens des États membres et programmes CTE, 18 entretiens ont été menés avec des représentants de groupements d'intérêt au niveau européen.

Chapitre 1 – Le principe de partenariat dans les accords de partenariat 2014-2020 et les programmes FEDER/FC

Le principe de partenariat est depuis longtemps l'un des principes essentiels utilisés dans la gestion des fonds de la politique de cohésion européenne. Dans le cadre législatif des Fonds ESI 2014-2020, la base juridique des partenariats et de la gouvernance à plusieurs niveaux a été renforcée. Cependant, le principe de partenariat est mis en œuvre de manière très différente selon les États membres, le niveau et le mode de participation des partenaires dépendant souvent des structures

² http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2014.074.01.0001.01.ENG

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

administratives nationales et étant soumis à des différences d'histoire et de culture. L'efficacité de la mise en œuvre du principe de partenariat dépend également de la capacité technique et financière des partenaires.

Chapitre 2 – Composition des partenariats

D'une manière générale, les partenariats, tant pour les accords de partenariats que pour les programmes, impliquent toutes les catégories de partenaires, mais des différences existent entre États membres et entre catégories de programmes. Dans les États membres où il ressort de la documentation que certaines catégories de partenaires sont absentes, le partenariat n'est pas nécessairement perçu comme déséquilibré. Dans les États membres où l'absence d'une certaine catégorie de partenaire est ressentie, cela peut, dans une certaine mesure, s'expliquer par des attentes élevées concernant la participation des partenaires. Le tableau général qui se dégage est que les pays qui ont adhéré à l'UE en 2004 ou plus tard ont eu tendance à établir de nouveaux partenariats, tant en ce qui concerne les programmes que les accords de partenariat, alors que les pays ayant adhéré avant 2004 ont plutôt développé les partenariats existants. Il est important de noter que ce tableau général comporte un certain nombre d'exceptions. Il existe également des disparités entre ce qui figure dans les documents et le point de vue des répondants aux enquêtes.

Chapitre 3 – Partenariats dans la phase de programmation

De façon générale, la participation des partenaires a été élevée dans la plupart des pays, tant en ce qui concerne les accords de partenariats que les programmes, les partenaires étant le plus souvent impliqués dans la sélection des objectifs thématiques/le développement des priorités du programme et l'analyse des besoins. Le mode précis de participation de chaque partenaire spécifique et le type de contribution apportée diffèrent grandement selon les différents États membres. D'une manière générale, tant les partenaires que les autorités de gestion considèrent que les documents ont été accessibles en temps opportun pour permettre aux partenaires de participer et de faire des observations. Dans un certain nombre d'États membres, il s'est avéré délicat de donner assez de temps pour permettre la participation des partenaires, même si les organes nationaux de coordination et les autorités de gestion ont fait des efforts pour rendre la procédure plus transparente. Le sentiment général est que la participation des partenaires a été traitée de façon équitable, mais les autorités publiques sont en général plus positives que les autres catégories de partenaire. Les résultats relatifs aux accords de partenariats montrent que les préoccupations des partenaires ont généralement été prises en compte, bien que les documents fassent rarement état de la manière dont les différentes observations ont été traitées à un niveau plus détaillé. Pour les CTE et les programmes à fonds unique, la participation des partenaires est généralement mieux prise en compte que pour d'autres types de programmes.

Chapitre 4 – Partenariats dans la phase de mise en œuvre, de suivi et d'évaluation

Pratiquement tous les programmes font état d'une forme de participation des partenaires dans le processus de mise en œuvre, soit via des actions de consultation, soit via une participation aux comités. Les partenaires des programmes participent le plus souvent par le biais de comités, et dans une moindre mesure par le biais d'actions de consultation. Concernant le niveau de participation, on n'observe aucune différence majeure entre les différents types de programme. La différence principale concerne plutôt l'équilibre entre les partenaires publics et non publics, ainsi que leur mode de participation. Le tableau général qui se dégage montre que les autorités publiques, notamment au niveau national et régional, sont généralement surreprésentées, aux dépens du public général, de la société civile et des partenaires économiques et sociaux. Des différences substantielles demeurent concernant le contenu des documents relativement au renforcement des capacités et la perception des différentes parties prenantes. Dans certains cas, cela s'explique par le fait que les activités liées au renforcement des capacités sont décrites dans des programmes entièrement financés par le FSE. Étant donné que ces programmes ne sont pas couverts par la présente étude, ces efforts ne sont pas visibles dans l'analyse documentaire. On remarque une différence importante entre les programmes régionaux « Investissement pour la croissance et l'emploi » et les programmes sectoriels nationaux, ces derniers faisant rarement état d'actions de renforcement des capacités dans la documentation des programmes.

Chapitre 5 – Programmes de coopération territoriale européenne

En ce qui concerne la composition des partenariats, les principaux messages tirés de l'analyse sont que la participation de la société civile et des partenaires sociaux et économiques est faible et que

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

les partenariats sont principalement fondés sur des structures déjà établies. Les partenaires sont généralement directement impliqués dans le processus de rédaction, même si certains programmes mentionnent comme facteurs de limitation le manque de capacité institutionnelle et le faible niveau d'engagement chez les partenaires. Par ailleurs, les procédures sont le plus souvent considérées comme transparentes et la prise en compte des observations des partenaires est satisfaisante. Des actions sont généralement programmées pour trouver des moyens de faire participer les partenaires au cours du processus de mise en œuvre, par exemple à travers des groupes d'expertise thématiques ou géographiques.

Chapitre 6 – Évaluation générale des partenariats

Les conclusions suggèrent que le principe de partenariat apporte trois types de valeur ajoutée à la mise en œuvre des politiques publiques européennes. Premièrement, elle garantit que l'expérience et le savoir-faire technique sont pris en compte au cours du processus de prise de décision, ce qui permet de mieux équilibrer les thèmes et de se concentrer sur ce qui compte. On en veut pour exemple des pays tels que l'Estonie, Chypre, la Bulgarie, l'Irlande, la Slovaquie, la Pologne, la Lettonie et Malte. Deuxièmement, avec le principe de partenariat entraîne, les acteurs sont plus engagés et se sentent responsables des actions entreprises, ce qui facilite la mise en œuvre des politiques, comme cela a pu être observé en Estonie, en Irlande, en Bulgarie, à Malte, en Finlande, à Chypre, en Pologne, aux Pays-Bas, en Allemagne, en Espagne, en Suède et en Slovaquie. Troisièmement, les entretiens montrent que les partenariats ont généré des complémentarités avec d'autres politiques, stratégies et sources de financement en Finlande, Pologne, Bulgarie, Espagne et Slovaquie.

Le fait de travailler sur des partenariats liés aux programmes ESIF ou à des accords de partenariat est généralement perçu comme positif. Cependant, compte tenu de la complexité des sujets en jeu et de la diversité des partenaires, ces partenariats rencontrent des difficultés.

Premièrement, dans de nombreux pays, la principale difficulté a été la mobilisation de partenaires. Ces pays comprennent l'Autriche, l'Allemagne, la Croatie, la Finlande, la Lettonie, la Pologne, les Pays-Bas, l'Irlande, Malte et l'Espagne. Deuxièmement, ce qui s'est passé en Allemagne, Lettonie, Malte, aux Pays-Bas, en France, Pologne, Slovaquie, Bulgarie et dans la République Tchèque montre qu'il est difficile de développer des stratégies équilibrées lorsque les parties prenantes défendent des intérêts particuliers. Troisièmement, il semble que par manque de temps, on n'a pu engager un dialogue constructif au Royaume Uni, en France et en Pologne. Enfin, des préoccupations ont été exprimées concernant les règles administratives du processus de consultation. Ces règles ont souvent été perçues comme trop standardisées, ce qui laisse peu de place aux ajustements au niveau national.

Tant les partenaires que les autorités de gestion insistent sur le fait que la participation des parties prenantes a augmenté depuis la période 2007-2013. Ceci est valable tout particulièrement pour les programmes nationaux concernant des champs politiques spécifiques ainsi que pour les programmes transnationaux / interrégionaux.

Une fois encore, tant les partenaires que les autorités de gestion soulignent l'importance du changement de cadre légal, qui a permis au principe de partenariat d'être mieux connu et de rester dans les esprits tout au long du processus de programmation. Bien que le CCEP n'ait été mis en place qu'après le début de la programmation et qu'il n'ait pas un caractère juridiquement contraignant, il est largement apprécié et sert de référence car il contribue à clarifier le rôle des partenariats et l'application du principe du partenariat. Le CCEP donne des conseils très clairs sur comment gérer un partenariat, conseils qui ont été suivis par beaucoup. Il est perçu comme une partie intégrante du cadre légal modifié, ce qui est perçu comme positif.

Le dialogue informel avec la Commission est mené plus fréquemment et a été perçu comme plus utile, ceci plus fréquemment dans le contexte d'un programme que dans le cas d'un accord de partenariat. Il a notamment facilité la compréhension des nouvelles exigences et a donc contribué à une meilleure adhésion aux bonnes pratiques et à une meilleure représentation de toutes les catégories de partenaires dans les processus.

Il est important de souligner que la perception que les répondants ont des processus ne correspond pas toujours aux opinions exprimées dans la documentation relative aux programmes et aux accords de partenariat. Pour effectuer une évaluation correcte de la performance des États membres, les différentes sources d'information ont, jusqu'à un certain point, été traitées

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

séparément tout en étant replacées dans un contexte plus large. Sur la base des résultats de l'enquête et de l'analyse documentaire, deux indices séparés sont calculés pour évaluer la performance des États membres concernant le principe de partenariat et la gouvernance à plusieurs niveaux. Ces deux indices combinés illustrent à la fois l'information documentaire et les points de vue recueillis au cours de l'enquête. La comparaison fournit une vision générale de l'information documentaire et des résultats de l'enquête ainsi que des résultats relatifs au principe de partenariat des différents États membres.

Conclusions et recommandations

D'une façon générale, l'étude montre que l'application du principe de partenariat a progressé au cours de la période ESIF 2014-2020 comparé aux périodes de programmation précédentes. Cette tendance positive, soulignée à la fois par les partenaires et les autorités de gestion, est confirmée par les conclusions de l'analyse documentaire.

Le cadre légal modifié, notamment le CCEP, est perçu comme ayant contribué à ce progrès. En dépit du fait qu'il n'a pas de caractère contraignant et bien qu'il soit entré en jeu après le début de la période de programmation, le CCEP a été largement suivi et a été joué un rôle dans cette évolution, en clarifiant le rôle des partenariats et l'application du principe de partenariat.

L'étude montre que le travail en partenariat apporte une valeur ajoutée. Entre autres, il permet de s'assurer que l'expérience et le savoir-faire technique sont pris en compte pendant le processus de prise de décision, ce qui permet de mieux équilibrer les thèmes, de se concentrer sur ce qui compte et de faire en sorte que les acteurs soient plus engagés et se sentent responsables des actions entreprises, ce qui facilite la mise en œuvre de politiques. Ce travail génère également des complémentarités avec d'autres politiques, stratégies, et sources de financement.

Compte tenu de la complexité des sujets en jeu et de la diversité des partenaires, la mise en œuvre du principe de partenariat n'est pas exempte de difficultés. La mobilisation des partenaires, ainsi que les conflits d'intérêts à gérer entre partenaires, restent notamment un problème dans de nombreux cas.

Le fait de dégager une valeur ajoutée du travail en partenariat demande des efforts, tant pour gérer les partenariats que pour garantir que tous les partenaires disposent des capacités nécessaires. Compte tenu de ce qu'un partenariat coûte et de ce qu'il apporte, il faut parfois faire un compromis entre efficacité et efficience: un équilibre subtil doit être trouvé pour chaque programme et accord de partenariat.

La participation des parties prenantes et le travail en partenariat doivent constamment être adaptés pour suivre l'évolution des conditions de coopération. La présente étude a permis d'identifier les points suivants, que les autorités nationales et les autorités en charge de la programmation doivent garder à l'esprit:

- Les partenariats permettant de dégager une valeur ajoutée pour un programme doivent être gérés de façon rigoureuse. Les ressources allouées à la gestion sont donc importantes, bien que puisse falloir faire un compromis entre efficacité et efficience.
- Les actions programmées pour faire participer les partenaires au processus de mise en œuvre doivent faire l'objet d'un suivi et d'une évaluation réguliers pour déterminer comment elles peuvent encore être améliorées.
- Au fur et à mesure de la mise en œuvre, la composition du partenariat peut changer, et les partenariats peuvent bénéficier de l'intégration de nouveaux partenaires.
- Il peut être utile de développer des mécanismes de renforcement des compétences destinés aux partenaires et porter une grande attention à la valeur ajoutée des partenariats (tant pour les programmes que pour chaque partenaire), notamment lorsqu'il est difficile de mobiliser les partenaires concernés.
- Il peut s'avérer essentiel d'éviter les déséquilibres dans le partenariat, tant concernant la composition officielle qu'au niveau du rôle et de l'influence des partenaires dans la pratique.
- Le rôle des partenaires et les compétences nécessaires pour remplir ce rôle varient au cours du cycle de vie du programme. En prenant des mesures pour renforcer les compétences liées au partenariat, on peut permettre au partenariat de s'adapter à ses différents rôles.

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

- Divers moyens de participation des parties prenantes peuvent être envisagés à chaque étape du cycle de vie du programme. Établir une structure pertinente et faire appel aux bonnes personnes peut permettre de construire une communauté de pratique autour de l'objet des programmes dans le domaine de programmation.

Ces recommandations complètent les leçons essentielles résumées dans l'étude de DG REGIO « Partenaires locaux et régionaux contribuant à l'Europe 2020: la gouvernance à plusieurs niveaux pour soutenir l'Europe 2020 » (Local and Regional Partners Contributing to Europe 2020: Multi-level governance in support of Europe 2020), publiée en 2015.

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

INTRODUCTION

Partnership has traditionally been one of the key principles of cohesion policy. The partnership principle implies close cooperation between public authorities at national, regional and local levels in the Member States and with the private and other sectors. Partnership must be seen in close connection with a multi-level governance approach and the subsidiarity and proportionality principles: each level of government should play its role, and action should be taken at the right level and be proportionate to the objectives.

The legal basis for partnership and multi-level governance has been strengthened in the legislative framework for the 2014-2020 ESI Funds. Article 5 of the Common Provision Regulation (CPR) makes it compulsory for each Partnership Agreement and ESI Fund programme to organise a partnership at all programming stages and at all levels. Furthermore, a European Code of Conduct on Partnership (CoC) has been set up to support Member States in the organisation of partnership with regard to ensuring the involvement of relevant partners in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Partnership Agreements and programmes. The CoC is not legally binding and there is an absence of sanctions in case of non-compliance with its provisions. The CoC was officially introduced on the in the beginning of 2014³ when processes of developing Partnership Agreements and programmes was already under way.

As part of the work to assess implementation of new or specific provisions in the 2014-2020 Regulations for the ESI Funds, the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) commissioned a study to assess the implementation of the partnership principle during the programming phase of programmes financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund (CF), including multi-fund programmes co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF), including to what extent the new provisions regarding the partnership principle and multi-level governance in the 2014-2020 Regulations (including the Delegated Act on the European Code of Conduct on Partnership) have influenced the programming process.

The overall purpose of the study is therefore to develop an evidence-base on how the regulatory provisions relating to the partnership principle and multi-level governance have been implemented in all 28 Member States during the programming of the ESI Funds.

The findings will feed into the Commission's assessment of the outcome of programming negotiations and into further reflections on the future of the policy. They may also contribute to improving the implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance during the implementation phase of the 2014-2020 programmes.

This is the Final Report which integrates and analyses **data collected by document analysis, web-survey and interviews**. In order to ensure comparability the results presented in this report are exclusively based on the three above mentioned data sources, i.e. what is written in the specified documents and the perception of the stakeholders as reflected in their responses to the specified survey and interview questions. Even if this methodology provides a strong triangulation, the results do not provide a complete and objective truth regarding this topic and there might be opinions on certain matter which have not been fully captured in this methodology. Hence, this report reflects the **perception of the stakeholders**, but it also has a strong **evidence-base**.

The report is structured around the three topics in the Partnership Agreement and programmes: composition of the partnership, involvement in the drafting process of Partnership Agreements and programmes, and involvement of partners in the implementation of the programmes. Additionally, there is a chapter exclusively addressing European Territorial Cooperation programmes (ETC). Additionally, there is a chapter covering elements that concern all three previous topics, i.e. general benefits and challenges of partnerships, comparison with the 2007-2013 programming period, and value of informal dialogue between the Member States and the European Commission.

In order to analyse variations in the implementation of the partnership principle, different dimensions characterising the various governance arrangements will be used, such as diverse state traditions, policy styles, historical legacies and maturity of the partnership as well as territorial

³ Commission delegated Regulation (EU) of 7.1.2014 on the European Code of Conduct on Partnership in the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

specificities and recent changes in government systems. This analytical approach is further described in section 1.2.

Each chapter of the report integrates the findings deriving from:

- **document analysis** of all 216 Investment in Growth and Jobs (IGJ) programmes, all 28 Partnership Agreements, and 75 of the 79 European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) programmes⁴ as well as a number studies and reports on the implementation of the partnership principle in the 2014-2020 programming period;
- **online survey** on the partnership principle, with 511 respondents. The survey covers 156 IGJ programmes and 66 ETC programmes. The coverage of programmes by Member State is presented in the methodological annex. There are 19 Member States that are fully covered by the responses; the survey includes relatively few programmes from Spain and France. Apart from the fact that the response rate is low in some Member States, the survey results regarding individual Member States might also be affected by the relative response rate from different stakeholder groups, i.e. the share of answers from managing authorities vs partners. This is further described in the methodological annex.
- **interviews** with selected key players at programme level, national level and with EU level interest organisations. In total 88 interviews were carried out to obtain a better understanding of implementation rationale for the partnership principle (all interviewed organisations are listed in the methodological annex).

Some questions have been addressed by several means of information collection and provide a varied picture in respect of the documented and perceived partnership efforts. In the cases where similar topics have been addressed both by document analysis and surveys, the results are presented in terms of two separate indices describing the performance of each Member State based on the survey and the document analysis respectively.

This report is structured in such a way that it provides the reader with a sound overview of the different dimensions that are of relevance for a proper implementation of the partnership principle in multi-level decision-making and implementation structures throughout the EU 28. These dimensions or themes, such as composition and selection of partnerships, involvement of partners, transparency and institutional capacity building, are analysed in chapters 3-8. While the chapters can of course be read separately, the structure of the report is based on the consideration that each chapter informs the subsequent ones. **Chapter 1** provides a **general overview** of the performance of the Member States regarding the partnership principle while outlining the **conceptual and methodological approaches** selected for the current study. **Chapter 2** discusses the **composition of partnerships**. In addition to shedding light on the EU-wide representation of different partners in Partnership Agreements, the balance of partnerships and the selection of partners (in programmes and Partnership Agreements) is also analysed in this chapter. **Chapters 3 and 4** are meant to dig deeper still into these issues. This is done by **detailing the different phases of policy making**; the programming phase (chapter 3) and the implementation, monitoring and evaluation phase (chapter 4). Issues such as transparency, access to documents, representativeness and capacity-building through ESF funds are dealt with in these two chapters. After this specific focus on the policy-making phases, **chapter 5 analyses the European Territorial Cooperation programmes in more detail** by differentiating between various types of ETC programmes, such as CBC, IGJ, IR and TNC programmes. Topics covered here concern balance and selection of partnerships, the involvement of partners in the different policy cycles, and transparency and capacity-building efforts to strengthen partner status in the different programmes.

Following these three chapters specifically addressing policy-making cycles and programmes, **chapter 6** was written with a view to providing a **general assessment of partnerships**. The main overarching topics covered here are benefits and challenges, comparisons with the previous programming period and the value of informal dialogue between the Member States and the EC. The focus here is on Partnership Agreements and programmes and on differentiating between different types of programmes. **Chapter 7 concludes** the report and **translates its main findings** in key messages, as per chapter and theme (Table 4).

⁴ The programme: Interreg IT-HR - Italy-Croatia had still not been submitted to the EC at the current time of writing

1 THE PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLE IN THE 2014-2020 PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS AND THE ERDF / CF PROGRAMMES

Key messages:

- The partnership principle is implemented very differently in the Member States throughout the EU 28.
- Implementation depends on national administrative structures and cultures, the technical and financial capacity of the partners and on political circumstances in the country / region / locality
- The perception of the respondents (as reflected in the survey) is not always coherent with the elements included in the programmes and Partnership Agreement documents.

Chapter 1 provides a general overview of the performance of the Member States regarding the partnership principle and *vis-à-vis* the legislative framework for the ESI Funds in programming period 2014-2020 as well as in respect of the CoC. Chapter 1 also serves to outline the conceptual and methodological approaches selected for the current study.

1.1 The partnership principle and the European Code of Conduct on Partnership

The partnership principle has been, for a long time, one of the key principles used in the management of the European Cohesion policy Funds. Partners' involvement can be beneficial in enhancing collective ownership of and engagement in the Europe 2020 Strategy for growth and jobs, as well as for EU policies more generally. The partnership principle helps to share knowledge, expertise and different standpoints in the programming phase and also ensures a more transparent process. It can also contribute to better coordination between different levels of government during the implementation phase.

The legal basis for partnership and multi-level governance has been strengthened in the legislative framework for the 2014-2020 ESI Funds. Article 5 of **the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR)** makes it compulsory for each Member State to organise, in accordance with its institutional and legal framework, a partnership for each Partnership Agreement and ESI Fund programme, at all programming stages and at all levels. The partnership must include competent regional and local authorities (including urban and other public authorities), economic and social partners, as well as relevant bodies representing civil society (including environmental partners, non-governmental organisations, and bodies responsible for promoting social inclusion, gender equality and non-discrimination).

With a view to highlighting the importance of the partnership and multi-level governance principle, the CPR also empowers the Commission to provide for a **European code of conduct on partnership** through the adoption of a delegated act, with regard to ensuring the involvement of relevant partners in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Partnership Agreements and programmes. Officially introduced at the beginning of 2014, the CoC aims at supporting Members States in their implementation of the partnership principle, by laying down a series of **key principles**:

- the partners selected should be the most representative of the relevant stakeholders;
- selection procedures should be transparent and take into account the different institutional and legal frameworks of the Member States and their national and regional competences;
- the partners should include public authorities, economic and social partners and bodies representing civil society, including environmental partners, community-based and voluntary organisations, which can significantly influence or be significantly affected by implementation of the Partnership Agreement and programmes;
- specific attention should be paid to including groups who may be affected by programmes but who find it difficult to influence them, in particular the most vulnerable and marginalised

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

communities, which are at highest risk of discrimination or social exclusion, in particular persons with disabilities, migrants and Roma people;

- for the selection of partners, it is necessary to take into account the differences between Partnership Agreements and programmes;
- partners should be involved in the preparation and implementation of the Partnership Agreement and programmes, through timely, meaningful and transparent on the analysis of challenges and needs to be tackled, the selection of objectives and priorities to address them, and the coordination structures and multi-level governance agreements necessary for effective policy delivery;
- the partners should be represented on the monitoring committees of programmes. Through their active participation in the monitoring committees, the partners should be involved in assessing performance on the different priorities, the relevant reports on the programmes and, where appropriate, calls for proposals;
- effective partnership should be facilitated by helping the relevant partners to strengthen their institutional capacity in view of the preparation and implementation of programmes;
- the exchange of experience and mutual learning should be facilitated;
- the role of the partners in implementing the Partnership Agreements and the performance and effectiveness of the partnership in the programming period should be subject to assessment by the Member States⁵.

The partnership principle is implemented very differently across the Member States, with the level and type of partner involvement often depending on national administrative structures and the existence of different cultures. The efficient implementation of the partnership principle is also dependent on the technical and financial capacity of the partners.

1.2 European diversity of governance and partnership arrangements

To assess the variations among Member States, a literature review has been conducted. This is summarised in an analytic framework in Table 1 below.

Leading scholars in the area of policy-making in the EU and of European integration analyse the EU's influence on the sub-national level and the empowerment effects through the partnership and subsidiarity principles. Hooghe⁶, Jeffery⁷ and Börzel and Risse's⁸ findings confirm that participation in the partnership principle is **largely differentiated throughout the EU 28** and dependent on many intervening (domestic) variables and processes.⁹

In the literature a number of possible explanations for the variations between countries have been identified. These variations might depend on differences in **institutional factors** such as *different state traditions*¹⁰ and *diverse policy styles* but they may also depend on **territorial specificities** and **distinct local contexts**. Fleurke and Willemse¹¹ and Keating¹² stress the constitutional competences and attributed tasks of sub-national actors in this connection; accordingly, sub-national actors in some countries have better opportunity structures and institutionalised processes to deal with the EU than those in other countries. Similarly, other scholars of multi-level

⁵ http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2014.074.01.0001.01.ENG

⁶ Hooghe, L. (Ed). (1996), *Cohesion Policy and European Integration: Building Multi Level Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁷ Jeffery, C. (2000), *Sub-National Mobilization and European Integration: Does it make any Difference?*, *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol.38, No.1, pp.1–23.

⁸ Börzel, TA. and Risse, T., (2003), *The politics of Europeanization*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

⁹ e.g. van Kersbergen, K. and Verbeek, B., (2004), *Subsidiarity as a Principle of Governance in the European Union*, *Comparative European Politics*, 2, 142-162, doi:10.1057/palgrave.cep.6110033

¹⁰ Loughlin, J., Hendriks, F. and Lidström, A. (2011), *The Oxford Handbook of Local and Regional Democracy in Europe*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. Loughlin et al. identified four state traditions and policy styles: the Anglo-Saxon, Germanic, French and Scandinavian. The four analytical features used by Loughlin et al. – state-society relations, form of political organisation, basis of policy style, form of decentralisation – can be used as a starting point for the analysis of the differences in partnership principle implementation in the old EU Member States (including Austria, Sweden and Finland). It is however rather more challenging to classify the EU Member States that have acceded since 2004 within this framework of state traditions.

¹¹ Fleurke, F. and Willemse, R., (2007) *Effects of the European Union on Sub-National Decision-Making: Enhancement or Constriction?* *Journal of European Integration*, Volume 29, Issue 1.

¹² Keating, M., (2008) *Thirty Years of Territorial Politics*, *West European Politics*, 31:1-2, 60-81, DOI: 10.1080/01402380701833723

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

governance stress that the degree of involvement largely depends on the administrative and functional structure of the Member State, the policy stage of the project in question, and the availability of and access to resources - *financial, personal, and information and knowledge*.¹³ Variations in the implementation of the partnership principle might also be explained by **different interpretations by individual decision-makers** and stakeholders according to their perceptions, values and interests. These different interpretations might lead to results and side-effects that were not intended in the implementation process.

Historical legacies and the **maturity of the partnership** may also be decisive factors in terms of the implementation of the partnership principle. Dabrowski¹⁴ shows that the partnership principle is best observed in countries with traditions of cooperation between public, private and societal actors. In contrast, countries with centralised territorial administration and policy-making styles tend to face greater challenges when it comes to applying the partnership principle. In Member States such as Malta, Ireland, Austria or the Netherlands there is already a long tradition of civil society involvement. When considering these Member States one might expect partnerships in regional development to be mature and well-established. Notable differences can however be found when looking at the scale of partnership participation and involvement. As a federal state, Austria has been put forward as a model example of partnership creation, whereas partnerships in Sweden have suffered from the Swedish state's somewhat centralised, public sector-oriented approach. Similarly, while some countries which acceded to the EU in 2004 or later have experienced problems in this area, others who have undertaken successful institutional reforms have been able to create mature and prosperous partnerships in a relatively short time.¹⁵

Recent changes in government systems in the Member States might also affect implementation of the partnership principle, e.g. in Finland steps have been taken to transfer certain competences from the sub-national level to the national level while, for example, in France responsibility and resources for EU funds have been transferred to regional governments (Dabrowski et al. 2014).

Concerning the involvement of different actors in and through the partnership principle, earlier studies¹⁶ highlighted the **differing opportunities for participation even in one country** and the need to calibrate multi-level governance and partnership principle processes to distinct local contexts. The latter derives from what was identified as "different dynamics" across (the Italian) regions, "where the power balance between governmental levels and political actors on the one hand, and politicians and stakeholders on the other, is based on domestic mediating factors"¹⁷.

When it comes to **policy styles or political culture**, one concrete example of how this influences the interpretation and implementation of the partnership principle is the United Kingdom. Bache¹⁸ shows that the inspiration for partnerships in the United Kingdom was derived from the US model of public-private partnerships, where collaborations between public actors and stakeholders emerged organically.

In countries with a long tradition of partnerships, expectations in respect of participation and involvement may be quite high, but this does not automatically guarantee the best possible outcomes or the creation of successful partnerships. Mature partnerships can in some cases turn into non-dynamic and non-flexible patterns that fail to transform and do not involve new partners when necessary.

¹³ Bache, I. (1998), *The Politics of European Union Regional Policy: Multi-level Governance or Flexible Gatekeeping?* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.; Kull, M. (2014), *European Integration and Rural Development—Actors, Institutions and Power*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

¹⁴ Dabrowski, M., (2014), *EU cohesion policy, horizontal partnership and the patterns of sub-national governance: Insights from Central and Eastern Europe*, *European Urban and Regional Studies*, Vol. 21(4) 364–383

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ E.g. Milio, S. (2014), *The Conflicting Effects of Multi-Level Governance and the Partnership Principle: Evidence from the Italian Experience*, *European Urban and Regional Studies*, Vol.21, No.4, pp.384–397.

¹⁷ These factors, according to Milio (2014) comprise among other things: institutional settings and the degree of centralisation; the administrative tradition and the distribution of competencies between national, regional and local levels.

¹⁸ Bache, I. (2010), *Partnership as an EU policy Instrument: A political History*, *West European Politics*, 33:1, p. 70.

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

Within this context, Östhol and Svensson¹⁹ considered partnership processes to be more dynamic in reformed systems. They put the Nordic dimension of partnerships under scrutiny by focusing on the basis for partnerships and detectable institutional consequences within the process rather than traditions in administrative routines. According to Östhol and Svensson, new institutions, typically centres and agencies, entrusting the potential of public-private arrangements are a likely and desired outcome of the partnership process. A stable institutional situation that allows for frequent multi-level interaction and that is sensitive to all tiers of decision-making seems to provide the best environment for innovative policies to emerge. This would in turn indicate that dynamism and institutional support for partnerships are better guarantees for participation and involvement than the longevity, maturity or tradition of a partnership *per se*.

In the literature, the EU's impacts on the **countries that joined in or after 2004** and the empowerment of sub-national levels in these states is described as quite 'distinct' when compared to that experienced by Member States that joined before 2004.²⁰

It is stressed that in relation to the Central and Eastern European Countries, Europeanisation and sub-national empowerment are seen as "uniformly shaped through the European Commission's *aquis* and 'conditionality principle' based on the need to adapt to the Western European trend of increasingly transferring political authority and autonomy from the national to sub-state levels in order to absorb EU funds fully and effectively and to build up an effective regional policy system."

While the expectation is that the influence of multi-level governance and EU cohesion policy enhances the role of sub-national levels in the Central and Eastern European Countries, Dabrowski²¹ and Kull and Tatar²² remind us that it is **historical legacies** (e.g. the destruction of self-government and centralisation during Soviet occupation) that explains at least in part the deviation from what was expected to happen during the implementation of the partnership principle and regional policy in these countries.²³

Importantly, in countries that joined in or after 2004, such as Bulgaria²⁴, pre EU-accession central and sectoral planning was to be replaced by a functional regional policy regime through the creation of legal frameworks, new institutions, capacity-building measures and administrative and territorial reforms in order to create a space to accommodate and implement EU structural funds.

Another important and related point here suggesting that the countries that joined the EU in 2004 or later are a distinct case is the fact that in these countries, the ESI funds act as a quasi-substitute for national funds in the regions, thus enabling sub-national authorities to perform previously unattainable activities.²⁵

Keating²⁶ (2008) distinguishes here between states with strong regional policy instruments incorporating the ESIF and states with weak regional policy instruments using ESIF as the basis for their own programmes.

¹⁹ Östhol, A. and Svensson, B. (ed.) (2002), Partnership Responses – Regional Governance in the Nordic states. Nordregio Report 2002:6 - Future Challenges and Institutional Preconditions for Regional Development Policy, Volume 4. Stockholm: Nordregio 2002.

²⁰ Goetz, 2005; Keating, M., (2008) Thirty Years of Territorial Politics, West European Politics, 31:1-2, 60-81, DOI: 10.1080/01402380701833723, Pitschel and Bauer, 2009; Kull, M. and Tatar, M., (2015): Multi-Level Governance in a Small State: A Study in Involvement, Participation, Partnership, and Subsidiarity, Regional and Federal Studies, DOI: 10.1080/13597566.2015.1023298

²¹ Dabrowski, M., (2014), EU cohesion policy, horizontal partnership and the patterns of sub-national governance: Insights from Central and Eastern Europe, European Urban and Regional Studies, Vol. 21(4) 364–383

²² Kull, M. and Tatar, M., (2015): Multi-Level Governance in a Small State: A Study in Involvement, Participation, Partnership, and Subsidiarity, Regional and Federal Studies, DOI: 10.1080/13597566.2015.1023298

²³ On Estonia, Kull and Tatar (2015) note that "while local-level expertise and endogenous knowledge is supposed to be mobilized in MLG, the actual involvement of this expertise is still a problematic issue in this country, where 66% of the respondents to a survey indicated that they were not involved in the preparation of regional-development plans." These findings are also in line with this current study, where partnership according to programme and Partnership Agreement documents is strong, while the partners' perception of the partnership is weak.

²⁴ Kull, M. and Tatar, M., (2015): Multi-Level Governance in a Small State: A Study in Involvement, Participation, Partnership, and Subsidiarity, Regional and Federal Studies, DOI: 10.1080/13597566.2015.1023298

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Keating, M., (2008) Thirty Years of Territorial Politics, West European Politics, 31:1-2, 60-81, DOI: 10.1080/01402380701833723

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

Bache argues that the 'proliferation of participation through partnership can provide "safety in numbers" (...) preventing any single actor or organisation from dominating decision-making.'²⁷ In contrast to this however there may also be a risk that specific partners simply promote and protect their own interests thus preventing the development of a common view.

The governance dimensions that guide us through the analysis are summarised in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Governance dimensions and partnership arrangements

Institutional dimensions	State tradition; Policy style; Constitutional competences and attributed tasks of sub-national actors
Historical dimensions	Historical legacies; maturity of partnership; recent changes in government structures
Territorial dimensions	Territorial specificities; distinctiveness of local / regional contexts
Economic dimensions	Access to resources: Financial resources; personnel
Sociological / actor-centred dimensions	Access to resources: Information; knowledge; education

²⁷Bache, I. (2010), Partnership as an EU policy Instrument: A political History, West European Politics, 33:1, p. 70.

2 COMPOSITION OF THE PARTNERSHIPS

Key messages:

- In general, the partnerships for both Partnership Agreements and programmes involve all types of partners but variations do exist between Member States and between types of programmes.
- In Member States where the documents show that certain types of partners are missing, the partnership is not necessarily perceived as unbalanced.
- In Member States where there is a perceived lack of some types of partner, this can, to some extent, be explained by high expectations in respect of the involvement of partners.
- When it comes to the selection of partners the countries that joined the EU in 2004 or later tend more often to have established new partnerships whereas the countries that joined prior to 2004 have generally sought to build on existing partnerships. There are, however, a number of important exceptions from this overall tendency.

Adding to the general overview provided in the previous chapter, Chapter 2 focuses on the composition of partnerships. In addition to shedding light on the EU-wide representation of different partners in Partnership Agreements, the balance of partnerships and the selection of partners, both in the programmes and in Partnership Agreements, are analysed on the subsequent pages.

In specific terms, chapter 2 addresses the degree to which involvement of different categories of partners in the Partnership Agreements and programmes has been balanced, and analyses how these partners have been selected. The partner types, according to Articles 3 and 4 of the CoC are then described. The methods used in different Member States to identify these partners are detailed in order to assess the degree of representativeness in accordance with Article 2 of the CoC.

2.1 Balance of the partnership

The CoC specifies that the Member States shall ensure that the partner categories referred to in Article 5(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 are appropriately involved in developing the Partnership Agreement and programmes. According to Articles 3(1) and 4(1) of the CoC, the partnership shall include the following partners: (a) competent urban and other public authorities; (b) economic and social partners; and (c) relevant bodies representing civil society, including environmental partners, non-governmental organisations, and bodies responsible for promoting social inclusion, gender equality and non-discrimination.

To illustrate the balance within each Member State's partnership in the Partnership Agreement, rather than focusing on the exact number of partners, Table 2 below shows the shares of different categories of partners. All public authorities are included in a common category and the shares of local, regional, national and education providers are presented as a percentage of the public partners.

When considering the balance of partnerships, an important criterion here is that all types of partners are represented. Based on the analysis of the programming documents, this seems to hold true for most countries but in Austria, Germany²⁸, the Netherlands and Poland one of the categories is not specifically mentioned in the programming documents and has therefore been indicated by 0% in table 2. Unbalanced partnerships may be found when certain categories represent a substantial percentage of the total number of partners. Since there is no objective answer to the definition of what represents a 'high' or 'low' share, these figures can best be compared to the EU average for that category.

²⁸ In the case of Germany "Hochschulausschuss der Kultusministerkonferenz" / "Ausschuss für Hochschule und Forschung" is representing educational providers in the partnership. As this is a body composed of senior civil servants from state ministries charge of education and research, there are no actual educational providers in the partnership. The providers of vocational education and training are covered by the categories "Economic and social partners" and "Others" (dual system of vocational education and training is a speciality of the German system).

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in
2014-2020 ESI Funds

Table 2: Representation (%) of total number of partners in the Partnership Agreement

EU wide, 28 Member States								
Member State	Public authorities	Percentage of public authorities and education provider				Civil society	Economic & social partners	Other ²⁹
		Local authorities	Regional authorities	National authorities	Education providers			
Austria	27.6	6.7	64.4	28.9	0.0	30.7	3.7	38.0
Belgium	Na	Na	Na	Na	Na	Na	Na	Na
Bulgaria	46.4	11.5	38.5	30.8	19.2	30.4	12.5	10.7
Croatia	84.0	1.5	17.6	77.9	2.9	3.7	2.5	9.9
Cyprus	51.7	6.5	Na	83.9	9.7	10.0	38.3	0.0
Czech Republic	45.9	56.2	15.7	27.0	1.1	51.5	2.6	0.0
Denmark	54.0	40.5	8.1	29.7	21.6	19.0	24.8	2.2
Estonia	41.2	18.8	14.5	32.5	34.2	21.8	31.7	5.3
Finland	40.8	13.0	62.3	21.7	2.9	43.8	15.4	0.0
France	38.3	16.4	11.2	59.7	12.7	52.9	8.9	0.0
Germany	84.4	5.6	90.7	3.7	0.0	6.3	7.8	1.6
Greece	24.0	3.3	46.7	40.0	10.0	8.8	67.2	0.0
Hungary	32.6	4.3	21.3	63.8	10.6	31.3	36.1	0.0
Ireland	30.0	18.5	3.7	66.7	11.1	20.0	34.4	15.6
Italy	22.7	6.3	45.8	25.0	22.9	35.1	42.2	0.0
Latvia	46.9	13.3	26.7	26.7	33.3	25.0	25.0	3.1
Lithuania	27.6	2.2	2.2	66.7	28.9	8.6	62.0	1.8
Luxembourg	38.3	22.2	Na	72.2	5.6	23.4	10.6	27.7
Malta	23.2	72.1	Na	25.6	2.3	31.9	13.0	31.9
Netherlands	92.9	11.5	65.4	19.2	3.8	0.0	3.6	3.6
Poland	71.4	5.0	80.0	15.0	0.0	7.1	21.4	0.0
Portugal	22.6	24.2	3.0	30.3	42.4	0.7	52.1	24.7
Romania	70.3	8.9	17.8	68.9	4.4	12.5	17.2	0.0
Slovakia	55.7	5.1	23.1	59.0	12.8	31.4	12.9	0.0
Slovenia	51.3	20.0	32.5	37.5	10.0	21.8	20.5	6.4
Spain	44.6	15.2	57.6	24.2	3.0	43.2	12.2	0.0
Sweden	62.7	6.4	23.4	61.7	8.5	13.3	23.3	0.7
United Kingdom	62.6	40.1	28.2	13.4	18.3	1.3	26.9	9.3
EU ³⁰	47.9	16.7	29.8	41.2	12.3	21.7	23.3	7.1

Source: Database on partnership principle. 2015 (Sweco)

The survey results displayed in Figure 1 and in Figure 2 below also show that variations exist in the balance of partnerships in the programmes (figure 2) and the Partnership Agreements (figure 3). The survey questions distinguish between four different types of representativeness; population, meaning all population groups of the territory covered were represented e.g. different ethnicities, age, gender etc.; decision, meaning all relevant major decision makers were represented;

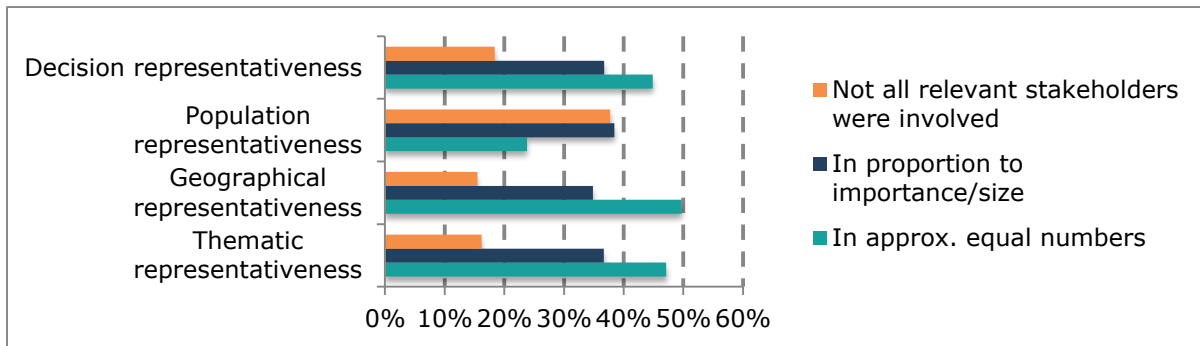
²⁹ Including a broad set of actors which cannot be put under any other category; various types of experts, private business, development agencies etc.

³⁰ The EU average is calculated as the arithmetic mean of the shares of the individual countries.

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

thematic, meaning all stakeholder groups relevant for the themes addressed were represented, and geographic, meaning all parts of the territory covered by the documents have been represented.

Figure 1: Balance of partnership, programmes

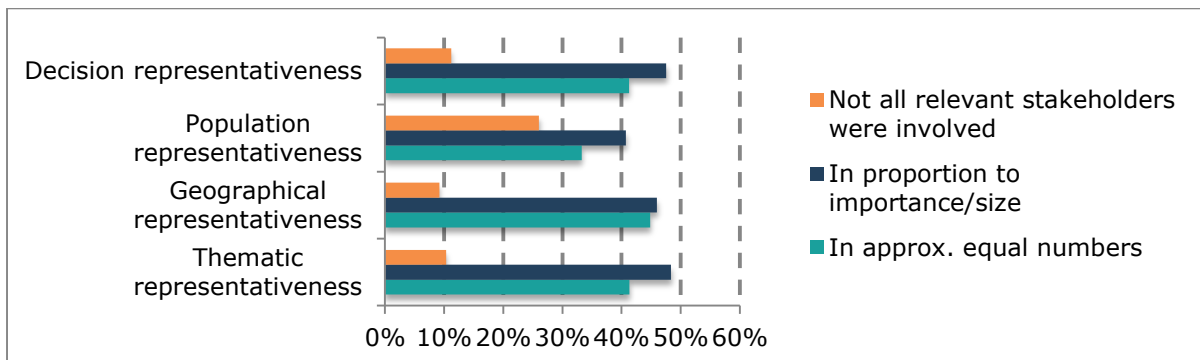


Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

Figures 1 and 2 show that the survey respondents see population representativeness as being least balanced, indicating most frequently that not all relevant stakeholders have been involved. The other three types of representativeness, decision, geographical and thematic are much more balanced, indicating generally that all partners have been involved. For these dimensions, there are usually better defined institutions representing certain interests or groups, which may explain a better balance compared to population representativeness. Differences are also evident in terms of the methods used to ensure balanced partnerships with the partner types involved in direct proportion to their importance/size or partner type. In the case of population representativeness, the partner types are most frequently involved in proportion to their importance/size both in programmes and in partnership agreements. When it comes to geographical, decision and thematic representativeness, the partner types are most frequently involved in approximately equal numbers for programmes but for partnership agreements the partner types are generally involved in proportion to importance/size.

The results displayed in figures 1 and 2 illustrate that thematic, geographical and decision representativeness are well assured in the programmes and Partnership Agreements, while population representativeness is assured to a lower extent.

Figure 2 : Balance of partnership, Partnership Agreement



Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

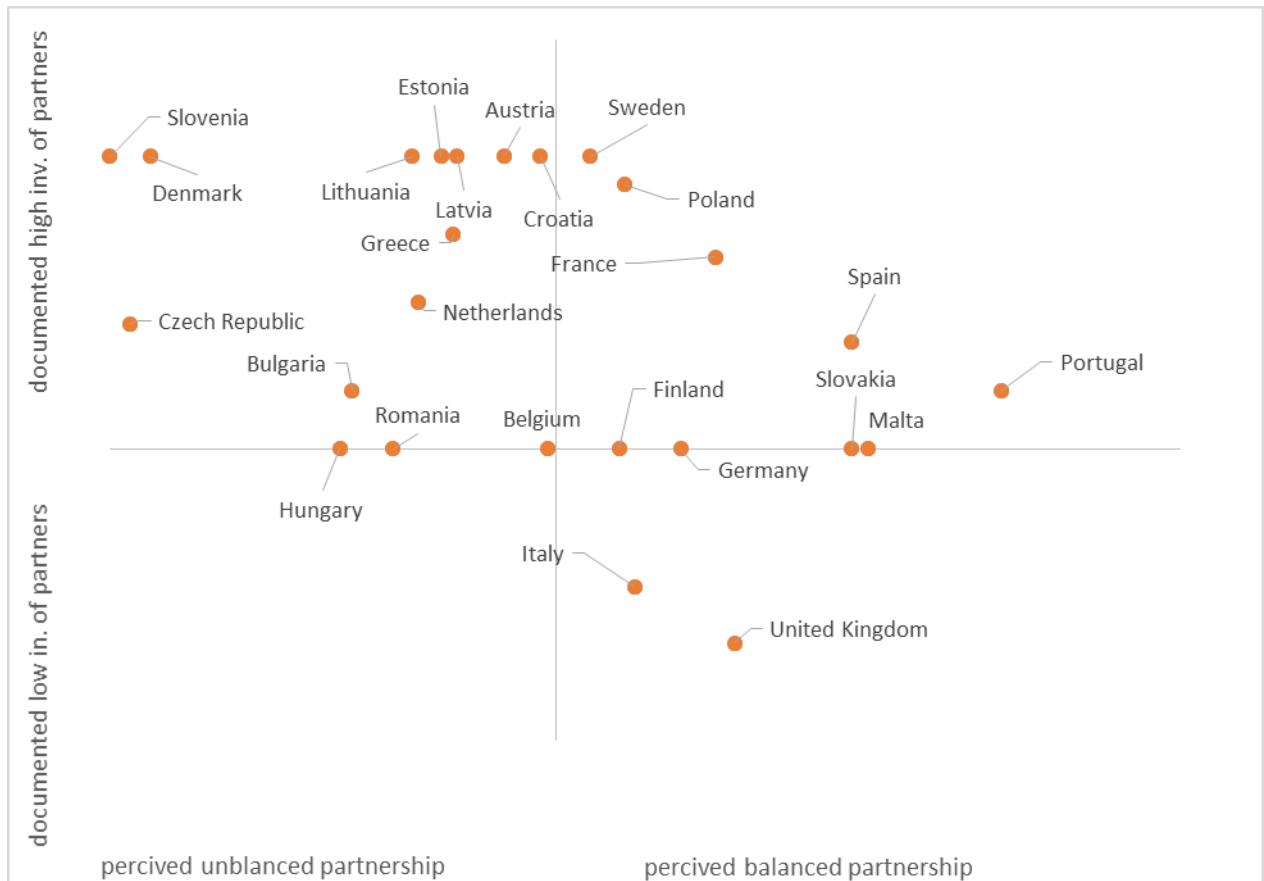
Figure 3 below displays the combined results of performance indices based on the document analysis and survey data regarding the programmes:

- 1) The vertical axis shows to what degree all types of partners are involved in the programme, i.e. the programmes of the countries in the upper half of the figure have to a large degree involved all types of partners. Programmes in countries in the lower half however are more often lacking in some types of partners.
- 2) The horizontal axis measures performance based on the survey question: Was any stakeholder group under- or overrepresented in the partnership? This means that

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

respondents from countries located in the right part of the figure do not generally consider any stakeholder group to be over or under represented i.e. the partnership is balanced. Countries on the left hand side of the figure are those where respondents consider some stakeholder groups to be over or under represented i.e. the partnerships are rather more unbalanced.

Figure 3: Programmes, representativeness of partnerships



Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

Figure 3 confirms that the majority of countries have involved all types of partners to a high degree in the programmes, although in about half of the countries some stakeholder groups are perceived as being either over- or underrepresented (e.g. those countries on the left hand side in the figure). Ireland, Cyprus and Luxembourg have not been included in the figure given that the survey results could be biased due to low response rate. According to the documents, the representation of different types of partners is high in Cyprus and Ireland and low in Luxembourg.

The group of Member States where, according to the documents, the representation of different types of partners is high, while survey respondents identified an over- or underrepresentation (upper left side of the figure) is interesting. One explanation for this is that in these countries expectations in respect of the involvement of different partner types is high. Another possible explanation for the discrepancy between the documents and the survey results is that the survey respondents do not have complete information on the involvement of different partners. A third explanation could be that they perceive the stakeholder group that they represent themselves to be underrepresented.

Concerning the Partnership Agreement, most Member States do seek to involve all types of partners. In Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and Poland, the documents fail to mention the involvement of some types of partners. However, the survey respondents perceived the partnership to be relatively balanced.

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

In Sweden the representativeness of the partnership in the Partnership Agreement is good according to both the survey and the documents. But, based on the interviews, this view has again to be treated with some caution as the process concerning the Partnership Agreement is considered to have been rather closed and limited to a small group.

Slovenia and Slovakia – new partnership arrangements in the making³¹

In Slovenia and Slovakia, new arrangements on paper need time to be put into practice and thus to convince partners. In Slovenia, the NCB organised the involvement of stakeholders at two levels. At the first level the general public could take part in public consultation and written/online consultation. Partner involvement at the second level proceeded through two ad hoc work groups; one included representatives of the NGOs and the other the economic-social council. In Slovakia, all types of partners were involved in each phase, in drafting and in implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Partnership Agreement. Individual parts of the Partnership Agreement were shared among partners and their comments were incorporated into the document.

Finland and Denmark – high involvement but even higher *expectations* on involvement

For Finland and Denmark, the documents show that these countries perform well while the survey results show a weaker performance. One explanation for this relates to political culture. While tripartite arrangements and cross-sector collaboration remain features of the administrative cultures in Finland and Denmark, they also create high expectations among potential partners. Thus, while the perception might be weak the actual performance might be much higher compared to other countries.

Overall, the partnerships are balanced both in terms of the programmes and the Partnership Agreements. However, in the United Kingdom, Italy and Luxembourg it was more common that some types of partners, specified in Article 3 of the CoC, were not specifically referred to in the programmes. In Austria, Germany, Poland and the Netherlands some types of partners were not specifically mentioned in the Partnership Agreements. It should be noted however that the absence of some types of partners does not necessarily mean that the stakeholders perceive an imbalance. There are also a number of country-specific explanations as to why some partners are not involved, e.g. in Luxembourg, where some partner types have only been involved through consultation in programmes and not in the Partnership Agreement.

The results also show that there is sometimes a discrepancy between actual and perceived representation. For example, in some countries local authorities are well-represented according to the programme documents, while the survey shows that they are in fact perceived as under-represented³². This can in part be explained by the fact that local authorities in many countries are represented through umbrella organisations. The results can also be sensitive to who in the country responded on the survey.

2.2 Selection of the partnership

To better understand the reasons behind the balance or imbalance in a partnership, this section looks specifically at the selection of partnerships, in particular the methods used to identify and select the partnerships and the transparency of the process.

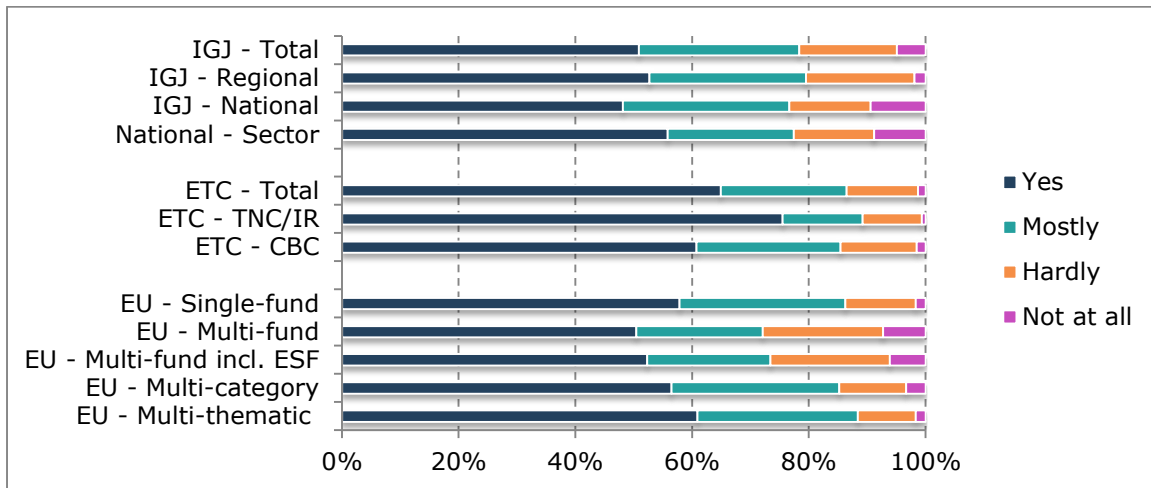
The mere identification of partners listed in Articles 3(1) and 4(1) of the CoC is not enough to judge the final composition of the partnership and the degree of the perceived balance. The selection process (i.e. the way in which the partners became involved) is in itself important, as repeatedly underlined in the interviews. The results of the survey indicate that most respondents consider the process used in the identification of stakeholders to be transparent, even if respondents from MA are more positive in this regard compared to the partners. The perceived transparency of stakeholder selection is generally higher in ETC programmes compared to IGJ. There is also a higher level of satisfaction among stakeholders in single funded programmes as compared to those in multi funded programmes. See figure 4 below.

³¹ The information in this text box derives both from the survey and from interviews.

³² When it comes to their actual involvement in policy implementation, the analysis shows that national and regional authorities are considered to be overrepresented, while civil society and social/economic partners are often hardly involved. See section 4.1 of this report.

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

Figure 4: Transparent stakeholder selection by type of programme



Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

Both the survey and the document analysis addressed the method used to identify partners. Table 3 shows which type of methods were used in the Member States for the Partnership Agreement; whether this was a continuation of previous partnerships, a newly established partnership and whether other methods of identifying and selecting partnerships were used.

Table 3: Type of method used to identify and select partnerships in the Partnership Agreement

Continuation of an existing partnership ³³	Newly established partnership ³⁴	Others
Austria	Croatia	Lithuania ³⁵
Belgium	Czech Republic	Netherlands ³⁶
Bulgaria	France	United Kingdom
Cyprus	Hungary	
Denmark	Italy	
Estonia	Romania	
Finland	Slovakia	
Germany	Slovenia	
Greece		
Ireland		
Latvia		
Luxembourg		
Malta		
Poland		
Portugal		
Spain		
Sweden		

Source: Database on partnership principle. 2015 (Sweco)

As shown in Table 3, Lithuania, the Netherlands and the UK used other noticeable methods to identify and select partnerships. These methods are customized to serve the specific institutional settings in the country reflecting also different administrative cultures at sub-national level.

³³ Same or similar to the partnership in the National Strategic Reference Framework 2007-2013 or other national strategic development document

³⁴ Following an open call for partnership or pre-selection by the NCB

³⁵ Selection of NCB on: (1) Labour; (2) Environment; (3) Social Inclusion; (4) Education.

³⁶ Netherlands: Selection of partners differs for the different layers in the PA, resulting in the application of several methods. The first and second layer with the main stakeholders is based on experience from the past, with more emphasis on including representatives from all ESI Funds. The third and fourth layers represent partners from the single OPs supplemented by other partners, e.g. representatives of equality to comply with the ex-ante conditionalities. Furthermore, these layers represent the partners that were involved through public consultation.

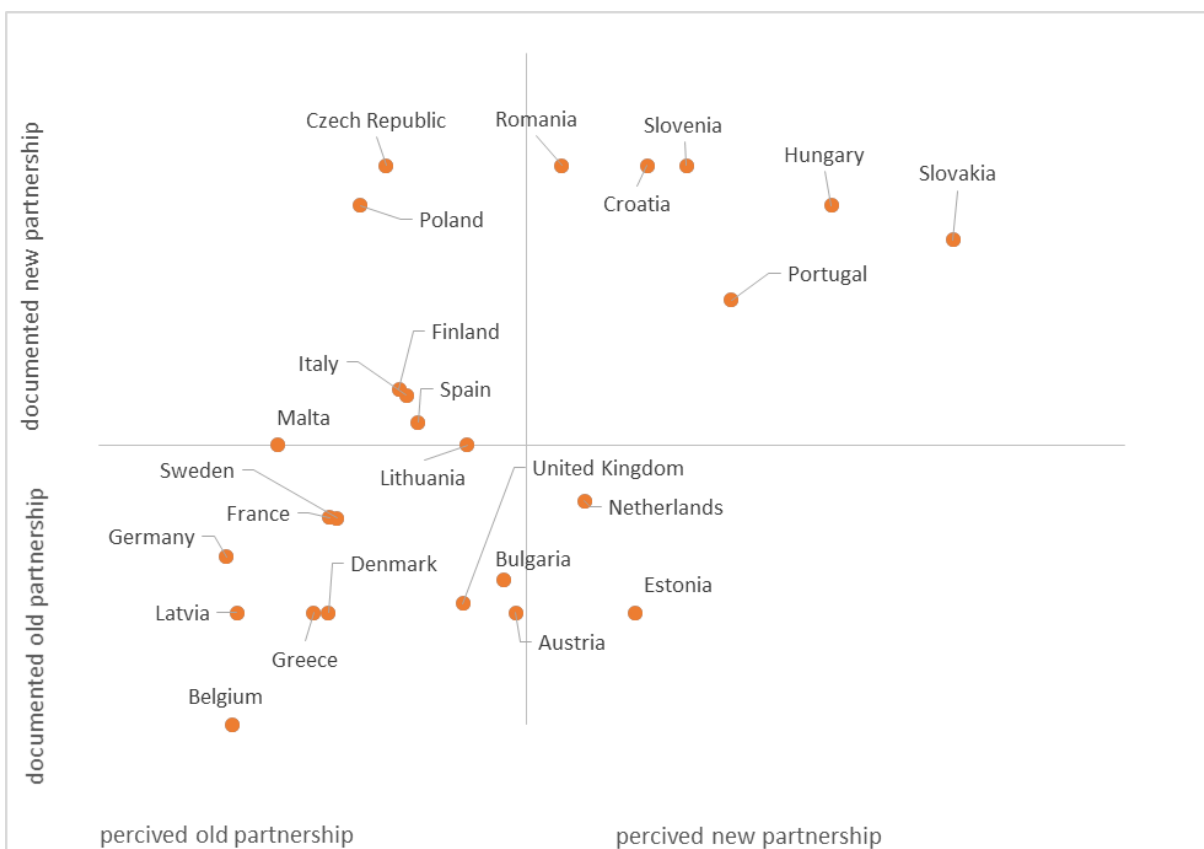
Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

United Kingdom – different methods for partner selection in the five constituent parts³⁷

The methods used for the identification of partners varied between the different countries in the UK. Because the Partnership Agreement is made up of five constituent parts, as noted, there has been no single method applied to identify partners across the UK Partnership Agreement. However, the UK Partnership Agreement Programme Board, made up of senior officials from each of the Managing Authorities (MAs) in the UK, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and HM Treasury, was set up at the outset of the Partnership Agreement development process and provided a mechanism for connecting UK-level strategic priorities with the UK nation-level Partnership Agreement inputs as well as the UK programmes. This ensured coherence between BIS and the individual MAs and that they were not acting in isolation from each other.

Figure 5 below measures whether there are newly established partnerships in the programmes or whether the partnerships are a continuation of those partnerships from the 2007-2013 programming period. The vertical axis measures the results from the document analysis while the horizontal axis measures survey perceptions.

Figure 5: Programmes, selection of partnership



Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

The higher the value, the higher the share of programmes in the respective country with newly established partnerships. From this it follows that, according to the documents, the countries in the upper part of the figure have generally newly established partnerships. In the countries on the right hand side of the figure, respondents generally perceived the partnership to be newly established.

Ireland, Cyprus and Luxembourg have not been included in the figure given that the survey results could be biased due to low response rate. According to the documents, Cyprus and Luxembourg built on old partnerships, whereas for Ireland a mix of new and old partnerships have been used..

³⁷ The information in this text box derives from both the survey and from interviews.

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

The overall picture for the **selection of partnerships for programmes** is that the countries that joined the EU in 2004 or later have established new partnerships to a greater extent than the countries that joined before 2004. The straightforward explanation in respect of Romania, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia and Slovakia is that these countries joined the EU in 2004 or later and have therefore experienced a shorter tradition of partnerships perhaps initially even lacking any partnership experience to use as a starting-point for the 2014-2020 programming period. This suggests that it is likely that the other Member States joining in 2004 or later would need to construct new partnerships from scratch though both survey and document results indicate that Bulgaria and Latvia both had some previous experience of partnership processes.

Portugal – new partnerships in a majority of programmes

Portugal is the only Member State that joined the EU before 2004 where the programmes have generated new partnerships in a majority of the programmes. Stakeholder involvement methods differed between the Portuguese programmes but the partnerships were in a majority of the programmes new, following an open call or a pre-selection of the Managing Authority. In all programmes, new aspects emerged in dealing with the involvement of partners. No programme has used the same partnership as it did during the 2007-2013 programming period.

France – multi-step selection procedure

In France, an initial list of stakeholders was proposed by the ministerial departments responsible for Cohesion Policy. This list was then narrowed down by the NCB, who selected the most representative partners. The list was then subsequently extended to include other organisations in order to increase the representativeness of the partnership involved.

The overall picture on the **selection of partnerships for the Partnership Agreements** is similar to the one for programmes. The document analysis shows that the Member States that joined the EU before 2004 tend to build on old partnerships, while the Member States that joined in or after 2004 tend to have established new partnerships. There are however important exceptions here, for example in respect of Italy, where the partnership is new, both according to the documents and the survey results. In Italy, the partners were selected by the NCB based on a pre-selection procedure. According to the interview with the NCB, strict criteria were not used in the selection and almost all of the stakeholders who applied to the partnership were involved in the discussions. In addition, some stakeholders joined the discussion groups based on their own choice as the consultation progressed.

There are discrepancies between what is stated in the documents and what is perceived by the survey respondents. The explanation for this could be that respondents do not have complete information on how the partners have been selected for the partnerships.

Chapters 3 (and 4) take up several points raised in this chapter by specifically addressing partnerships in the different phases of policy making. The issues discussed will include transparency, access to documents, representativeness and capacity-building through the ESF funds. Chapter 3 reflects on the programming phase. The implementation, monitoring and evaluation phases are subject of chapter 4.

3 PARTNERSHIPS IN THE PROGRAMMING PHASE

Key messages:

- There is significant involvement of partners in both programmes and Partnership Agreements in all Member States.
- In the Partnership Agreements, the partners are most commonly involved in the selection of thematic objectives and in the analysis of disparities and needs.
- In the programmes, the overall picture is similar. Partners are most commonly involved in the development of programme priorities and in the needs analysis.

This chapter reviews the actions taken by the Member States and MAs to involve partners in the drafting of the Partnership Agreements and the programmes as described in Articles 7(b) and 9(a) of the CoC. The chapter also assesses the involvement of partners in accordance with Articles 6 and 8 of the CoC and with the degree of timely information and feedback on comments in accordance with Article 5(2) of the CoC.

3.1 Involvement of partners

The CoC specifies that the Member States shall involve relevant partners in the preparation of the Partnership Agreement (Article 6)³⁸. The CoC also specifies that relevant partners shall be involved in the preparation of programmes (Article 8).³⁹

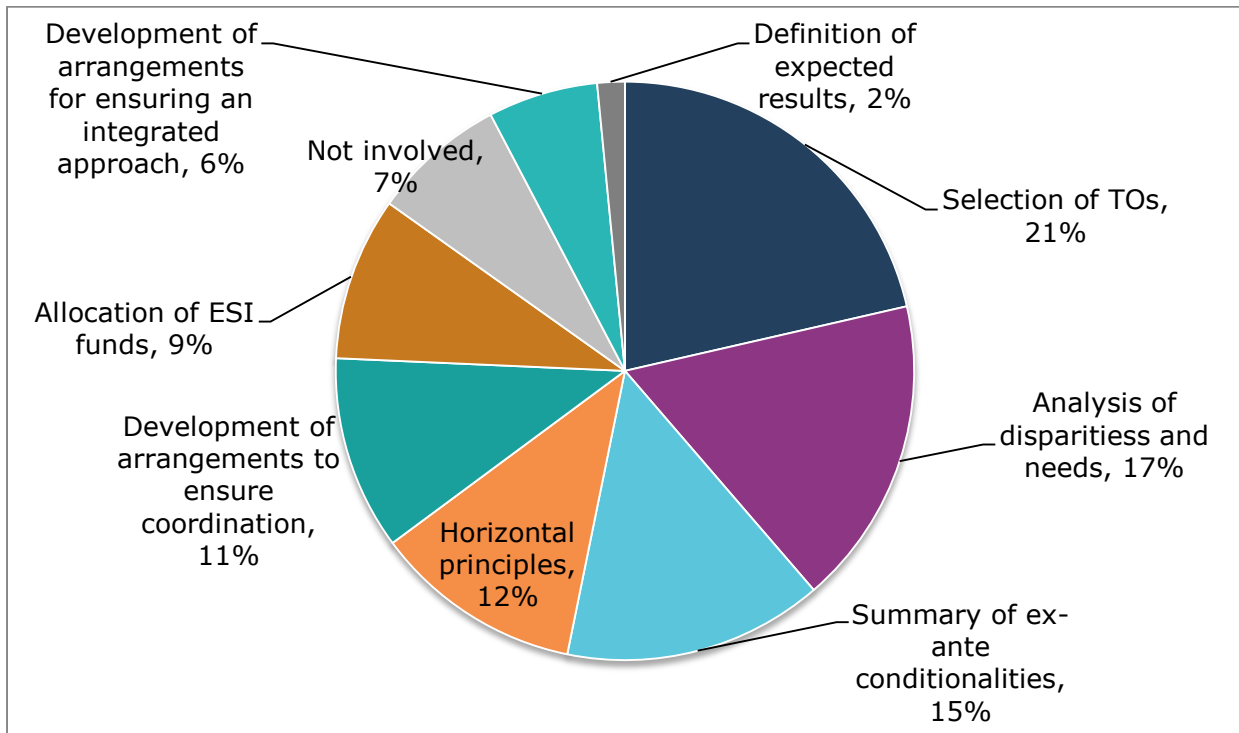
When it comes to partner involvement in the different drafting stages, Figure 6 and Figure 7 below shows the results from the survey. Figure 6 illustrates the fact that the process of involving partners at the drafting stage of a Partnership Agreement has many different aspects. Partners are mainly involved in the selection of TOs (21%) and in the analysis of disparities and needs (17%).

³⁸ Member States shall involve relevant partners especially concerning (Article 6 of the CoC): (a) the analysis of disparities, development needs and growth potential with reference to thematic objectives, (b) summaries of the ex-ante conditionalities of the programmes, (d) selection of TOs, the indicative allocations of the ESI Funds and their main expected results, (d) ensure coordination of the ESI Funds with one another and with other Union and national funding instruments and with the EIB, (e) arrangements for ensuring an integrated approach to use the ESI Funds for the territorial development of urban, rural, coastal and fisheries areas and areas with particular territorial features, (f) arrangements for ensuring an integrated approach to addressing the specific needs of geographical areas most affected by poverty and of target groups at the highest risk of discrimination or exclusion, with special regard to marginalised communities, (g) the implementation of the horizontal principles referred to in Articles 5, 7 and 8 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013.

³⁹ Member States shall involve relevant partners especially concerning (Article 8 of the CoC): (a) needs analysis, (b) definition or selection of priorities, (c) allocation of funding, (d) definition of programmes' specific indicators, (e) implementation of the horizontal principles as defined in Articles 7 and 8 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 and (f) composition of the monitoring committee.

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in
2014-2020 ESI Funds

Figure 6: Partnership Agreement, involvement of partners in the drafting stage⁴⁰



Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

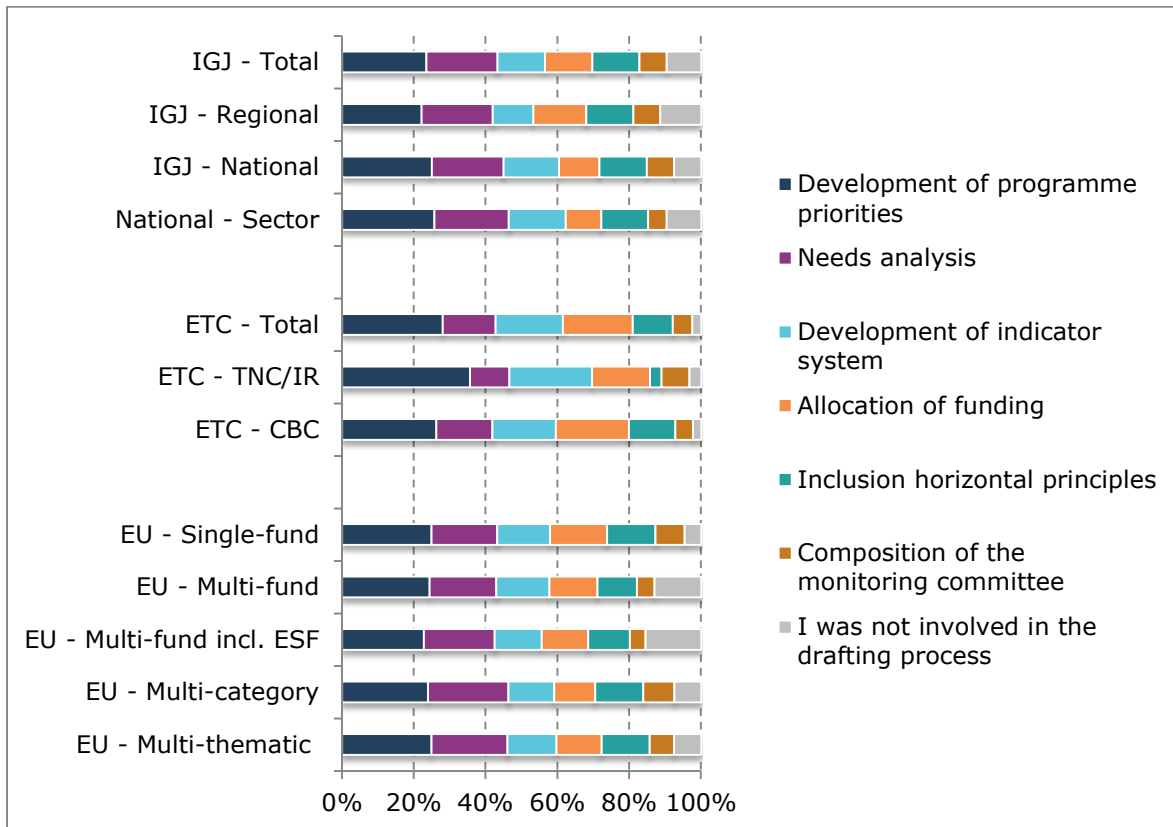
For example in Austria, a large number of different mechanisms and stakeholder constellations were used. Drafting was carried out by local, regional and national authorities, social partners, and business organisations, while civil society organisations concentrated on reviewing and discussing the content of the Partnership Agreement.

Figure 7 below shows the results of the involvement of partners in the drafting stage of the Programmes. Partners were most commonly involved in the development of programme priorities, needs analysis and in the development of indicator systems. There is little variation between different programmes; but the percentage of respondents that indicated they were involved in the allocation of funding is relatively higher for ETC programmes. This may be explained by the greater level of involvement and discussion with national and sub-national stakeholders. For the multi-fund programmes partners were most commonly involved in development of programme priorities, needs analysis and development of indicator system. In multi-fund programmes, there were a higher percentage of partners responding that they have not been involved in the drafting process compared to single-funds. This may be explained by the high complexity of these programmes.

⁴⁰ In the survey the two categories in CoC art. 6: i) Arrangements for ensuring an integrated approach to the use of ESI Funds for the territorial development or urban, rural, coastal and fisheries and areas with particular territorial features; and ii) arrangements for ensuring an integrated approach to addressing the specific needs of geographical areas most affected by poverty and of target groups at the highest risk of discrimination or exclusion, with special regard to marginalised communities; have been integrated into the category "Development of arrangements for ensuring an integrated approach"

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

Figure 7: Involvement of partners by drafting stage and type of programme



Source: Survey on partnership principle. 2015 (Spatial Foresight)

Figure 8 below presents indices based on the document and survey analyses in respect of the involvement of the partners in the programme drafting process. The vertical axis measures the level of involvement according to the documents, i.e. the higher a country is located in the figure the higher is the involvement of the partners. The underlying question from the documents is whether the partners have been involved in committees and/or consultation action. The horizontal axis shows the level of involvement according to the survey, i.e. the further a country is located to the right of the figure, the greater is the involvement of partners. The underlying question posed in the survey is whether partners have been involved in drafting, reviewing/discussing, or through public consultation or in the receipt of information.

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

Figure 8: Programmes, involvement of partners in the drafting process



Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

Most of the Member States (16) record a high level of partner involvement in the programmes according to both the documents and the perceptions of the survey respondents. The Netherlands, Hungary, France, Croatia and Bulgaria stand out here since these countries display a perceived high level of involvement in respect of partners but a low level of involvement in relation to the documents. Malta, Austria, Estonia and Belgium form another distinct grouping since here the documents show a high level of partner involvement while the survey perceptions were rather different. No Member State however has both a perceived and a documented low level of partner involvement.

One possible explanation as to why the level of involvement is, according to the documents, so low but is perceived as high could be that a weak tradition of partnerships exists in some of the countries concerned and thus that there is only a low level of expectation among partners to get involved. This would explain why survey respondents perceive their involvement to have been high even though, according to documents, it appears as being rather low.

In Croatia, many partners seemed not to be involved in all of the relevant processes, e.g. there was clearly a lack of relevant stakeholders in both drafting and even in the receipt of information. NCB interviewees indicated that there was a lack of understanding on the part of the stakeholders on the strategic aspects of their participation. The stakeholders focussed more on their projects and particular interests and not on the issue of strategic direction.

Ireland, Cyprus and Luxembourg have not been included in the figure given that the survey results could be biased due to low response rate. Documents show however a high level of partner involvement in all three Member States.

The majority of countries (22) displayed, according to the documents, a high level of partner involvement in the drafting of the Partnership Agreement (i.e. partners were involved in both committees and through consultation actions). In Greece, the Netherlands, Spain, Germany, Finland and Bulgaria the documents describe involvement of partners in committees or through consultation actions. The survey results suggest however that in 9 countries the involvement of

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

partners was low (varying from country to country). There were however no countries where partner involvement was low according to both the survey and the documents.

Ireland – broad range of partner types involved⁴¹

Ireland provides another useful example here where, for the Partnership Agreement, stakeholder involvement was realised through a number of consultation and engagement activities and partners were involved throughout the entire drafting process. For the Partnership Agreement, selected partners were involved in the development process through a Partnership Agreement Monitoring Committee. The broad range of partner types involved meant that the level of input experienced during the Partnership Agreement's development stages was rather disparate. The engagement of local authorities was particularly strong during the consultation process for both the Partnership Agreement and the regional programmes.

Germany – partner involvement through consultations and thematic seminars⁴²

In Germany, the partners have been involved in the Partnership Agreement preparation through consultations and thematic seminars and meetings. The representatives of the EC and partners have been invited and participated in the meetings. The monitoring committee at Partnership Agreement level does not exist in Germany (only at programme level). Therefore, these specific meetings had to be organised in order to involve all stakeholders concerned into the preparation of the Partnership Agreement: stakeholders at federal level, all ESIF MAs, partners and the representatives of the EC. Furthermore, focus groups for specific ESI funds were set up.

Partner involvement has generally been high in most countries, both in terms of the Partnership Agreements and in relation to the programmes. For both programmes and Partnership Agreements, partners are most commonly involved in the selection of TOs/development of programme priorities and in the needs analyses.

The precise ways in which specific partners have been involved and the kinds of contributions they were invited to or were capable of making differs widely between the different Member States. In fact, a wide range of participation processes exist – partly addressing different types of partners. This ranges from monitoring committees of the 2007-2013 period (e.g. Ireland and Finland), to combinations of public online consultations and target consultations (e.g. Spain) and thematic seminars and meetings (e.g. Italy) to combinations of consultations, thematic seminars and meetings ("focus groups and workshops") in Germany.

3.2 Transparent procedures and principles and best practice

The CoC outlines a number of principles and best practice concerning the involvement of partners in the preparation of the Partnership Agreement and programmes. According to Article 5(2) of the CoC, the Member States shall take account of the need for in the consultation of partners: (a) the timely disclosure of and easy access to relevant information; (b) sufficient time for partners to analyse and comment on key preparatory documents, on the draft Partnership Agreement and on draft programmes.

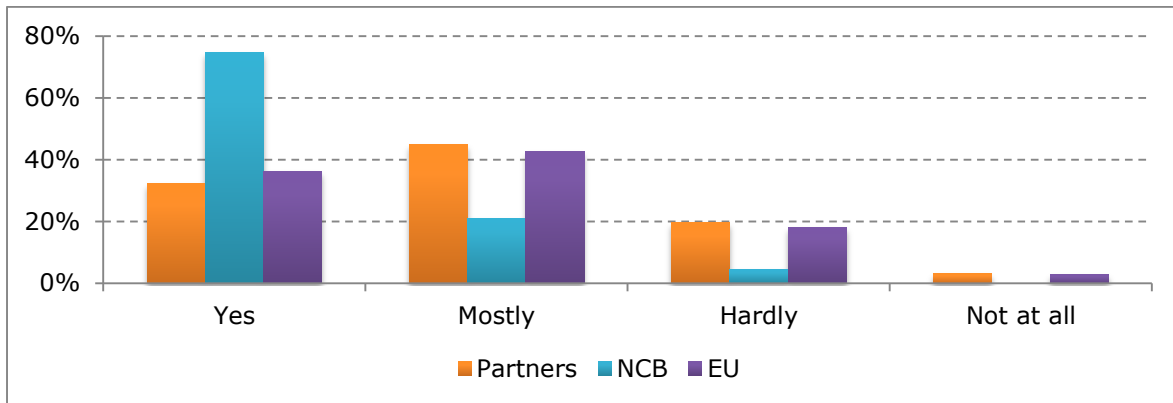
With regard to the access to documentation, the survey focused not on the actual number of days for which documents have been available before comments needed to be provided etc. The questions focused rather on whether the timeframe in which documents have been provided was sufficient to provide meaningful inputs. Depending on the context of the partner this can imply time to analyse documents, but also include time to consult with colleagues, experts or the hierarchy. Figure 9 below displays the survey results in respect of whether documents concerning the Partnership Agreements have been accessible in a timely fashion. A majority of both partners and MAs responded that they have been accessible in time. Partners have more frequently answered "Mostly" though a significant number of partners answered "Hardly" or "Not at all".

⁴¹ The information in this text box derives from the interviews.

⁴² The information in this text box derives from the survey and from interviews.

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

Figure 9: Access to documents in time⁴³ to participate in the Partnership Agreement development

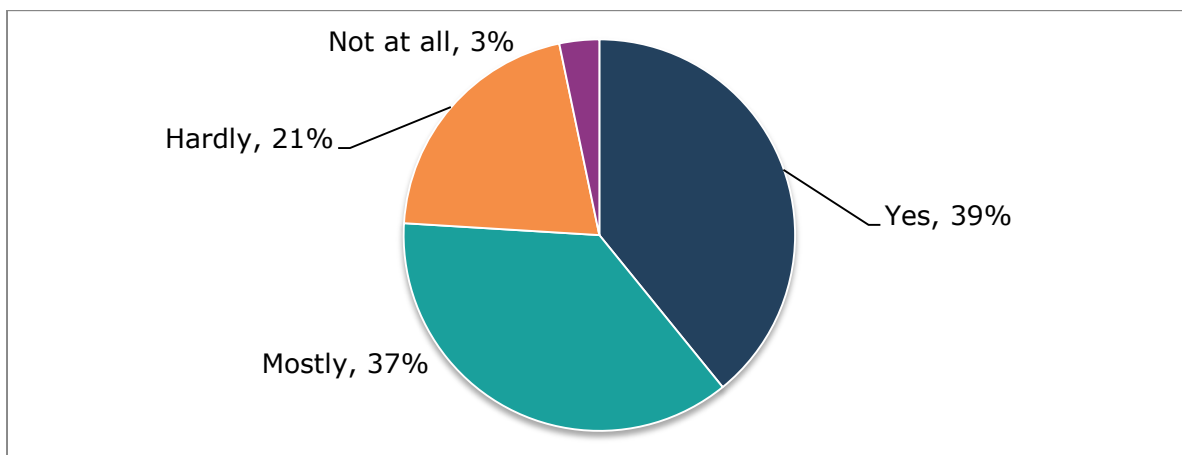


Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

The results for the programmes in respect of whether the documents were available in time are similar to the results for the Partnership Agreements. A majority of both partners and MAs responded that they had been. Partners frequently answered “Mostly” though there was also a larger share of partners than MAs answering “Hardly” or “Not at all”.

Figure 10 below shows the survey results concerning the issue of whether there was sufficient time for public consultation for the Partnership Agreements. A majority of survey respondents (76%) answered that there was enough time allocated to public consultation. 21% of respondents in the survey however responded ‘Hardly’ and 3% said ‘Not at all’. Differentiating by Member State shows that the time for public consultation was seen as being least sufficient in e.g. Hungary, Bulgaria, Estonia, Croatia and Slovenia. Respondents were however most positive in Austria, Greece, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

Figure 10: Time span for public consultation of the Partnership Agreement



Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

The survey results on whether there was sufficient time for public consultation for programmes show that 23% of the partners indicated having almost no time for consultation while a further 3% indicated that they did not have enough time for public consultation.

The MAs tried to find solutions to the issue of allowing enough time for partners to contribute, e.g. by preparing processes in advance (even if the full regulations were not clear) or by taking into account contributions that arrived late. For example in Ireland, the drafting process for both the Partnership Agreement and the regional programmes started in early 2013. This long lead-in time

⁴³ The Code of Conduct on Partnership (CoC), through article 11(b) specifies that partners should have at least 10 working days to receive documents or notices for meetings.

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

enabled partners to become engaged at a measured pace and also allowed multiple rounds of comments on the Partnership Agreement and the programme documents. Another interesting example here is that of France, where stakeholders considered the time to express their view to be short under the written consultation rules. Thus the NCB decided to also take into consideration views received after the deadlines.

Austria – Timely and easy access to documents⁴⁴

One example of timely access to relevant information and sufficient time for partners to comment is Austria (highlighted by the European Network of Civil Society Associations). The MA's website was well-structured and transparent and provided concise information. The process was well documented, all relevant draft documents were available and the timeline was publicly accessible, as were minutes of meetings and summaries providing feedback on comments.

Denmark – Transparent involvement of partners⁴⁵

Another example is Denmark, where partnership involvement for the Partnership Agreement was initiated in the summer of 2012 to discuss how funds should be spent in accordance with the CPR regulation. An inter-ministerial working group was established and initially the NCB had bilateral meetings with some of the most important stakeholders concerning their interests in respect of the coming programmes. Based on this, a proposal was developed and illustrated on a poster, which showed the options open to the Thematic Objectives. This was presented at the first stakeholder workshops for September 2012. At the workshops, the challenges that needed to be addressed with the funds were discussed, as well as the names of the priority axes. Furthermore, the draft ERDF and ESF programmes were published on the NCBs' website as part of the process in order to give stakeholders the chance to comment.

Generally, both the partners and the MAs perceive that documents were accessible in time for partners to be involved and provide comments. When it comes to sufficient time for public consultations, one fourth of the survey respondents saw it as insufficient. As such, in a number of Member States it has been a challenge to allow enough time for partner involvement even though the NCBs and MAs have made attempts to make the process more transparent.

3.3 Main points raised by partners and their integration

In this section, a number of general findings from the document analysis, the survey and the interviews are presented relating to the main points raised by the partners and how these were integrated into the programmes and the Partnership Agreements.

According to Article 5(2) of the CoC the Member States shall take account of the need for the consultation of partners with the two points in Article 5(2) that are particularly relevant here being (c) available channels through which partners may ask questions, provide contributions and be informed of the way their proposals have been taken into consideration and (d) the dissemination of the outcome of the consultation.

In general most stakeholders perceive that the inputs have been treated equally, especially respondents from Denmark, Portugal, Poland, Spain, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Malta displayed mainly positive perceptions concerning the equal treatment of comments from the stakeholders. Nevertheless, about 25% of the survey respondents responded by noting that their inputs had been treated hardly or not at all equally. In France, Sweden, the UK, Slovakia and Greece both the documents and the survey mirror the weaker integration of points raised by the partnership in the programmes. The data analysis shows a general deviation in perception between different types of partners; public authorities generally have a more positive perception of the treatment of inputs compared, for example, to partners from civil society and/or social and economic partners.

When considering the treatment of inputs and comments divided by type of programme, certain deviations become visible.

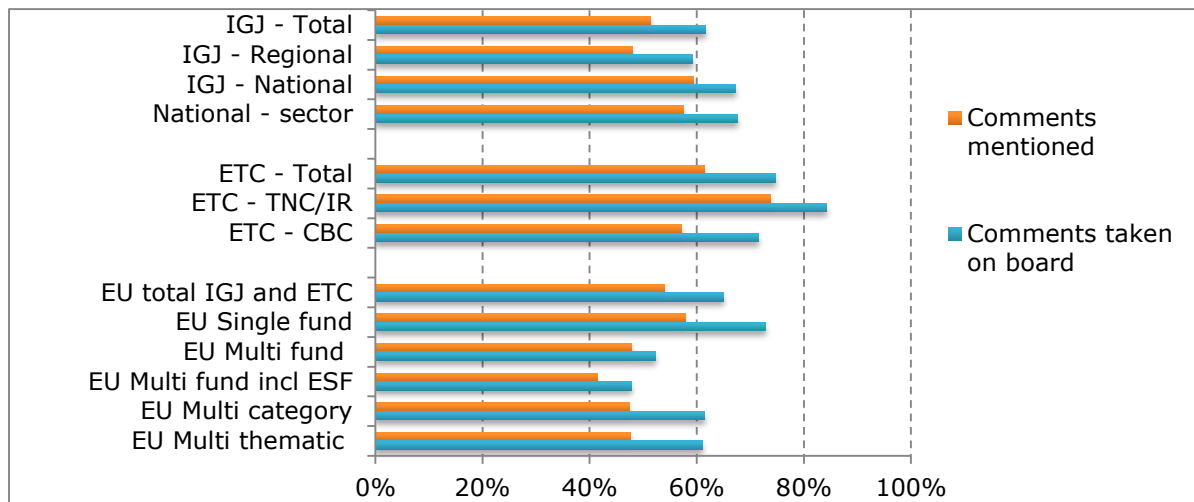
⁴⁴ The information in this text box derives from documentation by the European Network of Civil Society Associations.

⁴⁵ The information in this text box derives from the survey and from interviews.

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

Figure 11 below shows the results based on document analysis in respect of mentioning the comments and the integration of the points raised by the partnership in the programmes. Two aspects are immediately obvious here; the treatment of comments is generally better in ETC programmes as compared to IGJ- They treatment of comments were also generally better in single fund programmes as compared to multi fund programmes. This can be explained by the fact that multi-fund programmes are more complex than single-fund programmes and that it is not possible to take comment the comments on board to the same extent. These results are further confirmed by the survey. To some degree, national programmes also perform better when compared to regional programmes but this result cannot be confirmed by the survey in the same way. Concerning the Partnership Agreements, most countries have both mentioned comments from partners and how these have been taken on board. Only Luxembourg has chosen not to describe these actions.

Figure 11: Share of programmes which mention comments and how these have been taken on board in the programme documents



Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

Malta – equal treatment of input from partners⁴⁶

In Malta, the comments and recommendations from partners were considered and treated equally. The involvement of partners led to the development of a thematic balance and focus, meeting the needs and potential of the territory covered through the experience and technical knowledge brought in by partners. The involvement of partners and equal treatment of input from partners also contributed to a broad ownership which will also facilitate the implementation process.

Inputs from partners are generally perceived to have been treated equally, but public authorities are generally more positive when compared to other types of partners. There are also a number of minor differences between the different types of programmes; in ETC and single fund programmes inputs are generally treated better than in other types of programmes. The results for the Partnership Agreements indicate that partner concerns had usually been taken into account, although the documents seldom described how the various comments were handled at a more detailed level.

After an in-depth analysis of the programming phase and the actions taken by the Member States and MAs to involve partners in the drafting of the Partnership Agreements and the programmes as well as in relation to an information policy and feedback patterns, the following chapter looks at the next stages of the policy cycle – the implementation, monitoring and evaluation phase.

⁴⁶ The information in this text box derives from both the survey and the interviews.

4 PARTNERSHIPS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND EVALUATION PHASE

Key messages:

- Almost all programmes have planned actions to involve partners during the implementation process, mainly by involving them in committees.
- Some overrepresentation of public partners is expected.
- National sector-oriented programmes seldom mention activities for institutional capacity building.
- In 34% of ESF funded programmes there will be an allocation of resources enabling social partners to participate or to build NGO capacity.
- There are differences between the capacity building measures described in the programme documents and the perception of stakeholders.

This chapter analyses the actions planned by the Member States and MAs to involve partners in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the programmes in accordance with Article 9(b) of the CoC. Those actions planned to strengthen the institutional capacity of partners in accordance with Article 5(3)(e) of the CPR are also described herein. Finally, a description of the use of global grants and capacity-building in ESF-funded programmes in accordance with Article 6 of Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council (the ESF regulation) is also included.

4.1 Involvement of partners in the implementation process

Regarding the involvement of partners in respect of implementation, monitoring and evaluation, Partnership Agreements usually refer to arrangements in specific programmes, such as the inclusion in monitoring committees, some type of steering committee, evaluation, or targeted consultation. As such, this section focuses on the programmes rather than on the Partnership Agreements.

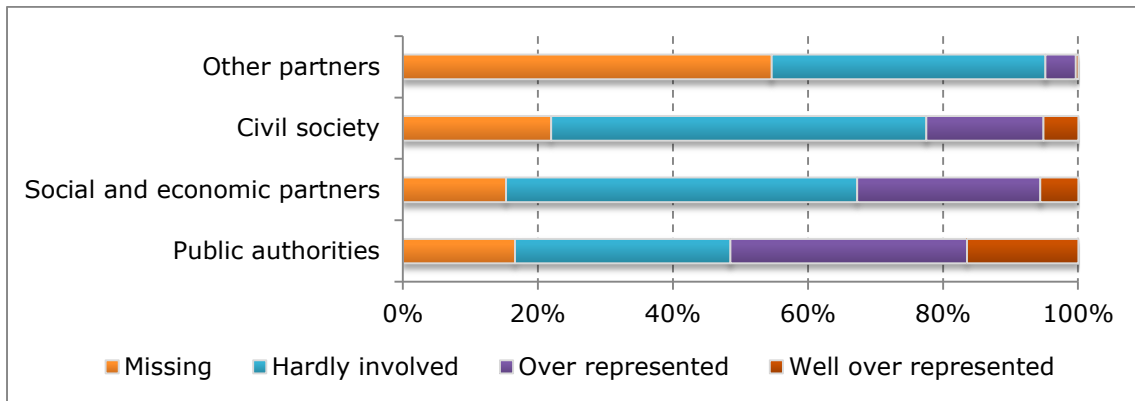
Considering the overall picture, covering the results for all programmes and countries, most programmes, according to the document analysis, plan to involve partners in the implementation process. In 85% of the programmes, it is anticipated that partners will be involved in a committee. In 27% of the programmes, partners would also be involved through consultation actions. Dividing the degree of involvement by type of programme does not reveal any significant differences.

In general, some stakeholder groups are more represented than others. The results displayed in Figure 12 are based on the survey and show the anticipated balance of different groups of partners according to MA and joint secretariats. Public authorities are considered to be over represented in more than 50% of cases. Within this group, it is mainly national and regional authorities that are over represented, while local authorities are not.⁴⁷ The least involved group according to this figure is that of 'other partners', which mainly consists of the general public. In addition, civil society and social/economic partners are often also 'hardly involved'.

⁴⁷ This is in line with the interviews with the EU-level special interest organisations pointing to considerable variations in local-level mobilisation.

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

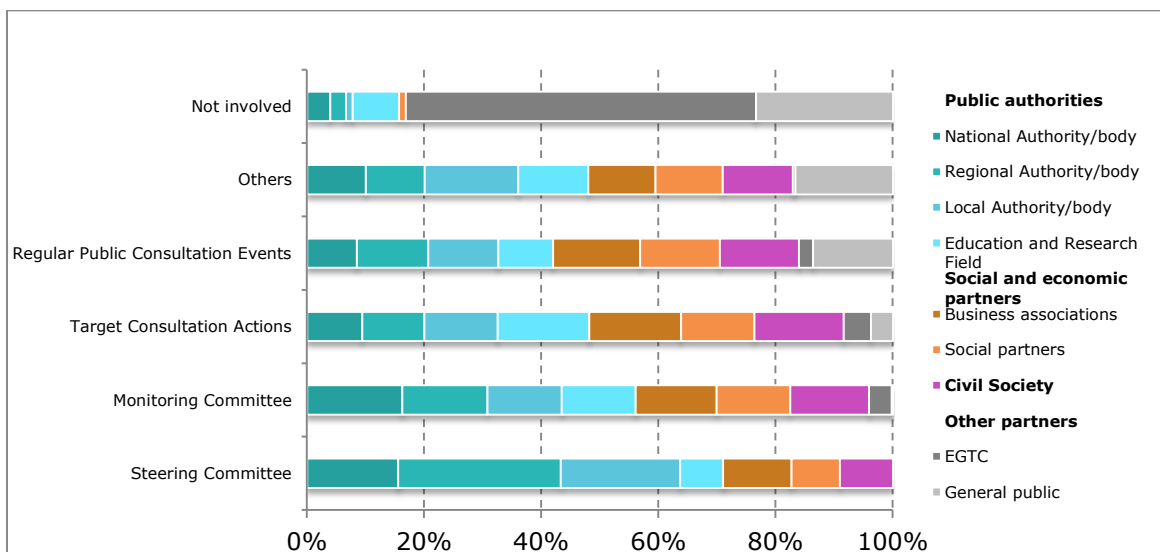
Figure 12: Perceived over- or under-representation in the implementation process of different types of partners



Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

Delving deeper into how it is anticipated that certain partner groups will be involved, Figure 13 describes the view of the MA in terms of which types of activities the different partner groups will be involved. There is a clear pattern here showing that committees will mainly consist of public partners. Non-public partners will primarily be involved through consultation actions. It is however important to bear in mind here that involvement through committees is much more common compared to involvement through consultation. Taking this into consideration confirms the view of heavy public partner involvement presented in the previous figure.

Figure 13: Perceived future involvement of partners in the implementation process

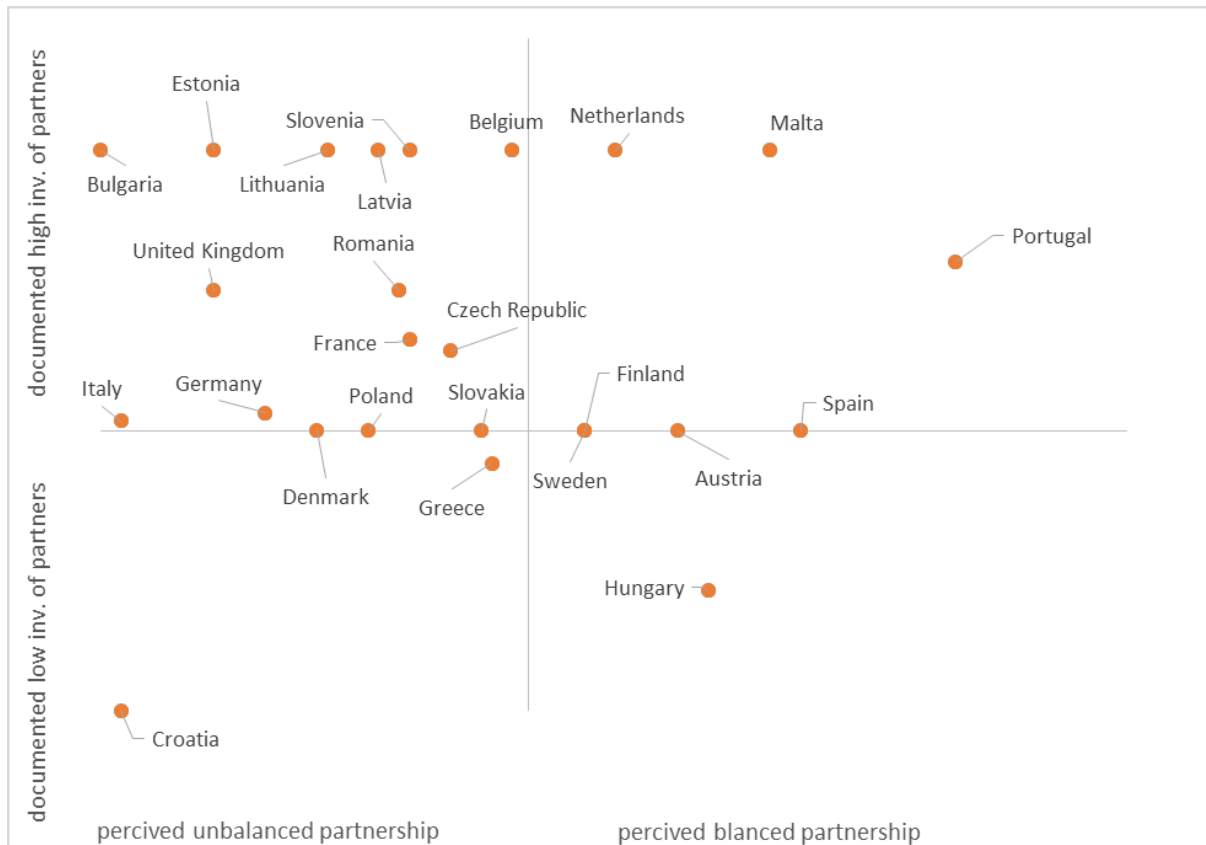


Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

Turning the analysis to a country-specific context, Figure 14 describes a combination of indices based on the document analysis and the survey regarding the future involvement of partners in the implementation process of the programmes. A higher value indicates, on average, a higher degree of the likely future involvement of partners in the programmes of a respective country. The results from the document analysis are described on the vertical axis and are based on the underlying question of whether partners will be involved in committees and/or through consultation actions. The results of the survey, on the horizontal axis, reflect a slightly different underlying question addressing perceived balance in respect of the different partners: "Do you see a risk that in the implementation process stakeholder groups are missing or over-represented in the partnership" i.e. the results presented in Figure 12.

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

Figure 14: Involvement of partners in the implementation of programmes



Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

All but three countries are gathered in the upper half of the figure, which implies that partners will be involved at least in either committees or through consultation actions in most programmes. In the countries at the top of the figure partners will be involved in both committees and consultation actions in all programmes. Ireland, Cyprus and Luxembourg have not been included in the figure given that the survey results could be biased due to low response rate. Documents show however a high level of partner involvement in all three Member States.

Concerning Croatia, Greece and Hungary, the document analysis reveals that the involvement of partners is generally weak. While this result is confirmed by the surveys conducted in Greece and Croatia, the Hungarian survey does not however confirm an expected risk that certain stakeholder groups are missing or that they are over-represented in the implementation process.

Croatia performs poorly both according to the documents and the survey i.e. there is not clear description in the documents on how partners will be involved in the implementation process, and the partnership that is actually involved is perceived as being unbalanced. There is very little planned involvement of specific partner groups in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the programmes. For example, steering committee roles and targeted consultations were only carried out by national authorities. This relatively weak performance is best explained by the existence of several important constraints. Firstly, being the youngest Member State, the 2014-2020 programming process was the first comprehensive exercise of the ESI funds programming using the partnership principle and multi-level governance in Croatia. It should also be noted that the long-term tradition of a strongly centralized state is still very visible in this programming period, resulting in significant overrepresentation of public authorities. Finally, successful implementation of the partnership principle is constrained by the lack of capacity in respect of the involved stakeholders.

Survey respondents in Portugal perceived a well-balanced partnership during the implementation process, something which reflects the fact that almost all programmes in Portugal have the balance criterion as one of the main goals of the partnership.

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

Even if the involvement of partners in Italy was, according to the documents, reasonably high the survey respondents perceived an imbalance in the partnership. The low results from the survey can be explained by weakness of the framework provided by the NCB and MA. According to interviews undertaken, the involvement of the partners in the implementation process has not really been planned by the NCB or for that matter, by a large number of MAs. Indeed, it is still not clear even now just how the government and the central administrations intend to involve the stakeholders in the implementation process.

According to Article 9b of the CoC, the programmes should describe planned actions to ensure partner participation in the implementation process. In concluding this section, almost all programmes mention some sort of partner involvement, either through consultation actions or committee involvement. Our research illustrates further that programme partners will most often be involved through committees and only to a lesser degree through consultation actions. Involvement of partners in monitoring committees is compulsory⁴⁸ which probably explains this pattern.

Dividing the degree of involvement by the type of programme does not reveal any big differences. The main difference rather concerns the balance between different types of partners and how they will be involved. The general picture shows that public authorities, especially from the national and regional levels, are generally overrepresented at the expense of the general public, civil society and the social and economic partners. Public authorities are also more likely to be involved in committees.

4.2 Institutional capacity-building

In order to enable partners to become strong and resilient actors in relation to policy implementation processes, a number of capacity-building actions are available and planned throughout the EU 28. This section analyses these planned actions in respect of partner capacity-building. Arrangements for institutional capacity-building are not usually detailed in the Partnership Agreements; instead, references are generally made to the programmes. Therefore, this section focuses on the results concerning the programmes.

Figure 15 below is based on the document analysis and provides an overview of the share of programmes explicitly mentioning capacity-building actions for partners.

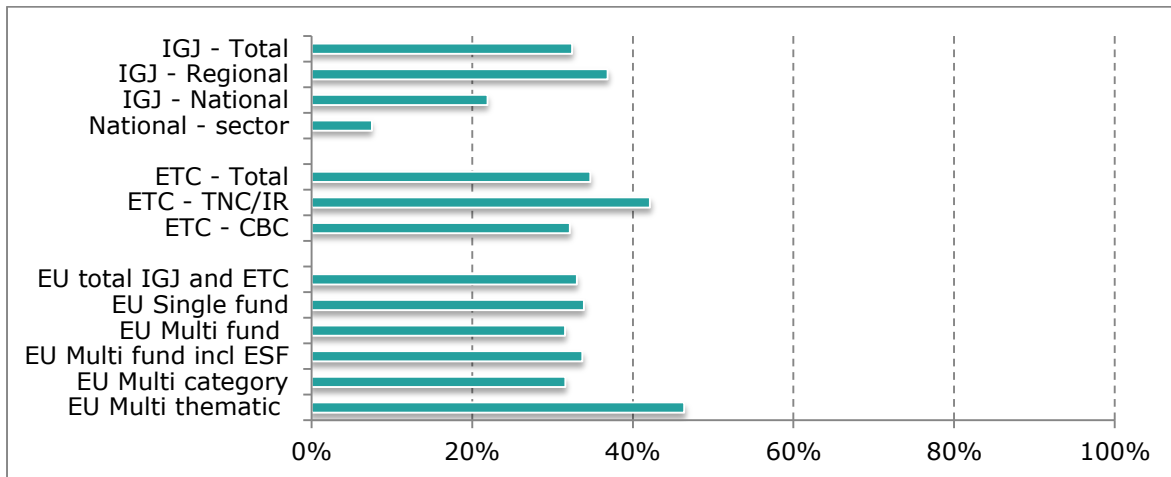
The most striking aspect of this figure is the **low representation of sector-orientated national IGJ programmes**. The same pattern holds also if the technical assistance programmes (which are sector programmes) are excluded from the analysis. The most interesting feature of sector programmes is that they have a clear thematic focus, e.g. on infrastructure. One possible consequence of this might be that partners, who choose (or are chosen) to be involved in these programmes, might be so because they are engaged in the topic, have a relative strong perception of the area and thus are in less need of capacity-building themselves.

Furthermore, it is also worth noting the **high performance of multi-thematic programmes and transnational cooperation and interregional (TNC/IR) programmes**. Both of these groups of programmes entail a rather high degree of complexity (e.g. wide geographical coverage for TNC/IR programmes and thematic complexity for multi-thematic programmes, all coupled with a large number of projects). One tentative explanation for this pattern may be that a higher degree of complexity in some cases also leads to a greater need for capacity-building actions. On the other hand, the results for the multi-fund and multi-category programmes do not support this explanation. For multi-fund programmes capacity-building activities for partners are mentioned to more or less the same extent as for single fund programmes.

⁴⁸ Articles 5 and 48 of the CPR

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

Figure 15: Share of programmes which mention capacity-building activities for partners



Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

The matter of capacity-building was also addressed by the web survey where the respondents could indicate types of planned capacity-building actions.

Figure 16 combines the results of the document analysis with those from the survey. The result based on the document analysis is presented on the vertical axis with the survey index on the horizontal. A higher value indicates a greater number of planned capacity-building actions.

Most countries are clustered in the lower right part of the figure, which indicates a low number of planned capacity-building actions according to the documents but a high level of satisfaction according to the survey. The interpretation of this overall result is that there is usually only limited explicit information on capacity-building actions available in the programme documents. On the other hand, those stakeholders who have been involved in the programmes usually perceive that a wide range of capacity-building actions will be undertaken in the programme.

There are a few countries that deviate from the common pattern. In Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, a wide range of capacity-building actions were mentioned in the programme documents. Since the level of satisfaction according to the survey was also reasonably high, Baltic States show both a coherent and positive result placing them in the upper right part of the figure. Finland, Slovenia and Italy also display relatively coherent and positive results. Countries with the most obvious contradictions between the survey and the documents are located in the lower right corner; here we find the Netherlands, Bulgaria and Romania. In Romania, this contradiction is best explained by the fact that most capacity-building activities will be undertaken under the framework of a pure ESF programme, which is not covered by the document analysis of this study. In Malta, the situation is the same; capacity-building actions are delivered by a specific ESF programme. In the case of the Netherlands it should be noted that most partners already have a high level of institutional capacity and thus the actual need for further capacity-building is rather limited. Thus even rather limited actions on the part of the programmes may nevertheless induce high levels of satisfaction among the respondents.

Ireland, Cyprus and Luxembourg have not been included in the figure given that the survey results could be biased due to low response rate. Documents show however a low number of planned capacity-building actions.

Figure 16: Institutional capacity-building, programmes



Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

Partnership training and capacity building – examples of good practice⁴⁹:

In general, various forms of partner training tend to be the most common type of capacity-building activity. Throughout the EU 28, a number of noteworthy examples of capacity-building actions have been developed, include the following ones⁵⁰:

Croatia

Planned actions to strengthen the institutional capacity of partners, include training, preparation of networking platforms and support for these platforms, the exchange of best practice, awareness-raising campaigns and public consultation.

Denmark

The NCB organises courses and seminars together with the Growth Forum secretariats. For the new period, a working group has been set up with representatives from secretariats across the country to meet regularly to discuss interpretation of the technical rules, regulations, etc.

⁴⁹ The information in this text box derives both from the survey and from interviews.

⁵⁰ The information in this text box derives both from the survey and from interviews.

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

Spain

Training sessions, exchanges of best practice, awareness-raising events and informative events on how to participate in Monitoring Committees to improve participation and effectiveness are planned to be implemented.⁵¹

Estonia

Various needs-based activities to increase partner capacity include training, studies, analyses, information events and various development projects.

Finland

Both regarding the mainland Finland and the Åland programmes plans exist to increase the knowledge and awareness of stakeholders through seminars and training days, taking into consideration the needs of small actors.

Ireland

ERDF-funded regional programmes do not include specific actions to strengthen the institutional capacity of partners. Partners are not seen to require capacity building, thanks to their well-established familiarity and competence in implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Capacity-building activities in Southern Italy: The SMEDis project (Competitive Development for Southern Italy through Social Dialogue)

The Italian Ministry of Labour has financed a project aiming at competitive development for southern Italy through social dialogue (SMEDis). It consists of a training programme aimed at developing professional expertise and capacity of officials, particularly those dealing with ESI Funds in Convergence Regions and that are involved in local negotiation and in social dialogue. The project is composed of different training programs targeting social partners depending on the role that these partners have in the different phases of programming (preparation, financing, fulfilment, monitoring and assessment of projects).

Differences however exist between the capacity building measures described in the programme documents and the perception of stakeholders. In some cases this is explained by the fact that the capacity-building activities are described in entirely ESF funded programmes. Since these programmes are not covered by this study, these efforts are not visible in the document analysis.

In the Baltic States, capacity-building is well described in the programme documents. The stakeholders also have a positive perception of the planned actions.

There is a substantial difference between regional IGJ programmes and national sector-oriented programmes, with the latter rarely mentioning capacity-building actions in the programme documents.

However, a number of noteworthy capacity-building and partnership training activities are going to be implemented throughout the EU 28 in the 2014-2020 period.

4.3 Capacity-building in ESF-funded programmes

This section presents findings from the document analysis regarding the capacity-building activities⁵² in programmes partially funded by ESF in accordance with Article 6 of the ESF regulation. This section considers only programmes with combined funding from the ERDF (or CF) and the ESF, which are present in 16 Member States.⁵³ Figure 17 provides an overview of the number of ESF-funded programmes in each of the programme categories. There are 92 ESF-fund

⁵¹ However, there are no detailed plans, as this seems to be a priority only for the later implementation and monitoring stages.

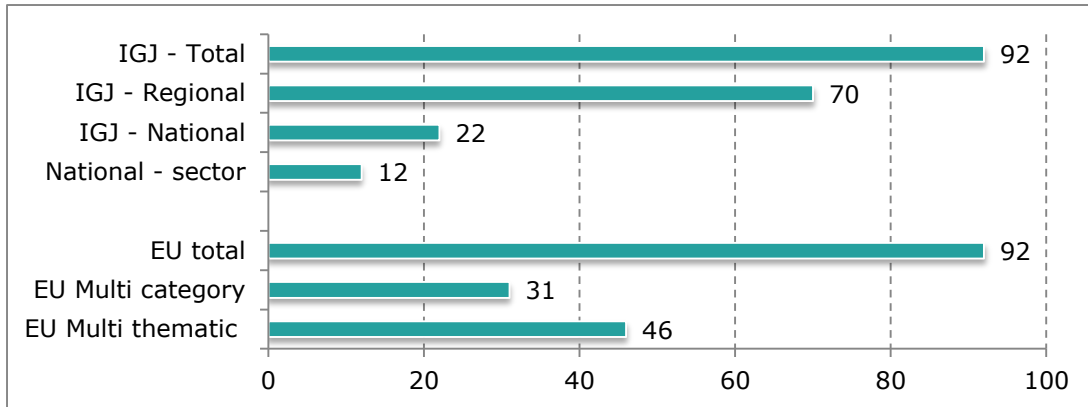
⁵² Only applicable for programmes in less developed and transition regions

⁵³ These are BG, CZ, DE, EE, FI, FR, GR, HU, IT, LT, LV, PL, PT, SI, SE, SK.

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESF Funds

programmes, all of which are IGJ programmes. Of these 92 programmes, 70 are regional and 22 are national. There are 31 programmes that are also multi-category while 46 are multi-thematic.

Figure 17: Number of ESF-funded programmes



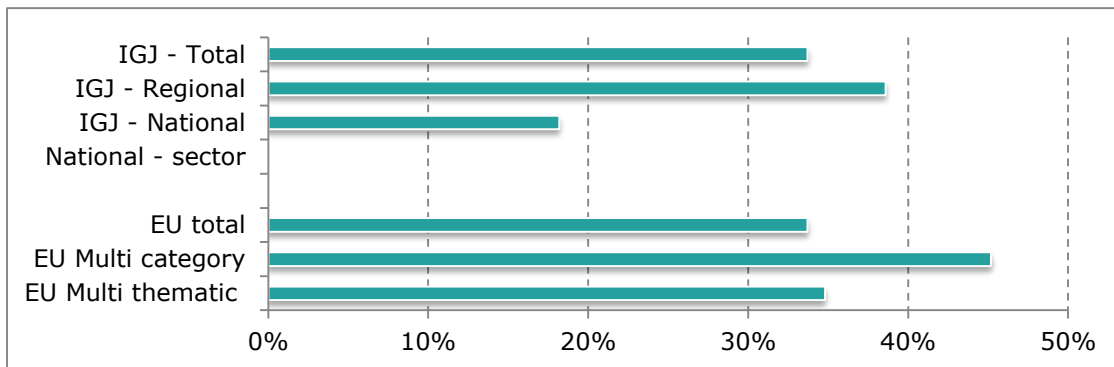
Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

The capacity building actions referred to in Article 6 (2) and (3) of the ESF regulation are only applicable for less developed and transition regions. As shown in Figure 18, capacity-building was noted in 29% of the programmes part funded by ESF, with an average funding of EUR 1.3 million per programme. It is however important to note that some of these programmes state the maximum amount to be allocated to this activity; hence the figure has an upward bias.

Regional programmes use this option more often. None of the sector-orientated national programmes intend to allocate resources for capacity building.

Compared to the average, this option is more common among multi-category programmes, and only slightly more common among multi-thematic programmes.

Figure 18: ESF-funded programmes which allocate resource for capacity-building



Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

5 EUROPEAN TERRITORIAL COOPERATION PROGRAMMES

Key messages:

- Partnerships mainly build on previously established structures. There are several cases, where a small group of public authorities have a significant influence on the composition of the partnership.
- Partners have been in general directly involved in the drafting process, even if some programmes mention a lack of institutional capacity and a low level of commitment among partners as limitations.
- Civil society and social/economic partners are involved to a lesser degree.
- Procedures are mainly considered to be transparent.
- The uptake of comments from partners has worked satisfactorily.
- There are usually planned actions on how to involve partners during the implementation process, e.g. through thematic or geographical expert groups.

After looking at specific policy-making phases (chapters 3 & 4), and identifying differences across countries, chapter 5 analyses the European Territorial Cooperation programmes in more detail and by differentiating between various types of ETC programmes, such as Cross Border Cooperation programmes (CBC), Inter Regional programmes (IR) and Transnational Cooperation programmes (TNC).

The analysis focuses on how the results for the ETC programmes deviate from the IGJ programmes and on the differences between the various types of ETC programmes. A differentiation is made between CBC and a joint group consisting of IR and TNC programmes. The results are based on the document analysis, the web-survey and interviews with six ETC programme coordinators⁵⁴.

5.1 Balance of the partnership

This section primarily addresses Article 2 of the CoC relating to the balance of the partnership and Article 4 regarding the involvement of different types of partners.

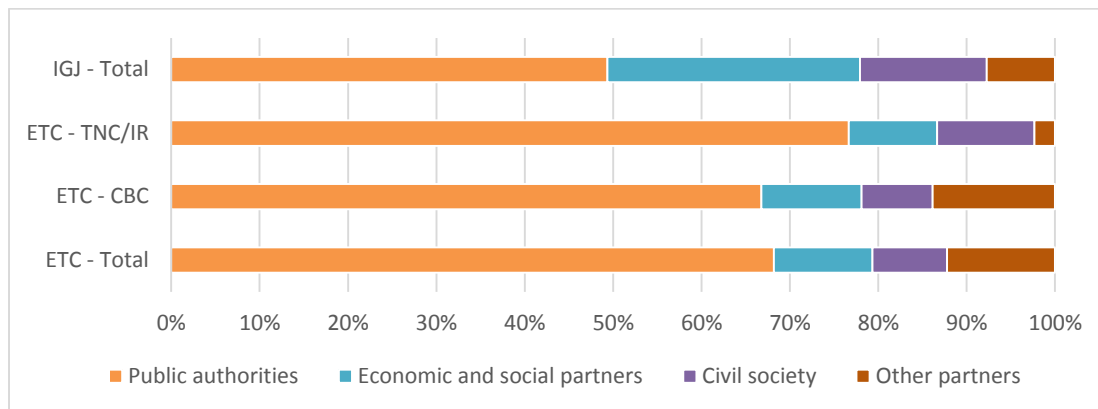
The overall picture on the balance of the partnership is mainly captured by the results of the web survey. The overall EU picture was already presented in figures 2 and 3. A separation of these results by type of programme does not reveal any significant difference, neither between IGJ and ETC programmes nor between CBC and IR/TNC programmes. In general, ETC programmes build on a balanced partnership, although there are voices arguing that public sector and research partners are dominant (e.g. in the case of the Northern Periphery and Arctic programme or the Central Europe programme) and that that difficulties remain in involving partners from the civil society sector (e.g. Sweden-Finland-Norway programme). Data from both the survey and the document analysis, shown in Figure 20 and Figure 21, indicate that the share of public authorities is generally higher in ETC programmes than in IGJ programmes, while the share of civil society and social/economic partners is lower. These results indicate that ETC programmes are generally dominated by public authorities when compared to IGJ programmes. Since ETC programmes always require international commitment and cooperation, the threshold for involvement is higher. This, in turn, penalises partners with limited institutional capacity and experience in international cooperation. Since many social/economic and civil society partners participate primarily in national arenas, this may provide an explanation as to why these groups are less involved in ETC partnerships.

In conclusion, the perceived balance of a partnership is more or less the same in the ETC and IGJ programmes. Nevertheless, there are indications that public authorities are slightly overrepresented in ETC programmes at the expense of civil society and social/economic partners.

⁵⁴ Sweden-Finland-Norway (North), Netherlands-Germany, Upper Rhine, URBACT, Northern Periphery and Arctic and Central Europe.

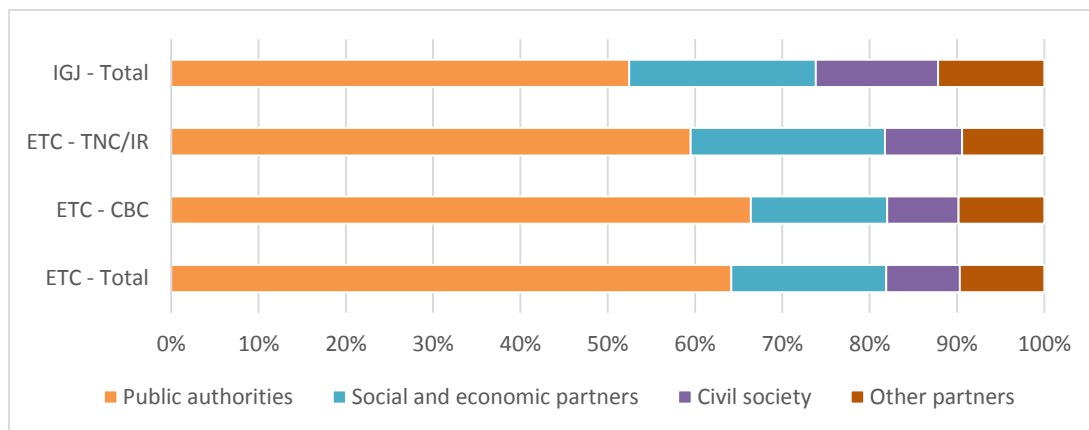
Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

Figure 19: Share of different types of partners in the partnership



Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

Figure 20: Perceived representation of different types of partners



Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

5.2 Selection of the partnership

After looking at the share of different types of partners in the partnership and the perceived representation of different types of partners, on previous pages, this sub-section analyses the selection patterns of partnerships. In general, survey respondents perceive the partnership selection process to have been transparent; stakeholders in the TNC/IR programmes were particularly satisfied with the transparency of stakeholder selection.

Turning to the more specific picture of how the partnerships of the programmes have been identified (e.g. newly established partnership vs already existing partnership) ETC programmes appear to largely build on already established partnerships; this is shown in Figure 21 and Figure 22, bringing together data from both the survey and document analysis.

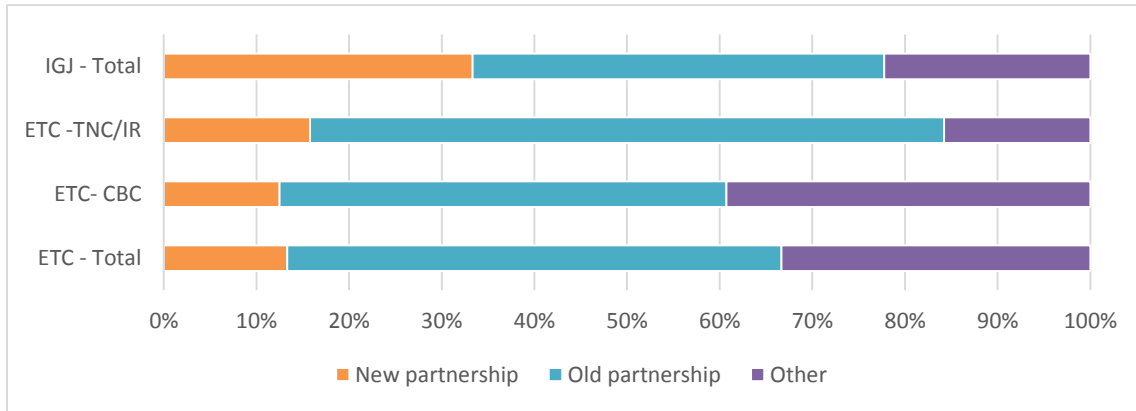
Three⁵⁵ of the six ETC programmes interviewed describe a rather complex multi-level procedure to identify partners, which corresponds with the undefined category of "other" in the figures. In these cases and more generally, a smaller core group consisting of public authorities is appointed by the NCBs. In the next step, this core group invites a broader partnership from civil society, interest groups and the general public to participate. The picture deriving from these examples indicates a process where a small group of public partners receives a strong mandate to form the partnership. In cases where this core group is stable over time - two of the interviewed programmes specifically mention the stability and tradition of the partnership - this may provide a conservative structure, which non-public partners may find difficult to penetrate.

⁵⁵ Sweden-Finland-Norway (North), Netherlands-Germany, and Upper Rhine

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

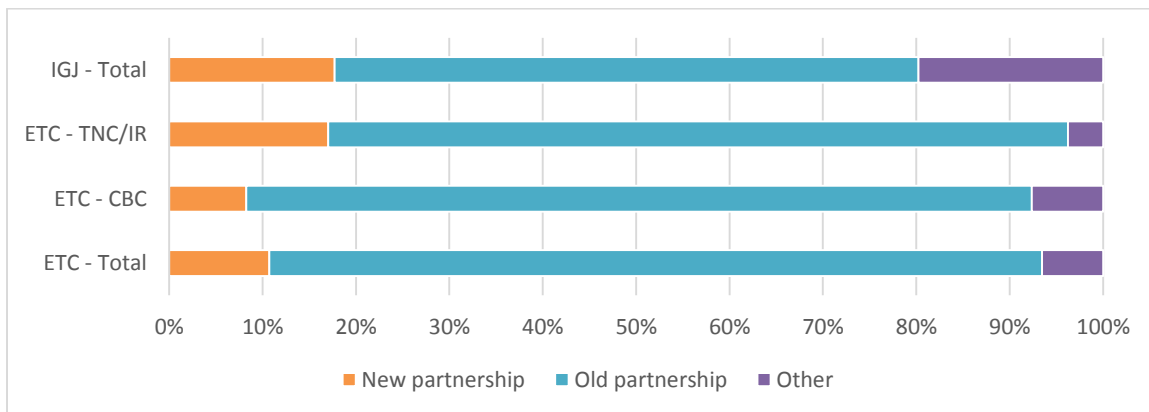
The results of this section process indicate that ETC programmes when compared to IGJ programmes do, to a greater degree, tend to build on previously established partnerships, often based around a core of public partners.

Figure 21: Identification of partnership according to the documents



Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

Figure 22: Perceived identification of partnership according to the survey



Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme – strong tradition of partner involvement⁵⁶

The process of partnership selection was considered as a continuation of the selection in the last period with generally no specific initiatives to select partners. The programme already had a strong tradition of involvement in 2007-2013. The Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme operationalised its partnership through two key regional mechanisms: regional contact points and regional advisory groups. These play an important role in terms of providing local linkages and allowed the programme to build the partnership on existing organisational structures. The exception to this process was in relation to the Arctic. Due to increased focus on the Arctic the programme wanted to identify interested partners in relation to Arctic cooperation throughout the region. A preparatory project in 2012 was tasked with identifying stakeholders with an interest in the Arctic across the programme area.

⁵⁶ The information in this text box derives from the interview with the Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme MA.

5.3 Involvement of the partners in drafting

This section provides further details on how the partners were involved in the drafting process of the programmes, addressing Articles 8 and 9a of the CoC.

The combined results of the document analysis and of the survey provide a complementary picture of partner involvement. Figure 23 is based on the document analysis and shows that partners were less involved in committees in ETC programmes when compared to IGJ programmes. This is particularly so for the group TNC/IR programmes. The involvement of partners through consultation actions was slightly higher in ETC programmes.

Figure 24, where partners have indicated how they have been involved in the drafting process, however shows a more nuanced picture. Partners in ETC programmes have generally been more directly involved compared to partners in IGJ programmes since the share of those who responded “no participated” or “received information” is lower. Partners in TNC/IR programmes have been heavily involved in both discussion and review processes. All the programme coordinators interviewed mentioned that partners have been involved in the drafting process in several different ways, especially through needs analysis, which was also mentioned in all of the programmes.

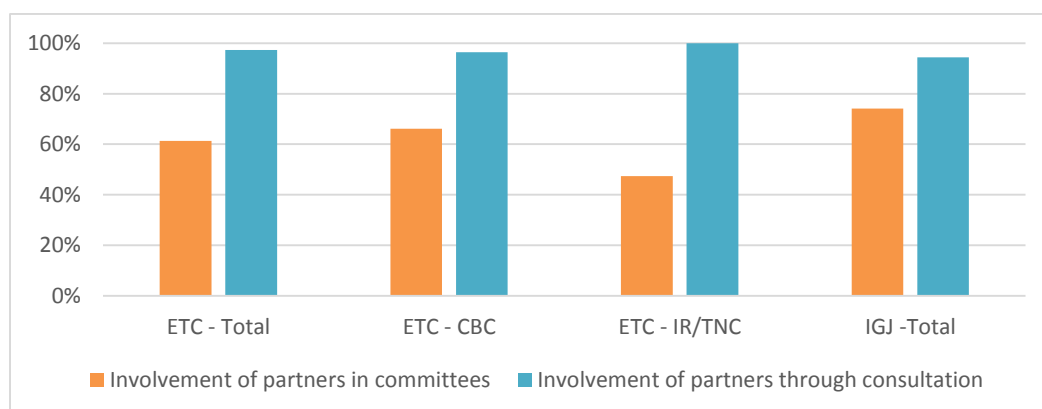
A number of limiting factors have however emerged in respect of the involvement of partners:

According to the Northern Periphery and Arctic programme, the involvement of partners in the drafting process was severely limited due the thematic limitation imposed by the regulatory framework. In practice, if potential partners were not interested, there was no point for them to participate. In the Sweden-Finland-Norway (North) programme, a broad partnership was involved in the drafting process, in receiving information and in the consultation process. It was however noted that the involvement and commitment of the partners was, to a great extent, related to their individual institutional capacity.

These comments, if generic, nevertheless shed additional light on the previous observation regarding the limited level of involvement in respect of civil society and social/economic partners. The limited involvement of civil society actors may in part be a result of their lack of institutional capacity and/or simply a lack of interest from such partners in participating due to an overly narrow thematic concentration.

In sum, even if partners in ETC programmes are less involved in committees compared to those in IGJ programmes, they are more directly involved in the drafting procedure. According to the interviews however, some programmes do face problems in terms of a lack of institutional capacity and/or commitment among partners.

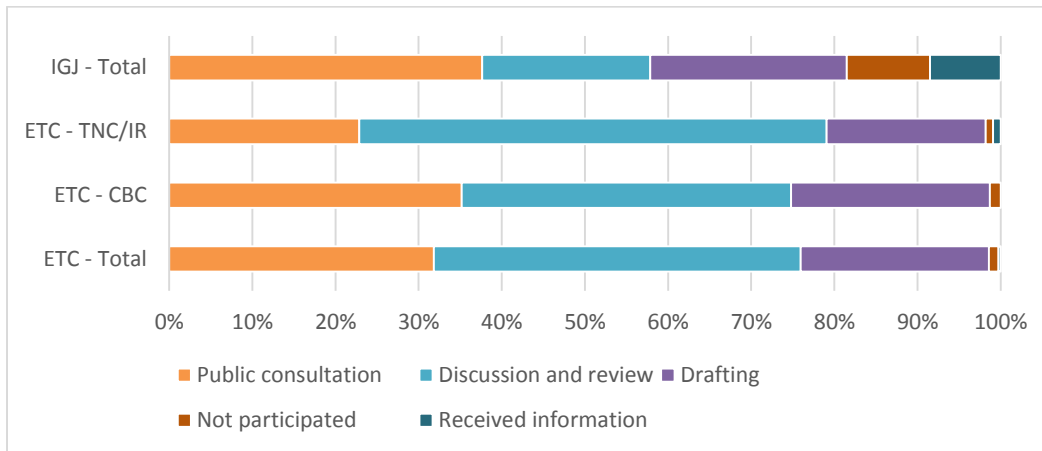
Figure 23: Share of programmes where partners will be involved in committees/through consultation in the drafting process



Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

Figure 24: Perceived involvement of partners in the drafting process



Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

Netherlands-Germany and Upper Rhine ETC programme - partner involvement through topical expert groups⁵⁷

The Netherlands-Germany and Upper Rhine programmes emphasise partner involvement through topical expert groups which prepare materials for the monitoring and steering committees. Especially the topical groups are very important as multipliers because when their role is active they open the doors to the target groups.

5.4 Transparent procedures and principles and best practice

The level of transparent procedures addressing Article 5 of the CoC is captured by two survey questions: “has enough time been allocated for consultation” and “to what extent did you have access to documents and information in time to prepare for your participation at partnership meetings, etc.” For each of these questions the stakeholders in ETC programmes are slightly more satisfied when compared to those in the IGJ programmes. The interviews nevertheless verify the picture of a rather transparent procedure with enough time assigned for partners to effectively participate.

5.5 Main points raised by the partnership and their integration

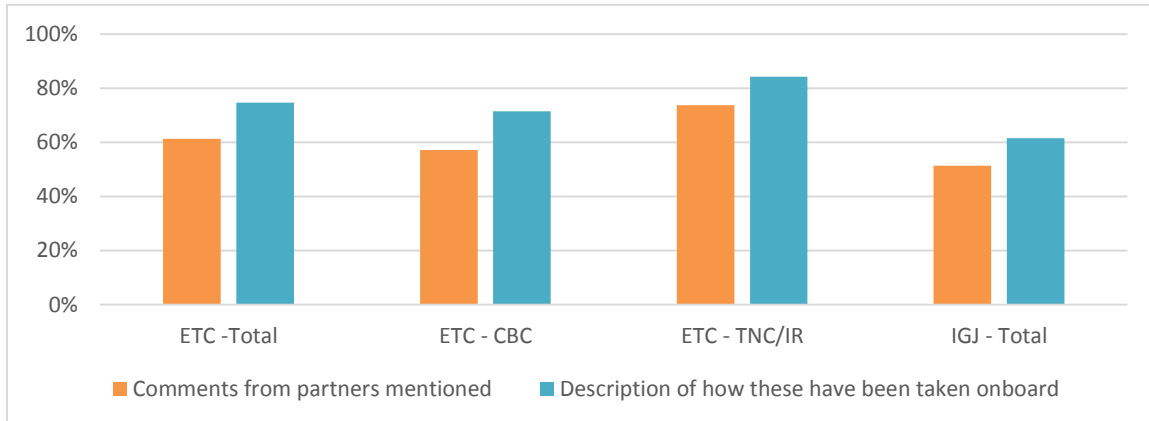
According to Article 5.2 (c) and (d) of the CoC, programme partners shall have the opportunity to provide comments and contributions. They shall also be informed on how comments and contributions have been taken into consideration and on the outcome of the consultations.

Figure 25 describes the extent to which comments from partners were explicitly mentioned in the programme documents and whether there is a description of how these interventions have been taken on board. There is however no obligation for partners to contribute. The level of institutional capacity may influence the actual potential of the partners to contribute. In addition, the CoC does not explicitly state that such comments received shall be reflected in the documents. Therefore, multiple explanations of the results displayed in the figure below are possible. Nevertheless, the analysis can still serve as a proxy for how active the partners have been and how relevant their comments were considered to be. According to this figure, the partners seem to be generally more involved in ETC programmes than in IGJ programmes. This is especially so in respect of TNC/IR programmes, where 84% of the programmes have descriptions of how comments have been taken on board while 74% of the programmes actually describe these comments. The comments described in the ETC programmes usually (59% of the cases) concern thematic orientation on a more general level i.e. the selection of thematic objectives and investment priorities.

⁵⁷ The information in this text box derives from interviews.

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

Figure 25: Share of programmes that mention comments and how these have been taken on board in the programme documents



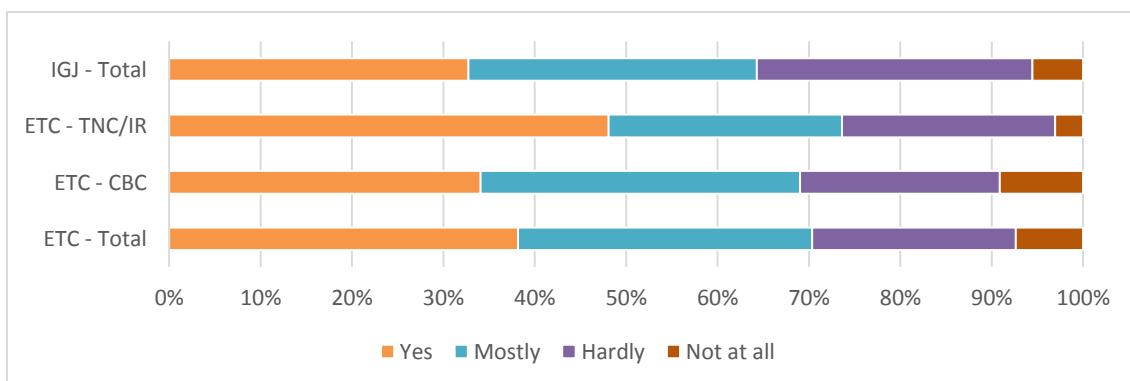
Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

The results of the survey, in general, neither contradict nor support the view of stronger influence of comments from partners in ETC programmes. Stakeholders were asked to rate the degree of equal treatment of inputs (Figure 26). The results do not show a clear deviation between ETC and IGJ programmes. What may be surprising is that respondents from the TNC/IR programmes are slightly less positive when compared to both ETC in total and the IGJ programmes. The relatively broad geographical scope of the TNC programmes may be a reason why some minor or local operating partners have encountered difficulties in seeking to provide useful contributions to the process.

The interviews with the ETC programmes show a generally positive picture; comments were often provided and taken on board during various stages of the drafting process. The Central Europe and URBACT programmes specifically mention the benefit of the bottom-up approach provided by the partnership. The only negative comment regarding partner involvement was from the TNC programme Northern Periphery and Arctic, which was criticised because the process did not allow partners to properly contribute to the development of the programme since the programme body was restricted by the regulatory framework and in particular the thematic concentration. Partners had to be continuously reminded that it was not possible to go beyond these requirements, and, as such, the debate was severely restricted. Basically, if a partner's interest was not part of the options available, then there was no point in them engaging.

The results outlined above indicate that the uptake of comments from partners in the ETC programme have worked satisfactorily, and perhaps even better than for the IGJ programmes. The results do not however deliver any strong evidence of deviations between different types of ETC programmes on this matter.

Figure 26: Perceived equal treatment of inputs



Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

5.6 Involvement of partners in the implementation process

The following section addresses the planned actions to ensure the participation of partners in the implementation of the programmes in accordance with Article 9b of the CoC.

According to the document analysis (Figure 277) the involvement of partners in committees and through consultation actions is slightly lower in ETC programmes when compared to IGJ programmes. There is however no substantial difference between the different types of ETC programmes.

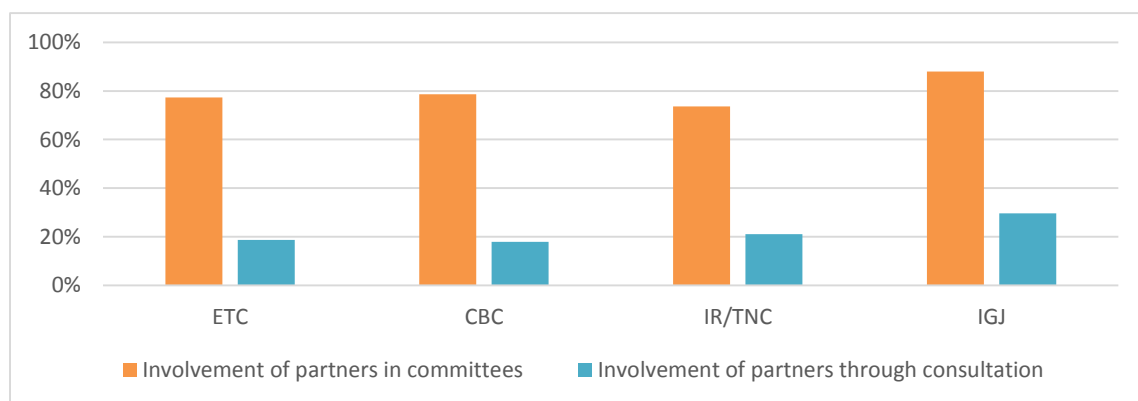
The programme coordinators interviewed generally describe a situation which sees the strong involvement of partners during the implementation process. The Netherlands-Germany and Upper Rhine programmes emphasise partner involvement through topical expert groups which prepare materials for the monitoring and steering committees. The TNC/IR programmes face certain challenges due to the fact that they cover a relatively broad geographical area encompassing significant cultural diversity. In order to ensure coherent management over these areas, all three TNC/IR programme coordinators interviewed highlighted the importance of regional/national contact groups in strengthening the links with regional/national partners during the implementation process.

Even if the rate of partner involvement in the implementation phase is slightly lower in relation to ETC as compared to the IGJ programmes, all programmes seem to have a well-developed plan on how to include partners during this phase.

Capacity-building activities in the Sweden-Norway-Finland ETC programme⁵⁸

One good practice example on capacity-building activities as for the ETC programmes is the Sweden-Norway-Finland ETC programme. One key civil society organisation, the interest organisation for the indigenous people (Sami) community in Finland was lacking capacity to get involved, both because the organisation is very small and because of the language-barrier. The programme MA is planning initiatives to strengthen this capacity, e.g. making regular visits to the interest organisation for the indigenous people community in Finland. The MA has the advantage of having bilingual staff (both Swedish and Finnish) which facilitates the involvement of civil society organisations in both Sweden and Finland.

Figure 27: Share of programmes where partners will be involved in committees/through consultation



Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

5.7 Institutional capacity building

Figure 28 describes the share of programmes, where capacity-building actions have been explicitly mentioned in the programme documents. ETC programmes in general, perform more or less on the

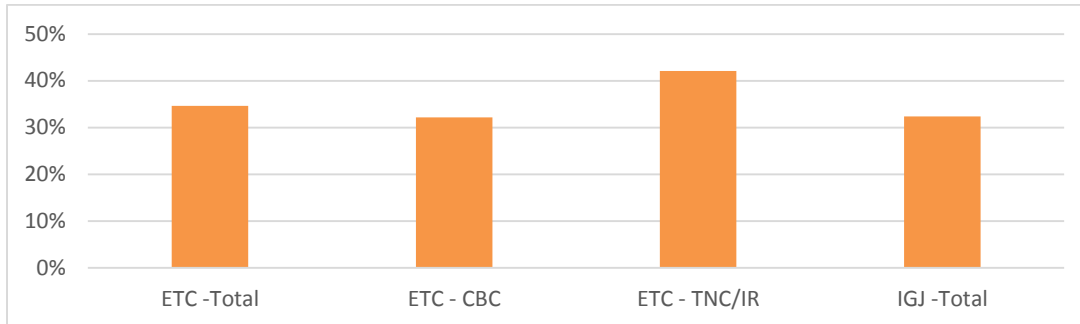
⁵⁸ The information in this text box is based on the interview with the MA for the Sweden-Norway-Finland ETC programme

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

same level as IGJ programmes, while TNC/IR programmes have a slightly higher share of programmes mentioning capacity-building. The results from the survey also confirm the picture of more or less equal performance as regards capacity-building between ETC and IGJ programmes.

The programme coordinators interviewed had a very limited focus on capacity-building actions, in some cases with the justification that the programmes have a long tradition of cooperation with their partners and the individual partners are seen to have a high level of institutional capacity.

Figure 28: Share of programmes which mention capacity-building actions



Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

6 GENERAL ASSESSMENT OF PARTNERSHIPS

Key messages:

- Both partners and MAs emphasise that stakeholder involvement has improved since the 2007-2013 period, specifically in national programmes addressing specific policy fields and Transnational Cooperation/Interregional programmes.
- The modified legal framework increased awareness of the partnership principle and kept the issue on the agenda throughout the programming process. The CoC provided clear guidance on how to work with partnerships and these have largely been followed.
- The partnership principle adds a threefold value to the implementation of European public policies:
 1. Ensuring that experience and technical know-how is considered during decision-making processes, enabling better thematic balance and focus;
 2. Strengthening commitment and ownership and thus facilitating policy implementation;
 3. Bringing complementarities with other policies, strategies and funding sources.
- The mobilisation of partners remains a challenge in a wide range of countries due to low interest or capacity.
- Opportunities to engage in constructive dialogues seem to have been hampered by time constraints.
- Concerns were expressed regarding the administrative rules of the consultation process, which were perceived as being too standardised, leaving little room for national adjustments.
- Informal dialogue with the Commission is more often conducted, and was perceived as more useful, in the context of a programme rather than a Partnership Agreement.
- Informal dialogue facilitated the understanding of new requirements (e.g. Denmark), while also providing relevant feedback.
- Informal dialogue contributed to better adherence to best practices and to the better representation of all types of partners in the processes (e.g. Ireland).
- The assessment of partnership based on document analysis and the online survey shows that in decentralised and federal Member States, the satisfaction with the partnership approach taken tends to be higher than in other Member States. At the same time, smaller centralised Member States tend to provide better accounts of their partnership work in the programme documents and Partnership Agreement.

After the previous chapters discussed policy-making cycles (3 & 4) and ETC programmes specifically (5), chapter 6 gives a more general assessment of partnerships.

This chapter presents the results of three general topics concerning both Partnership Agreements and programmes, 1) the perceived benefits and challenges, 2) a comparison with the 2007-2013 programmatic period, and 3) the perceived value of the informal dialogue between the Member States and the EC.

6.1 Benefits and challenges of the partnerships

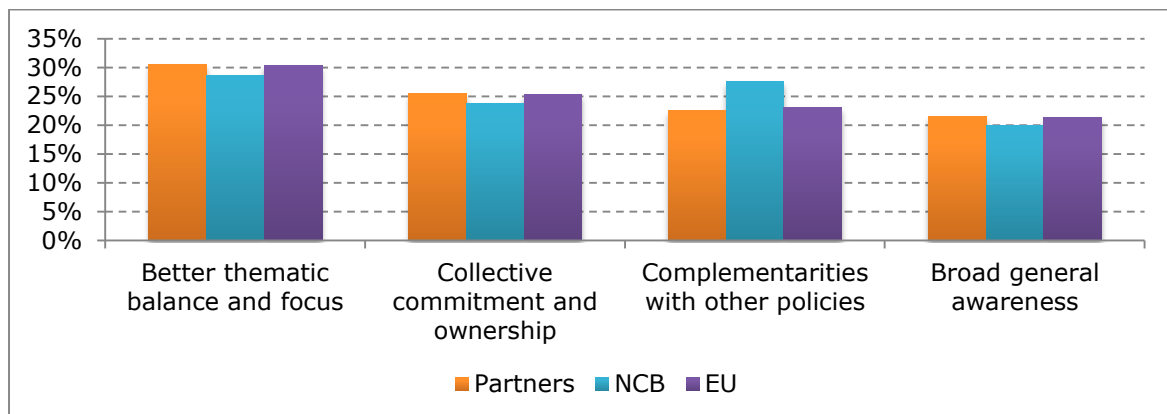
This section presents a number of general findings in respect of the perceived benefits and challenges of partnerships in relation to Partnership Agreements and programmes.

The following benefits are of particular importance:

- In almost all of the interviews, one of the main perceived benefits of the partnership principle is that it ensures **broad ownership and collective commitment**.⁵⁹
- Achieving a **better thematic balance and focus** is also, in many cases, identified as another important benefit of the partnership principle.⁶⁰
- Partnerships brought better complementarities with other policies, strategies and funding sources
- **Partnerships also helped to raise a broad general level of awareness**, which helps to mobilise stakeholders to submit funding applications. This is also perceived as an important benefit.

Overall, the survey data shows a variation in the perception of the partnerships' main benefits. Different benefits were highlighted for most Partnership Agreements. The ranking shows better thematic balance and focus as the main benefits (see Figure 29 below). The NCB and its partners have a different view when it comes to the second- and third-ranked benefits. According to the NCB the second main benefit is complementarity with other policies. For partners, collective commitment and ownership is the main secondary benefit.

Figure 29: Main benefits, Partnership Agreement



Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

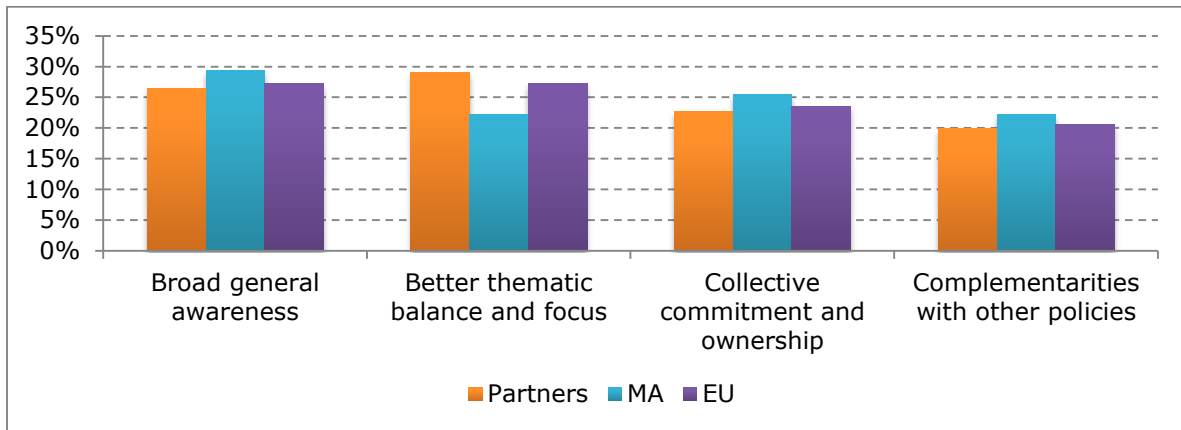
The main benefits of programme partnerships are ranked differently as shown in Figure 30 below. There are small differences between the MA and partners in ranking the main benefits. The MA perceives broad general awareness as the main benefit (29%) whereas partners more frequently selected better thematic balance and focus (29%).

⁵⁹ In Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Bulgaria, Malta, Finland, Cyprus, Poland, Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Slovakia, the Netherlands-Germany, the URBACT and the Sweden-Finland-Norway (North) ETC programme, this was perceived as one of the main benefits.

⁶⁰ This is the case in Estonia, Cyprus, Greece, Bulgaria, Ireland, Slovenia, Poland, Latvia, Malta, and the Northern Periphery and Arctic ETC programmes.

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

Figure 30: Main benefits, programmes



Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

According to interviews with EU-level interest organisations (see Methodological annex), strengthening the partnership principle is seen as very positive, since it highlights subsidiarity. There were, however, concerns regarding the implementation of the partnership principle while significant variations exist in its application as well as various nuances in respect of the perceptions held by different interviewees⁶¹. Overall, and considering the findings highlighted in previous chapters, these variations are best explained by reference to historical legacies and the maturity of the partnership, territorial specificities and distinct local contexts as well as access to resources (financial; personal; information and knowledge – see also Table 1)

Overall, looking at the **main perceived challenges of partnerships**, a rather more distinct picture emerges compared to the main benefits analysed above.

The main **challenges** of the partnership approach are as follows:

- **The difficulty in mobilising all relevant stakeholders**, both due to a lack of capacity and/or interest from certain stakeholders, was noted as one of the main challenges in Austria, Germany, Croatia, Finland, Latvia, Poland, the Netherlands⁶², Ireland, Malta and Spain.
- **Difficulties relating to partners seeing beyond their own interests** and producing focused and balanced documents. This challenge was noted in Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands, France, Poland, Slovenia, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic.
- **Lack of time** to ensure partner involvement was raised as one of the main challenges in Poland, the United Kingdom and France.

The **requirement for thematic concentration** was in a limited number of cases also perceived as a challenge, e.g. in Germany, in particular in light of its possible impact on the level of engagement and ownership of certain partners. This was also mentioned in the Northern Periphery and Arctic programme, where the programme body was perceived as being severely restricted by the regulatory framework and particularly the thematic concentration. The critical comments on thematic concentration, however, should be seen in light of the positive benefits of partnerships as

⁶¹ For example, according to documents from the European Network of Civil Society Associations, NGOs have not been treated as equal partners in the preparation processes in Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Spain and Slovenia. According to the European Network of Civil Society Associations the MAs did not provide any feedback on comments made by stakeholders in these cases. This view was also shared in documents and interviews with CEE Bankwatch and Friends of the Earth. In addition, a good case in point is Sweden. While the CEMR, for instance, perceives SE as one of the best performing countries, SKL perceived participation in SE as “one-way-communication”, “strongly” steered by the “national level” and variations of local level participation “rather focused on larger municipalities”.

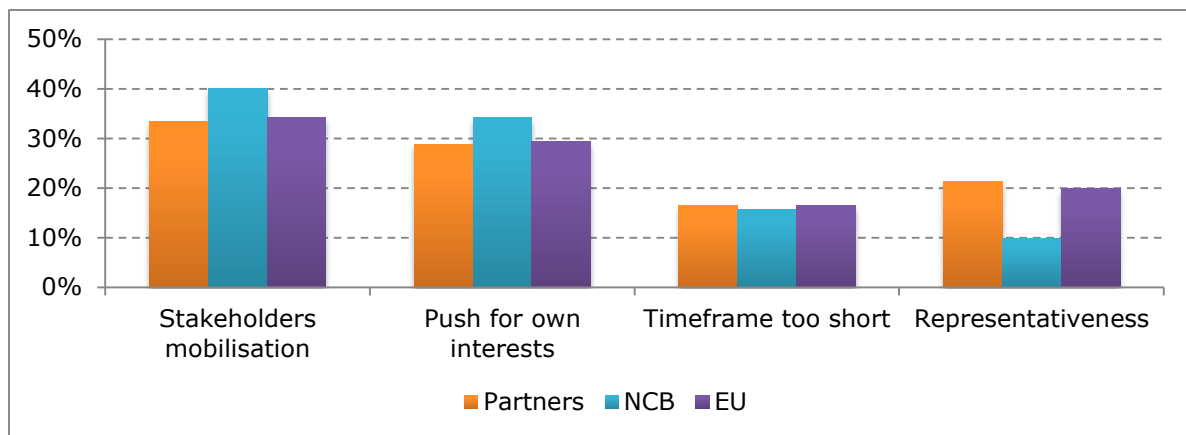
⁶² For instance it was difficult to mobilise some groups of stakeholders (e.g. SME's) but for other groups there was no difficulty (e.g. knowledge institutions, municipalities...)

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

discussed above. Partnership is not cost-free as there is sometimes a trade-off between wide consultation on one hand and efficiency on the other hand.

Challenges also come in the form of **stakeholder mobilisation**; some stakeholders are perceived as pushing particular interests thus challenging the creation of a focused and balanced document. In both cases, the NCB perceived this to be more of a challenge than the partners did. Partners rather than the NCB perceived the representativeness of the partnerships to be the main challenge (21% partners compared to 10% NCB) (figure 31)

Figure 31: Main challenges, Partnership Agreement

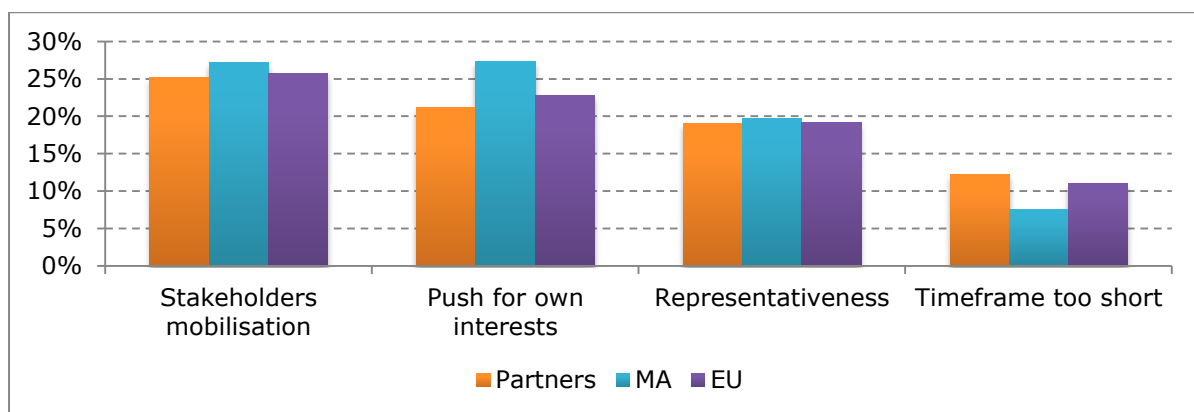


Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

Differentiating the survey results by Member States shows that only minor differences exist between the Member States and does not alter the ranking as presented above.

As seen in Figure 32 below, MAs and partners note two challenges more frequently. Mobilising stakeholders due to low interest or capacity (26%) and stakeholders pushing for particular interests were more often indicated than other challenges (MA 27%, partners 21%).

Figure 32: Main challenges, programmes



Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

According to interviews with EU-level interest organisations (see Methodological annex), one of the main challenges is that many countries lack a **real culture of partnership**; hence authorities and partners struggle to find their roles. The partnership principle requires new thinking from both authorities and partners. Personal contacts and more traditional lobbying are still often perceived to be more successful than just participating in partnerships. As previous chapters have shown, capacity-building is of fundamental importance and goes hand-in-hand with the availability and accessibility of resources. Institutional factors such as state tradition, policy style, constitutional competences and the attributed tasks of sub-national actors are both a limitation and a propelling factor in the development of partnership cultures and their maturity.

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

The findings suggest that the **partnership principle adds a threefold value to the implementation of European Cohesion policies**. Firstly, it ensures that experience and technical know-how is considered during decision-making processes, enabling better thematic balance and focus. This can be exemplified through examples such as Estonia, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Ireland, Slovenia, Poland, Latvia, Malta, and the Northern Periphery and Arctic ETC programme. Secondly, the partnership principle brings commitment and ownership and thus facilitates policy implementation, such as could be observed in Estonia, Ireland, Bulgaria, Malta, Finland, Cyprus, Poland, the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Slovakia, the Netherlands-Germany ETC programme and the Sweden-Finland-Norway (North) ETC programme. Thirdly, the interviews show that partnerships have brought about complementarities in respect of other policies, strategies and funding sources in Finland, Poland, Bulgaria, Spain and Slovenia.

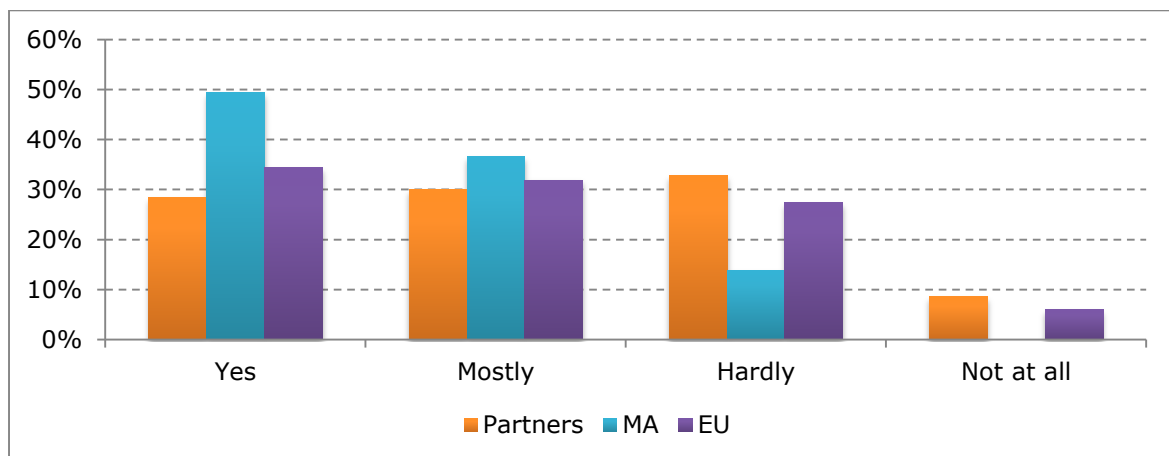
The **main challenge** has been the mobilisation of certain categories of partners, which concerns a wide range of countries. These countries include Austria, Germany, Croatia, Finland, Latvia, Poland, the Netherlands, Ireland, Malta and Spain. Secondly, experience in Germany, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands, France, Poland, Slovenia, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic shows that it is difficult to develop balanced strategies when the stakeholders promote vested interests. Thirdly, the opportunities to engage in constructive dialogue seem to have been hampered by time constraints in the United Kingdom, France and Poland. Finally, concerns were expressed regarding the administrative rules of the consultation process. These rules were often perceived as being too standardised, leaving little room for national adjustments in, for instance, France, Luxembourg and Slovenia, Germany and the Northern Periphery and Arctic programme. In a limited number of cases (e.g. Germany, the Northern Periphery and Arctic programmes) specific concerns were expressed regarding the requirements of thematic concentration.

6.2 Comparison with the 2007-2013 period

After analysing patterns of perceived challenges and benefits for the current programming period in section 6.1, this section presents a number of general findings from the survey and the interviews on the perceived development of partnerships as compared to the 2007-2013 programming period. Involvement in Partnership Agreements and programmes are both considered.

The survey included one question inviting respondents to compare the current experience with stakeholder involvement in the 2007-2013 programming period: "Has stakeholder involvement improved compared with the 2007-2013 programme period?" As shown in figure 33, **both MAs and partners perceived an improvement**. Partners however viewed this issue somewhat more critically, with 58% of them perceiving a degree of improvement compared to the 2007-2013 period, as against 86% of the MAs.

Figure 33: Perceived improvement compared to the 2007-2013 period; both regarding Partnership Agreement and programmes



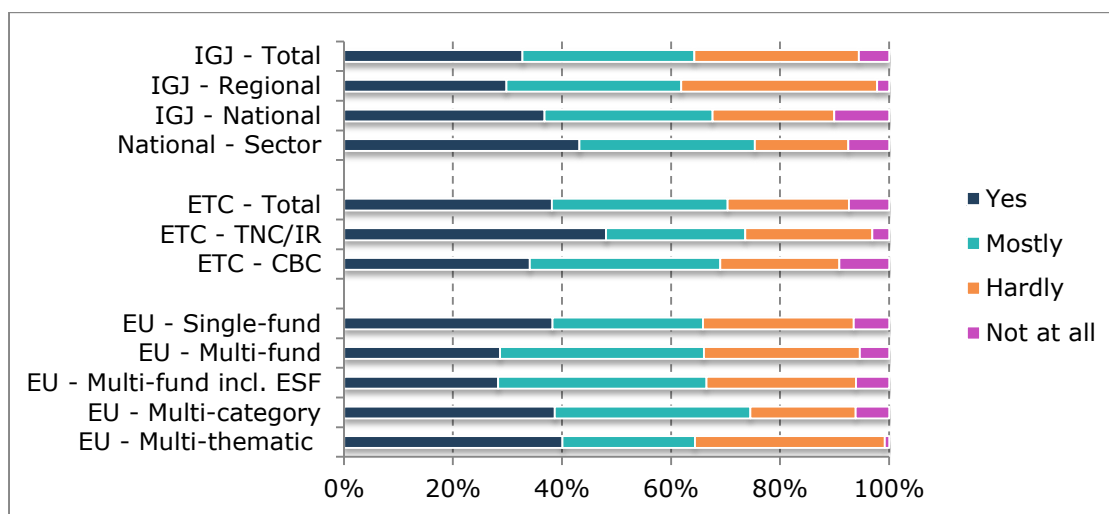
Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

Despite its legally non-binding character (and hence the absence of sanctions in case of infringement), as well as its introduction when the programming processes were well under way, **the CoC appears as having played an important role** in increasing awareness of the partnership principle and keeping the issue on the agenda throughout the programming process. The CoC has further strengthened the focus on the importance of partnership, thus creating opportunities to reflect on and improve established methods.

Zooming in on the different types of programmes, a mixed picture therefore emerges. There are, for instance, more positive answers for national IGJ programmes, especially for national programmes that addressed a specific policy field. However, these programmes also received more answers indicating no change at all if the two programme periods are compared (Figure 34). As for multi-fund programmes, fewer respondents have answered “Yes” than for the single-fund programmes but if we also include the answer “Mostly”, an equal number of respondents have answered that there have been improvement compared to the 2007-2013 period for multi-fund programmes and for single-fund programmes.

Figure 34: Improvement compared to the 2007-2013 period, programmes



Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

Additional insights and background information was also received from the interviews and the document studies.

Overall, both the interviews and the document analysis suggest that the partnership approach has been improved when compared to the previous period. This is, to a large extent, assumed to be due to experience but also owed much to the push for a stronger partnership approach by the EC and the availability of the CoC which served as benchmark, contributing to clarify the role of partnerships and the application of the partnership principle. Room for improvement remains however, as specifically highlighted by the submissions of the social and economic as well as the civil society partners.

Different national cultures and traditions of cooperation materialise into substantial differences between Member States. This concerns both the level of expectation concerning the likely involvement of partners as well as their actual involvement. Drawing on interviews with programmes and EU-level interest organisations, these observations can be further substantiated with the following examples:

Stakeholder involvement and partnership balance in light of different national cultures and traditions of cooperation⁶³

Germany

Due to the strengthened legal framework, cooperation with partners intensified.⁶⁴ The cooperation process started much earlier as compared to previous funding periods.

Estonia:

Input and degree of involvement varied according to the capacity of the partners and their willingness to participate. While partners' capacity has improved, the ability of partners to see a wider context and to make strategic decisions still, to a large extent, varies. While in the previous planning period however it was mainly umbrella organisations that were involved, the capacity of NGOs to participate in policymaking has now increased in all areas.

France:

A clear improvement in stakeholder involvement at the national level was noticed.⁶⁵ The partnership was much more structured (with a stronger legal basis) and clear involvement paths in terms of implementation were defined. The perception of improvement varied however across the French regions.

Poland

Stakeholder involvement improved compared to the 2007-2013 programming period. Improvement here concerned issues of general awareness, thematic balance and focus, meeting the needs and potential of the territory through experience and technical knowledge and better complementarities with other policies, strategies and funding sources in the area.

The Netherlands

The use of partnerships was already said to be strong in 2007-2013 period. Furthermore, the increased emphasis on partnerships in the regulations for the 2014-2020 ESIF programming period has further influenced their use. A strengthened focus on partnership creates opportunities to reflect on established methods and to improve them. In general, the legal basis is seen as having been improved as compared to the 2007-2013 period.

Spain

The balance of partners has improved since the last programming period, mainly due to a more regionalised process that developed and improved regional dialogues on priorities and strategies. New provisions for the partnership principle and multi-level governance have positively influenced the programming process. In general, new partners have been involved, the participation process was more open and transparent and more and better informed comments and proposals were sent to the MAs.

Greece

The overall assessment of the legal basis for the partnership principle is that a slight improvement has been experienced as compared to the previous programming period.

In other cases, there were no significant changes in the involvement of partners compared to the 2007-2013 programme period.

- In mainland Finland, the modified legal framework through the CoC increased awareness of the partnership principle and kept the issue on the agenda throughout the programming process.

⁶³ The information in this text box derives from both the survey and from interviews.

⁶⁴ This point was made by the NCB.

⁶⁵ This point was made by the NCB.

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

The MA did not however see any major impact from the modified legal framework due to the already well-established processes in place with the stakeholders.

- In Ireland, stakeholder engagement during the Partnership Agreement drafting and programming stages for 2014-2020 was not much of an improvement compared to the previous period and was, rather, a continuation of a historically close and positive relationship.
- In Lithuania, the strengthened legal basis has only slightly improved the involvement patterns of partners.
- In Sweden, the strengthened legal basis and the CoC have not influenced partner involvement in a significant manner. The general message emerging from the interviews is that the CoC does not change anything since they already worked in partnerships.

According to the EU-level interest organisations, many aspects of the process have been improved since the 2007-2013 programme period. Stakeholder dialogues have been formalised, time planning, timing and access to documents has improved and partners are now afford a much higher level of recognition. There are, however, examples of the opposite trend occurring, such as in Hungary, where programming was moved to the Prime Minister's Office and documents were held back.

Both partners and MAs emphasise improved stakeholder involvement since the 2007-2013 programming period. Forty nine percent of all MAs surveyed (Figure 34 above) argue that the current programmes are more inclusive. This is especially applicable to national programmes addressing specific policy fields as well as Transnational /Interregional programmes. Zooming in on individual Member States, the evidence suggests that partner cooperation intensified in countries such as the Czech Republic, Germany, France, Spain, Poland and the Netherlands. Overall, some respondents (Germany, France and the Netherlands) underlined the importance of the modified legal framework which increased awareness of the partnership principle and kept the issue on the agenda throughout the programming process.

6.3 Value of informal dialogue between the EC and the Member States

Informal dialogue between the EC and the Member States holds out the promise of either avoiding or successfully tackling some of the challenges discussed in sections 6.1 and 6.2. Consequently, this section presents a number of general findings on the perceived usefulness of informal dialogues between Member States and the EC in respect of partnerships. Involvement in both Partnership Agreements and programmes is considered. The data analysed stems from the survey and interviews.

It should be understood that the dialogue passes through different stages during programming. It begins at an informal level where desk officers at the European Commission and national coordinators and/or managing authorities are in contact and exchange information. Once the CPR had been approved, Art. 5 forms the basis for the dialogue and partnership approach. This was subsequently enriched and further supported by the CoC.

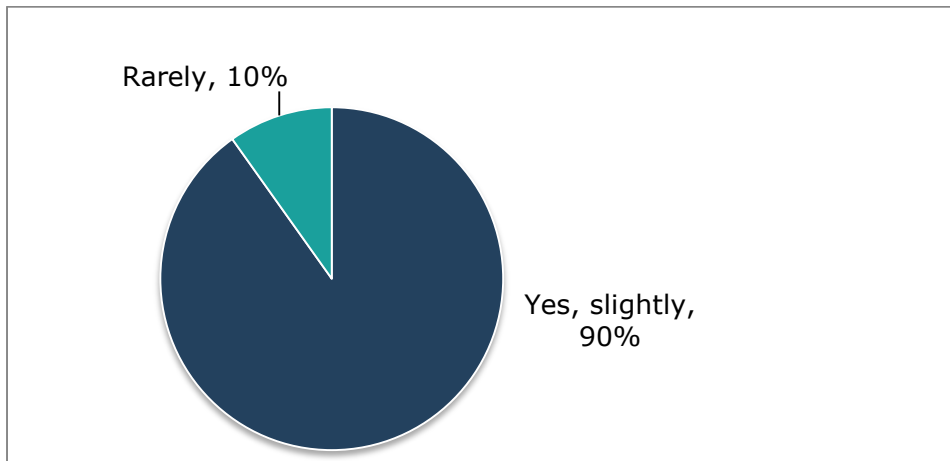
The survey included two questions posed to NCBs in order to assess the value of informal dialogue with the EC:

- Did you have any informal dialogue with the EC regarding the implementation of the partnership and multi-level governance?
- Did this dialogue improve the implementation of the partnership principle?

The survey, however, resulted in a limited number of responses from the NCB while not all of the Partnership Agreements are covered by the survey.

Discussing partnership and multi-level governance through informal dialogue seems to be positive, although its actual usefulness is limited. For the Partnership Agreements with fewer informal dialogues (Bulgaria and Italy), the usefulness of informal dialogues was seen to be rather limited. NCBs from these Member States indicated that the informal dialogues were only slightly useful.

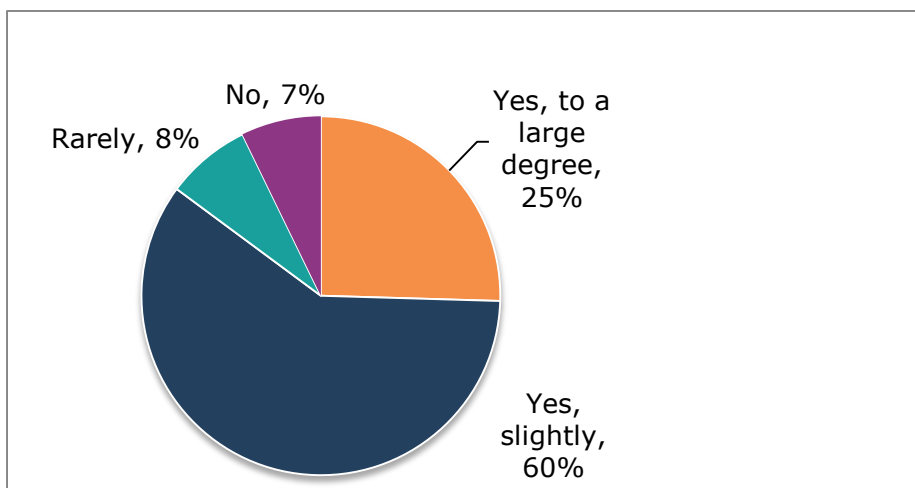
Figure 35: Usefulness of informal dialogue, Partnership Agreement



Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

When it comes to the usefulness of informal dialogue in relation to the programmes, the picture looks very different (Figure 36 below) when compared to the Partnership Agreement. While 25% of the respondents find informal dialogues between the EC and the Member States largely useful, 7% do not consider them as useful at all. The majority, (60%) answered in the affirmative and find those dialogues to be slightly useful.

Figure 36: Usefulness of informal dialogue, programmes



Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

In conclusion, the informal dialogue with the Commission was perceived as more useful in the context of a programme rather than a Partnership Agreement. More specifically, the informal dialogue with the EC has facilitated the understanding of new requirements, as in Denmark, while also providing relevant feedback. Hence, such dialogues contributed to better adherence to best practices and to a better representation of all types of partners in the processes, with one such example being that of Ireland.

Examples of added value of the informal dialogue with the EC in the implementation of the partnership principle⁶⁶

Spain

The informal dialogue with the EC helped to improve partnership implementation in a number of ways. It was also seen as important in selecting additional partners while changing the internal regulation of monitoring committees, and in the conversion of existing thematic networks.

Netherlands

The MA and NCB had regular informal meetings with the EC. While the implementation of the partnership principle was not the main subject of discussion in these meetings it was nevertheless included in the dialogue. This was particularly so in respect of negotiations over whether the programmes were to have all partners involved in the preparations of the programmes and the MCs.

Ireland

The dialogue with the EC played an important role in the finalisation of the Partnership Agreement and programmes. However, this dialogue did not tend to focus on the application of the partnership principle and multi-level governance because they were not viewed as problematic areas. The Ireland interviewees did however express the view that the European CoC [on Partnership] was useful as a formal point of reference through the drafting and programming processes, to ensure that best practice was adhered to and that no 'gaps' appeared in the involvement of a broad and representative range of partners.

Denmark

Communication with the Danish desks of DG Regio and DG Employment has been very good. Dialogue with the EC helped the NCB, especially regarding new requirements such as social inclusion and sustainable urban development, and concerning the types of stakeholders that it was important to include.

6.4 Assessment of partnership in EU Member States

This study analyses the implementation of the different Member States regarding the partnership principle.

During the study it became evident that the perception respondents had of the analysed processes is not always coherent with the views presented in the programmes and Partnership Agreement documents.

To conduct a proper description of the partnerships, the different sources of information have, to a certain degree, been treated separately while also being put in a wider context in order to understand why deviations between different data sources exist.

Based on the survey results and the document analysis, two separate indices are calculated to describe the implementation of the Member States regarding the partnership principle and multi-level governance⁶⁷.

Firstly, it is important to note that the two data sources represent different viewpoints. The database is based on what is written in the programme documents and Partnership Agreements, whereas the survey represents the perceptions of the process of certain individuals.

⁶⁶ The information in this text box derives from both the survey and from interviews.

⁶⁷ Please consult the methodological annex for further description of the two indices.

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

By combining these indices, it is possible to illustrate both the documented information and the perception collected through the survey. Even if the two indices are not entirely comparable in terms of the questions on which they are based, this comparison nevertheless enables a review of the partnership principle and its implementation in different Member States.

Figure 37 presents a combination of these indices. The indices are covering results both regarding the programmes and the Partnership Agreements.

The **survey index** is based on the following questions:

1. Have the stakeholders been identified in a transparent procedure?
2. Was any stakeholder group under- or over-represented in the partnership?
3. To what extent did you have access to documents and information in time to prepare for participation in partnership meetings etc.?
4. Has enough time been allocated for the consultation process?
5. Do you have the impression that the comments of all stakeholders have been treated in the same way?
6. Are any particular actions envisaged to strengthen the institutional capacity of the involved partners?
7. How did you experience the participation of different stakeholder groups in the development of the document?
8. Do you see a risk that in the implementation process stakeholder groups are missing or over-represented in the partnership?

In this context it shall be noted that survey results for individual Member States shall be treated with care since the response rate is low in some cases. The methodological annex shows more details on this matter.

The **index for the documents** is based on the following questions:

1. Are all categories of partners included in the partnership?
2. Is there any description of comments raised from the partnership?
3. Is there any description of how comments from partners have been taken on board?
4. Have partners been involved in any committees during the drafting process?
5. Have partners been involved with any consultation during the drafting process?
6. Will partners participate in any committees during the implementation process?
7. Will partners be involved in any consultation during the implementation process?
8. Are any actions planned to strengthen the institutional capacity of partners?

The countries in the upper right section are **above the average, according to both the survey and the document analysis**. This means that there is relative consistency between the survey and the documents results, and the assessment is high. Looking into further detail at these specific examples could provide valuable insight on what type of actions are needed so that a higher number of countries would fit under this category in the future.

In the lower right section, the **respondents considered the partnership to be relatively strong, but the documentation of these countries showed some shortcoming** in the implementation of the partnerships.

Countries indicating the opposite can be found in the upper left section. These countries **performed well according to the documents, but appraised low according to the survey**.

Finally, in the lower left-hand section, we find those countries that are **below the average, both in terms of the survey and the database**.

Many countries are gathered approximately in the centre of the figure, indicating the existence of relative **coherence between the survey and the document results**. There are however numerous exceptions to this pattern. The three Baltic States are gathered in the upper centre, indicating a strong partnership in respect of documents but a rather weaker level on the survey. Slovenia is an extreme case in the sense that assessment is high in terms of the documents but the lowest in respect of the survey. The document analysis in the case of Germany, Poland and Spain reveals some shortcomings in the implementation of partnerships, while the stakeholders themselves nevertheless have a relatively positive perception of the partnership. Finally, Malta is

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

the country with the most obviously consistent high assessment, in respect of both the documents and the survey. The interpretation for those countries which have a relative consistent level in terms of both the survey and the documents, e.g. Malta, is straightforward; the description of the functionality of partnership in the documents is coherent with whether the stakeholders perceived the process to be positive or negative.

The interpretation when combining the results of the survey and document analysis is more ambiguous where the **partnership is weak in the documents but strong according to the surveyed stakeholders**. In countries with a strong tradition of partnerships, such as Austria, Sweden or the Netherlands, the document itself may actually play only a minor role since the partnerships are embedded in a broader political culture that does not need to be 'put on paper' to be viable. In countries with a weaker tradition or culture of partnerships, and where partners are thus not used to being involved in participatory governance arrangements, even a relatively weak level of enforcement through documents may still be an improvement and result in positive reactions from stakeholders. This may in fact be the case in countries such as Croatia, Bulgaria and Poland.

Where the **documents described the partnership as strong while the survey describes it as weak**, interpretations can also diverge in a similar manner.

In countries with long pluralistic, democratic and participatory traditions, a stakeholder may expect to be heavily involved in partnerships and multi-level governance structures. Hence, a relatively strong partnership on paper may still not be strong enough to satisfy the demands and expectations of the stakeholders. This may be the case in countries like Denmark and Belgium.

Another interpretation here is that in countries where partners have few opportunities to hold the programme/Partnership Agreement drafters accountable, the documents seem often only written to satisfy the demands of the CoC, while there is no 'on-the-ground' action. Slovenia seems to be a variant of such a case; at least opinions between the National Coordination Body (NCB) and the partners are strongly divergent. Many partners, especially from the civil society sector, are very critical of the level of transparency, the treatment of comments and of their opportunities for general involvement in the process. The NCB on the other hand considered that the partners were only competing for resources without a feeling for the common good. A possible explanation of this situation is the lack of political will and instability at the time of the drafting process due to a change of government and an ongoing process of ministry reconstruction. The NCB also faced a general lack of capacity due to budget cuts and difficulties in recruiting additional staff.

Ireland, Cyprus and Luxembourg have not been included in the figure given that the survey results could be biased due to low response rate. Documents however describe partnership as strong in Cyprus and Ireland, whereas in Luxembourg they showed shortcomings in the implementation of partnership.

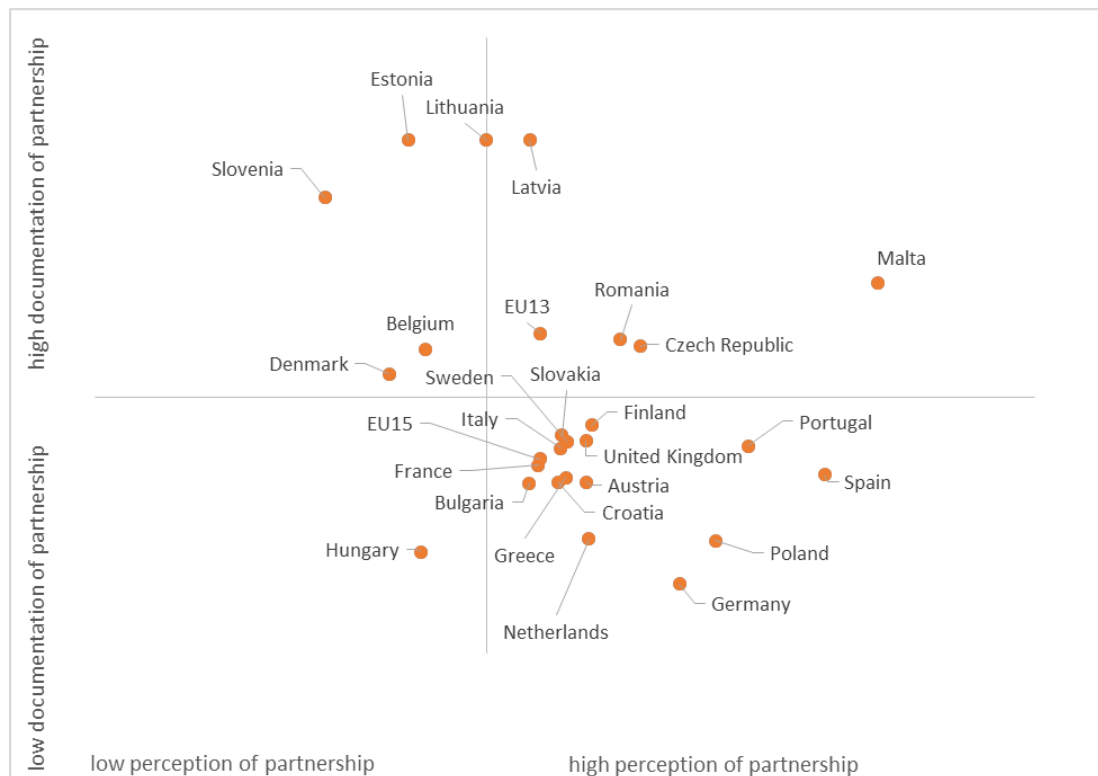
In addition to the Member States, the average of the EU-15 (i.e. countries that joined the EU before 2004) and of the EU-13 (i.e. countries that joined the EU 2004 or later) is calculated. In relation to the survey results, the assessment is more or less the same for the two groups, but looking at the vertical axis presenting the partnership according to the documents, the Member States that joined the EU after 2004 are appraised higher compared to the old.

The assessment of partnership based on document analysis and the online survey shows that in decentralised and federal Member States, the satisfaction with the partnership approach taken (i.e. the perceived function of the partnerships) tends to be higher than in other Member States. At the same time, smaller centralised Member States tend to provide better accounts of their partnership work in the programme documents and Partnership Agreement.

The assessment of partnership based on the documents can also be used to test whether there is any correlation on programme level between the assessment of partnership and various programmes characteristics such as aid intensity and types of programmes. The results are presented in Annex II, and the general conclusion is that the assessment of partnership based on the documents does not show any correlation with the above mentioned programmes characteristics.

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

Figure 37: Assessment of partnership in EU 28⁶⁸



Source: Project team 2015 (Sweco and Spatial Foresight)

7 CONCLUSIONS

Improved partnerships. The application of the partnership principle has improved in the 2014-2020 ESIF period as compared to previous programme periods. This concerns both the role partnerships played in the development and the envisaged implementation of programmes including ERDF funding as well as the development of Partnership Agreements. This positive trend was emphasised by both partners and MAs, specifically when it came to national programmes addressing specific policy fields and Transnational Cooperation/Interregional programmes.

Cooperation with partners intensified in a number of countries, such as Germany, France, Spain, and the Netherlands as well as the Czech Republic and Poland. Respondents from a number of countries also underlined the importance of the modified legal framework, contributing positively to increased awareness of the partnership principle while keeping the issue on the agenda throughout the programming process.

The European Code of Conduct on Partnership contributed to this improvement. Although the CoC came only in to place when programming had started and has no legally binding character, it is largely appreciated and served as benchmark, contributing to clarify the role of partnerships and the application of the partnership principle. Indeed, the CoC is seen as integral part of the modified legal framework which is perceived positively. The CoC provided clear guidance on how to work with partnerships and these have largely been followed.

The partnership principle has been satisfactorily respected in a wide range of countries and programmes. For example, the report indicates that, generally:

- partner identification procedures have been transparent;

⁶⁸ Ireland, Cyprus and Luxembourg have been deleted because of low response rate on the survey

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

- background documents were submitted on time;
- sufficient time was allocated for the public consultation process.

Still, some of the stakeholders, in particular MAs, perceive the administrative rules concerning the consultation process as cumbersome, i.e. too standardised, leaving little room for national adjustments.

Added value of partnerships. The partnership principle adds a threefold value to the implementation of programmes and Partnership Agreements:

- Ensuring that experience and technical know-how is considered during decision-making processes, enabling better thematic balance and focus
- Strengthening commitment and ownership and thus facilitating policy implementation,
- Introducing complementarities with other policies, strategies and funding sources.

Working in partnership on ESIF programmes or Partnership Agreements is generally perceived as a benefit. However, given the complexity of the topics at stake and of the diversity of partners involved it is not without challenges.

Challenges of partnerships. Despite the emergence of these positive trends a number of challenges and obstacles were identified. Working in partnerships is not always easy as different partners come with different perspectives and possibly conflicting interests need to be managed. Indeed, running productive partnership approaches comes with a management cost.

Overall, and irrespective of country size, duration of EU membership or the constitutional responsibilities of sub-national authorities, the greatest challenge across a broad range of countries remains the **mobilisation of partners**. Zooming-in further on the different stages of the lifecycle of programme (programming implementation, monitoring and evaluation) shows that in some countries it is difficult to develop balanced strategies when the stakeholders promote their own vested interests. Furthermore, opportunities to engage in constructive dialogue have seemingly been hampered by time constraints in certain cases.

ETC Programmes. In some cases, the results derived from ETC programmes deviate from those deriving from IGJ programmes.

- ETC programmes are prone to gathering partners' input through discussion/review during drafting.
- Stakeholder identification was perceived as generally more transparent in ETC programmes.
- A high percentage of ETC programmes mentioned comments from partners.
- The ETC programme category of transnational cooperation and interregional programmes emphasises that stakeholder involvement has improved since the 2007-2013 period.

Balanced partnerships. Based on the analysis of programmes and Partnership Agreements, partnerships appear as generally balanced⁶⁹. The absence of some types of partners according to the documents is not necessarily reflected in the perceptions of stakeholders answering the survey and interviews. There is also, in some cases, a discrepancy between the actual and the perceived representation of certain partner groups, e.g. concerning local authorities (explained in part by the fact that local authorities in many countries are represented through umbrella organisations).

New and old partnerships. In general terms, countries that joined in or after 2004 have more often established new partnerships both for programmes and Partnership Agreements, compared to countries that joined before 2004. The latter group of countries have sought to build on existing partnerships. While exceptions do exist, there are also discrepancies between what the documents stated and what the survey respondents perceive. It should moreover be noted here that some survey respondents might not have access to a complete overview of this matter.

⁶⁹ In Austria, Germany, Netherlands and Poland some types of partners have not been mentioned in the Partnership Agreements.

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

Participation processes. The precise ways in which specific partners have been involved and the kind of contributions they were invited to make, or indeed were capable of making, differs greatly across the EU. A wide range of participation processes persists – partly addressing different types of partners – including monitoring committees, combinations of public online consultations and target consultations, as well as thematic seminars and meetings.

Capacity building for partners. In order to enable partners to participate, a number of procedural actions are envisaged in the different Member States, in addition to capacity-building interventions. Regarding the procedural actions, almost all programmes have planned actions to involve partners during the implementation process, mainly by involving them in committees. As regards capacity-building, there is clearly a substantial difference between what is described in the programme documents and what the involved stakeholder actually perceives. Furthermore, national sector-oriented programmes seldom mention activities designed to enhance institutional capacity-building. On the allocation of funding for capacity-building in ERDF programmes also including ESF funds, 34% of these programmes will allocate resources enabling the social partners to participate or to build NGO capacity.

Dialogue with the Commission. The perceived value of the informal dialogue between the Member States and the European Commission remains ambivalent. In some Member States, it facilitated the understanding of new requirements (e.g. in Denmark) and provided relevant feedback. Dialogues also led to a better adherence to best practices and to the better representation of all types of partners in the processes (e.g. in Ireland). However, in countries that did not consider the implementation of partnerships to be a problematic issue (e.g. the Netherlands), the partnership principle was not the main subject of discussion although it was included in the dialogue.

Ways forward. Stakeholder involvement and working in partnership constantly needs to be adjusted to changing cooperation circumstances. The DG REGIO report 'Local and Regional Partners Contributing to Europe 2020: Multi-level governance in support of Europe 2020'⁷⁰, published in 2015, provides a few key lessons for improving partnerships. In addition, and with special focus on partnerships for implementing ESI Funds, some points for consideration for national and programme authorities derive from the present study:

- Partnerships providing added value for a programme need to be thoroughly managed. Accordingly resources for the management are important – although there is a trade-off between efficiency and effectiveness.
- Planned actions to involve partners in the implementation process should be followed-up and assessed regularly to see whether things can be improved further.
- As the implementation moves on, the composition of the partnership may change and partnerships might benefit from taking on board new partners.
- Capacity building schemes for partners and a clear focus on the added value of the partnerships (both for the programmes and the individual partners) may help, especially when mobilising the relevant partners raises a challenge.
- Avoiding imbalances in the partnership both as regards its formal composition as well as the actual role and influence of partners can be crucial.
- The role of the partners and the competences required to fulfil this role varies throughout the programme lifecycle. Measures for capacity building for the partnership can help the partnership to adjust to its changing roles.
- Different means of stakeholder participation can be considered at different stages of the programme lifecycle. Creating the right mix and reaching out to the right people can help building a community of practice around the topics of the programme in the programme area.

Table 4 provides a summary of the findings and some practice examples structured around topics that have been systematically analysed throughout the report.

⁷⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/studies/2015/local-and-regional-partners-contributing-to-europe-2020-multi-level-governance-in-support-of-europe-2020

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

Table 4: Key Messages

Theme	Key Messages	Practice Examples
Partnership principle in 2014-2020 ERDF / CF programmes	<p>The partnership principle is implemented very differently across the EU.</p> <p>Implementation depends on national administrative structures & cultures, the technical & financial capacity of the partners & political circumstances in the country / region / locality.</p> <p>Different governance dimensions serve to analyse these differences and guide the analysis.</p>	
Composition of partnerships (article 2, 3 and 4 of the CoC)	<p>Partnerships for both Partnership Agreements and programmes involve, in general, all types of partners.</p> <p>Partnerships are not necessarily perceived as unbalanced in Member States that lack certain types of partners according to documents.</p> <p>A perceived lack of some types of partners in some Member States can, in part, be explained by the high level of expectations in respect of partner involvement.</p> <p>Countries that joined the EU in or after 2004 tend, more often than not, to have established new partnerships; 'old' Member States tend to build on existing partnerships. There are however a number of important exceptions to this general tendency.</p>	<p>Slovenia and Slovakia – new partnership arrangements in the making (p.11)</p> <p>Finland and Denmark – high involvement but even higher expectations on involvement (p.11)</p> <p>United Kingdom – different methods for partner selections in the five constituent parts (p.13)</p> <p>Portugal – new partnerships in a majority of programmes (p.14)</p> <p>France – multi-step selection procedure (p.14)</p>
Programming phase (article 5(2), 6, 7b, 8, 9a of the CoC)	<p>There is, in general, a high level of involvement of partners in programmes and Partnership Agreements across all Member States.</p> <p>Partnership Agreements: partners are most commonly involved in the selection of thematic objectives and in analysing disparities and needs.</p> <p>Programmes: partners are most commonly involved in developing programme priorities and in the needs analysis.</p> <p>Document analysis and survey show that comments and input from partners have generally been treated better in ETC and single fund programmes.</p>	<p>Ireland – broad range of partner types involved (p.19)</p> <p>Germany – partner involvement through consultations and thematic seminars (p.19)</p> <p>Austria – Timely and easy access to documents (p.21)</p> <p>Denmark – Transparent involvement of partners (p.21)</p> <p>Malta – equal treatment of input from partners (p.22)</p>
Partnerships in the implementation,	Almost all programmes have planned actions to involve partners during	Partnership training and capacity building – examples of good practice: Croatia, Denmark, Spain, Estonia, Finland, Ireland (p.28)

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in
2014-2020 ESI Funds

<p>monitoring and evaluation phase (article 9b of the CoC, article 6 of the ESF regulation and article 5.3 of the CPR)</p>	<p>the implementation process, mainly through committees.</p> <p>Partnerships are expected to have an high share of public authorities.</p> <p>Stakeholder perception and programme documents describing capacity-building are substantially different.</p> <p>National sector-oriented programmes rarely mention institutional capacity-building activities.</p> <p>26% of ESF-funded programmes plan to use global grants. This activity is more common in regional than in national IGJ programmes.</p> <p>34% of ESF funded programmes will allocate resources to enable the social partners to participate in, or to build, NGO capacity.</p>	<p>Capacity-building activities in Southern Italy: The SMeDis project (Competitive Development for Southern Italy through Social Dialogue (p.29)</p>
<p>European Territorial Cooperation Programmes (articles 2, 4, 5(2), 8 and 9 of the CoC)</p>	<p>Document analysis and survey indicate a low involvement of civil society and social/economic partners.</p> <p>Partnerships are mainly built on previously established structures. In several cases, a small group of public authorities strongly influences partnership composition.</p> <p>Partners are generally directly involved in the drafting process.</p> <p>Procedures are largely considered to be transparent.</p> <p>The uptake of comments from partners worked satisfactorily.</p> <p>There are usually planned actions on how to involve partners during the implementation process, e.g. through topical or geographical expert groups.</p> <p>Limited focus, though at same level as IGJ programmes, on capacity-building action.</p>	<p>Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme – strong tradition of partner involvement (p.33)</p> <p>Partner involvement through topical expert groups in the Netherlands-Germany and Upper Rhine ETC programme (p.36)</p> <p>Capacity-building activities in the Sweden-Norway-Finland ETC programme (p.38)</p>
<p>General assessment of partnerships (benefits, challenges, difference compared to 2007-2013, value</p>	<p>The partnership principle adds a threefold value to the implementation of European public policies: 1) ensuring consideration of experience & technical know-how in decision-making; 2) strengthening commitment & ownership; 3) introducing complementarities with other policies, strategies and funding sources.</p>	<p>Stakeholder involvement and partnership balance in light of different national cultures and traditions of cooperation: Germany, Estonia, France, Poland, Netherlands, Spain, Greece (p.42)</p> <p>Examples of added value of the informal dialogue with the EC in the implementation of the partnership principle: Spain, Netherlands,</p>

Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds

of informal dialogue)	<p>Stakeholder involvement improved since the 2007-2013 period and intensified in a number of countries.</p> <p>The modified legal framework and the availability of the European Code of Conduct on Partnership contributed to this improvement. Despite not having legally binding character, the code of conduct was largely followed and helped clarifying the role of partnerships and the application of the partnership principle.</p> <p>Some countries have difficulties in developing balanced strategies when the stakeholders promote their own vested interests.</p> <p>Time constraints & administrative rules in relation to the consultation process are often seen as obstacles.</p> <p>Diverging perceptions exist as to the value of the informal dialogue between the Member States and the EC, with informal dialogue often seen as being more useful in the programmes than in the Partnership Agreements.</p>	Ireland, Denmark (p.45)
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ANNEX I: METHODOLOGY

1.1 Data collection and analysis

This chapter describes the method of data collection and analysis of how the partnership principle and multi-level governance have been reflected in Partnership Agreements and programmes.

The aim of data collection and analysis (task 2 of the study) was to provide a synthesis of how the provisions relating to the partnership principle and multi-level governance are reflected in Partnership Agreements and programmes financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund (CF), including European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) programmes and multi-fund programmes co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF). In total, 28 Partnership Agreements and 292 programmes are analysed for this.

The first part discusses the overall process of data collection, including database set up in MS Excel, and national experts' work of data collection. The second part illustrates the analysis in three main stages (Member State level, EU level, and in-depth assessment following the Terms of Reference of the assignment).

1.1.1 Data collection

The timing of data collection was strongly based on the EC's approval of the programmes. Consequently, the programmes were approached following a flexible time table.

Table 1: Number of programmes per country

Member State	OP per MS	Batch 1	Batch 2	Batch 3
AT	1	x		
BE	3	x	x	
BG	5	x	x	x
CY	1	x		
CZ	7			x
DE	16	x	x	x
DK	1	x		
EE	1	x		
ES	22	x	x	x
FI	2	x		
FR	34	x		
GR	17	x		
HR	1	x		
HU	7		x	x
IE	2	x		
IT	29	x	x	x
LT	1	x		
LU	1	x		
LV	1	x		
MT	2	x		
NL	4	x		
PL	21	x	x	
PT	10	x		
RO	4	x	x	x
SE	10	x		x
SI	1	x		
SK	6	x		
UK	6	x		x

Member State	OP per MS	Batch 1	Batch 2	Batch 3
ETC	78	x	x	x

Source: Project team, 2015.

The work on this database (design and set-up) started in January 2015. In February, the database template was tested in pilot studies covering the Netherlands and Sweden before it was sent out to the national experts in late February.

The evaluation work started in February 2015 with an analysis of batch 1: 136 operational programmes under the Investment for Growth and Jobs Goal and 18 ETC programmes. The next batch followed in mid-March 2015 with 38 operational programmes and 6 ETC programmes.

This first round of data was processed and assessed continuously from mid-April to mid-May 2015.

The last batch of programmes - batch 3 - was delivered in three sub-batches during June and July 2015.

To summarise, the overall timetable of data collection and analysis was:

- first half of January 2015- finalisation of the datasets;
- February 2015 – pilots in Austria, the Netherlands and Slovenia;
- first half of May 2015 – finalisation of first round of data collection;
- mid-May 2015 – first analysis of results;
- May to August 2015 – second analysis of results;
- first half of September 2015 – finalisation of data collection;
- second half of September 2015 – final analysis.

1.1.2 Setting out the database in further detail

For data collection in task 2, a database was broken down into two datasets and further developed by the project team. The data collected covered:

Preparation of programming documents

- Coverage of partners
- Method of involvement
- Results of consultation

Planned involvement in implementation, monitoring, evaluation

- Planned method of involvement
- Planned actions to improve institutional capacity of partners

Multi-fund specific issues

- Capacity building of social partners and NGOs.

Dataset 1 collects data related to the programmes and ETC and has three main parts:

- Part 1 focuses on partners and the criteria for selecting partners:
 - quantitative information on the partners involved in the processes (OP 5.6 and 12.3);
 - information on the involvement of umbrella organisations for various types of partners; (OP 5.6 and 12.3)
 - information on the methods used for identification and selection of partners (OP 5.6).

This information will be used to develop types of programmes and Member States for the types of stakeholders and the balance of different types of stakeholders.

- Part 2 focuses on involvement in the drafting of programmes and collects information on:

- the mechanisms in which partners have been involved in the preparation of the programmes (OP 5.6 and 7.2.1);
- actions to ensure accessibility for individuals with disabilities, the main points raised during consultation and how these have been taken on board (OP 11.2).

This information will be used to develop types of programmes and Member States.

- Part 3 collects information on the implementation, monitoring and evaluation activities. It focuses on:
 - the mechanism for involving partners in implementation, monitoring and evaluation. (OP 5.6 and 7.2.1);
 - the action and financial allocations for building institutional capacity in partners (OP 7.2.3);
 - multi-fund programmes and data on capacity building for NGOs (OP 7.2.2-7.2.3).

This information will be used to highlight partner involvement in the implementation, evaluation and monitoring processes.

Dataset 2 collects data related to Partnership Agreements and largely follows the same structure as dataset 1.

- Part 1 focuses on the partners involved and criteria for selecting partners:
 - quantitative information on the types of partners involved in the processes (PA 1.5.1);
 - the involvement of umbrella organisations for various types of partners (PA 1.5.1);
 - the methods used for identification/selection of partners (PA 1.5.1);

This information will be used to develop types of programmes, Member States and the balance of different types of stakeholders.

- Part 2 focuses on drafting the partnership agreement and collects information on:
 - mechanisms the partners used in the preparation of programmes (PA 1.5.1);
 - actions to ensure accessibility for individuals with disabilities and the main points raised during consultation and how these have been taken on board (PA 1.5.22).

This information will be used to develop types of programmes and Member States.

- Part 3 collects information on implementation, monitoring and evaluation activities, which is more complicated for Partnership Agreements than OPs. It focuses on:
 - the mechanism for involving partners in implementation, monitoring and evaluation;
 - actions to build the institutional capacity of partners.

This information will be used to develop types of involvement of partners in implementation, evaluation and monitoring.

1.1.2.1 Filling the Database

For analysing the data per programme, each national expert was provided with:

- an Excel-file with database sheets covering dataset 1 and 2;
- programme documents of their respective country;
- the Partnership Agreement between their country and the EC
- EC formal observations on PAs.

Furthermore, experts were provided with a detailed toolkit⁷¹, guiding their analysis, including examples of data analysis, describing the database structure in detail, and outlining the main sources of information, which were:

- for each partnership agreement, section 1.5.1-1.5.2;
- for each programme including ERDF and/or CF financing, sections 7.2.1-7.2.3, 11.2 and 12.3;

⁷¹ The toolkit is available in the Annex of this report.

- for each programme under the ETC objective, section 5.6.

1.1.3 Data analysis

After the national experts finalised their database work, the project team did an in-depth check of the MS Excel-file. In some cases, the experts were contacted and information was modified based on this additional feedback loop.

After this quality check, all information was integrated in the joint European database, covering all IGJ and ETC programmes.

Data analysis can be summarised along:

- (a) analysis of information at Member State level;
- (b) analysis of information overall.

These stages are illustrated in detail in the following sub-chapters.

1.1.3.1 Analysis of information at Member State level

For a first step, the information was structured per Member State; this was: (a) to obtain an initial overview of the situation in the different Member States and (b) to provide the national experts with tables, additional guidance and analysis for their national reports, which represent an internal, intermediate step of data analysis, taking into account regional specifics.

The following analyses were structured in tables with data covering individual Member States as well as the EU average for:

- number of partners in the Partnership Agreement, differentiating between national, regional and local authorities, education providers, economic and social partners, civil society and others;
- representation of umbrella organisations in the Partnership Agreement differentiating by the categories of partners described above;
- number of partners in the programmes, differentiating between categories of partners;
- umbrella organisations in programmes differentiating by categories of partners;
- method used to identify partners in the Partnership Agreement;
- percentage of programmes differentiating by method used to identify partners;
- type of partner involvement in drafting the Partnership Agreement; steering committee, 2007-2013 monitoring committee, public consultation, written/online consultation and targeted consultation;
- percentage of programmes differentiating by type of partner involvement in drafting the programmes; steering committee, 2007-2013 monitoring committee, public consultation, written/online consultation and targeted consultations;
- percentage of programmes differentiating by type of partner involvement in implementation steering committee, 2007-2013 monitoring committee, public consultation, and targeted consultation;
- percentage of programmes with actions planned to strengthen the institutional capacity of partners; training of partners, networking measures, strengthening of social dialogue, joint activities of social partners;
- percentage of multi fund programmes that allocate funds for NGO capacity building.

1.1.3.2 Analysis of information overall

For the second step, data covering ETC and IGJ programmes were analysed. The aim of this was a first comparative assessment covering the percentage of:

- programmes where some category of partners is missing;
- programmes that do not mention any comments from partners;
- programmes that do not mention how comments from partners have been taken on-board;
- programmes where partners have been involved in the drafting process;

- programmes where partners will be involved during the implementation process;
- programmes that mention capacity-building actions;
- partners representing public partners, economic and social partners and civil society
- and the
- selection of the partnership by type of Operational Programme;

The IGJ and the ETC programmes were analysed using separate and common typologies in accordance with the description below.

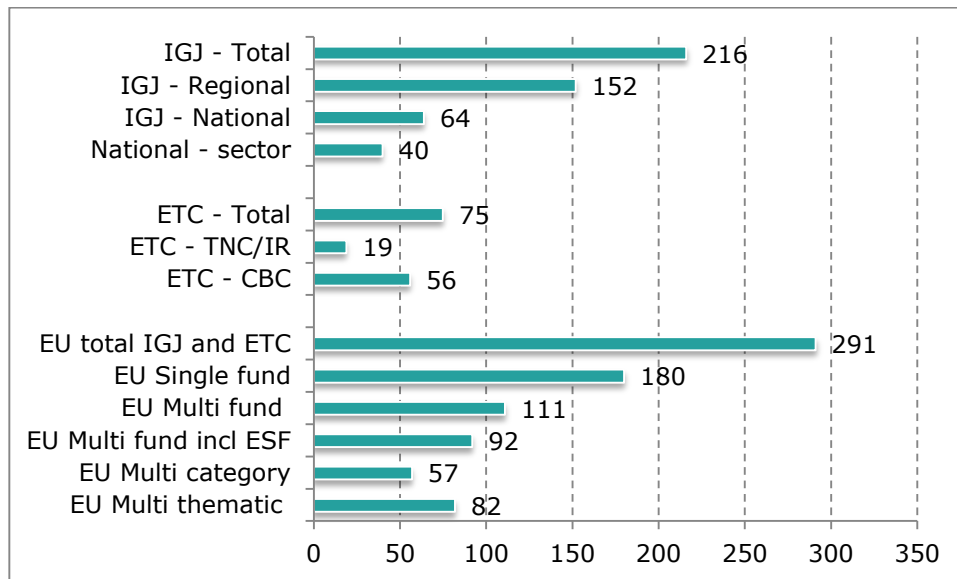
The IGJ programmes were differentiated and analysed based on whether the programmes covered the entire country or only a specific region. National programmes with a specific sector focus were also considered separately from the more general national programmes.

The ETC programmes were differentiated by; (a) Cross-Border cooperation programmes and (b) Transnational Cooperation together with Interregional programmes.

The aggregated database covering both ETC and IGJ programmes were analysed differentiating by:

- single- and multi-fund programmes;
- programmes with only one type of region⁷² and programmes covering multiple types of regions;
- programmes with single TOs and programmes with multiple TOs.

Figure 1: Number of programmes per type covered in 2nd interim report



Source: Database on partnership principle. 2015 (Sweco)

1.2 Survey

This section describes the methods establishing, promoting and analysing the survey with additional insights and perception on the process of involving partnerships in the programmes and Partnership Agreements. The first part discusses the overall aim, purpose and target group of the survey. The second part gives more in-depth analysis. The first analysis showed differences in respondents by Member State and programme. The analysis in this report treats the programmes equally.

⁷² More developed, Less developed, In transition, Not specified, Outermost or Northern Sparsely Populated

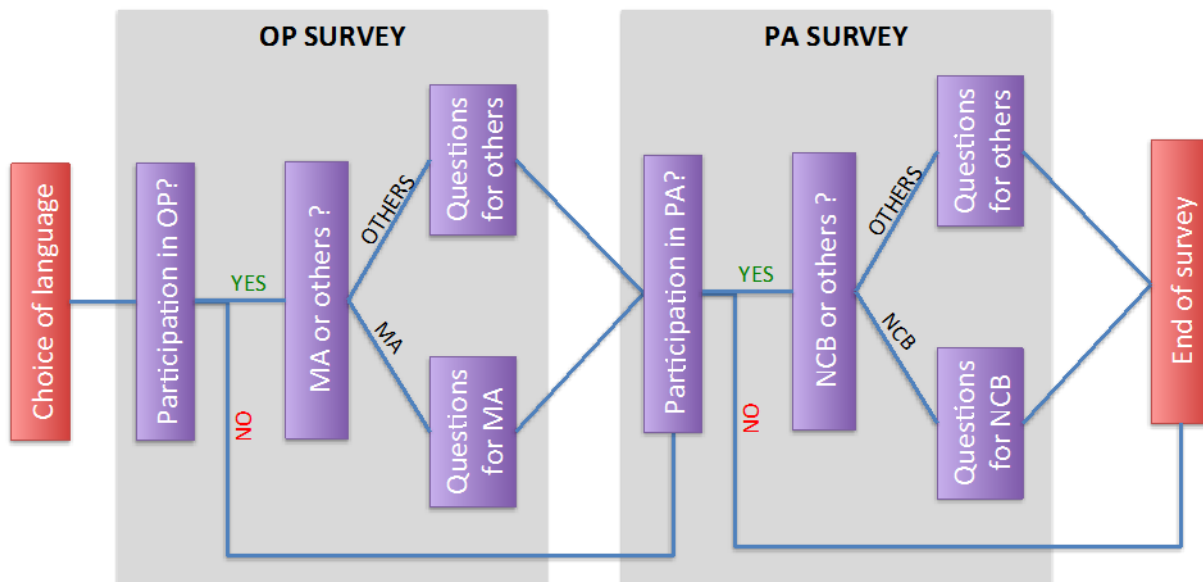
1.2.1 Survey aim, purpose, target group and respondents

The online survey's aim was to collect additional insights and perceptions regarding implementation of the partnership principle and multilevel governance in the 2014-2020 ESI-funds. It supplements the database as it allows for insights in programmes that have not been adopted when the document analysis was performed; it also supplements the interviews by reaching a larger number of stakeholders.

The main targets of the survey were the individuals involved in partnerships for the development of the programmes and Partnership Agreements. The survey collects input on how partners were involved in the development of documents, and compares the views of government authorities, i.e. MAs and NCBs with those of partners. The survey was between 23 February and 23 March and 1 May and 18 June 2015. MAs, NCBs as well as different EU umbrella organisations representing partners were informed about the survey and requested to distribute the survey throughout their networks.

Survey questions were specified according to the respondents. Firstly the survey was divided into a part addressing partnerships of the programmes and partnerships of the Partnership Agreement. Secondly, MAs and NCBs – more responsible for the programmes and Partnership Agreements were asked different questions than partners of the documents. The scheme below illustrates the structure of the survey which contained open and semi-open questions.

Figure 2: Schematic description of the survey



In total, 511 useful responses were collected, with fewer responses at the end of the survey.

The survey covers 156 IGJ programmes and 66 ETC programmes. The coverage of programmes by Member State is presented in figure 3. There are 19 Member States that are fully covered by the responses; the survey includes relatively few programmes from Spain and France. The total number of respondents per Member State is presented in figure 4.

Figure 3: Coverage of the programmes in the survey in percentage

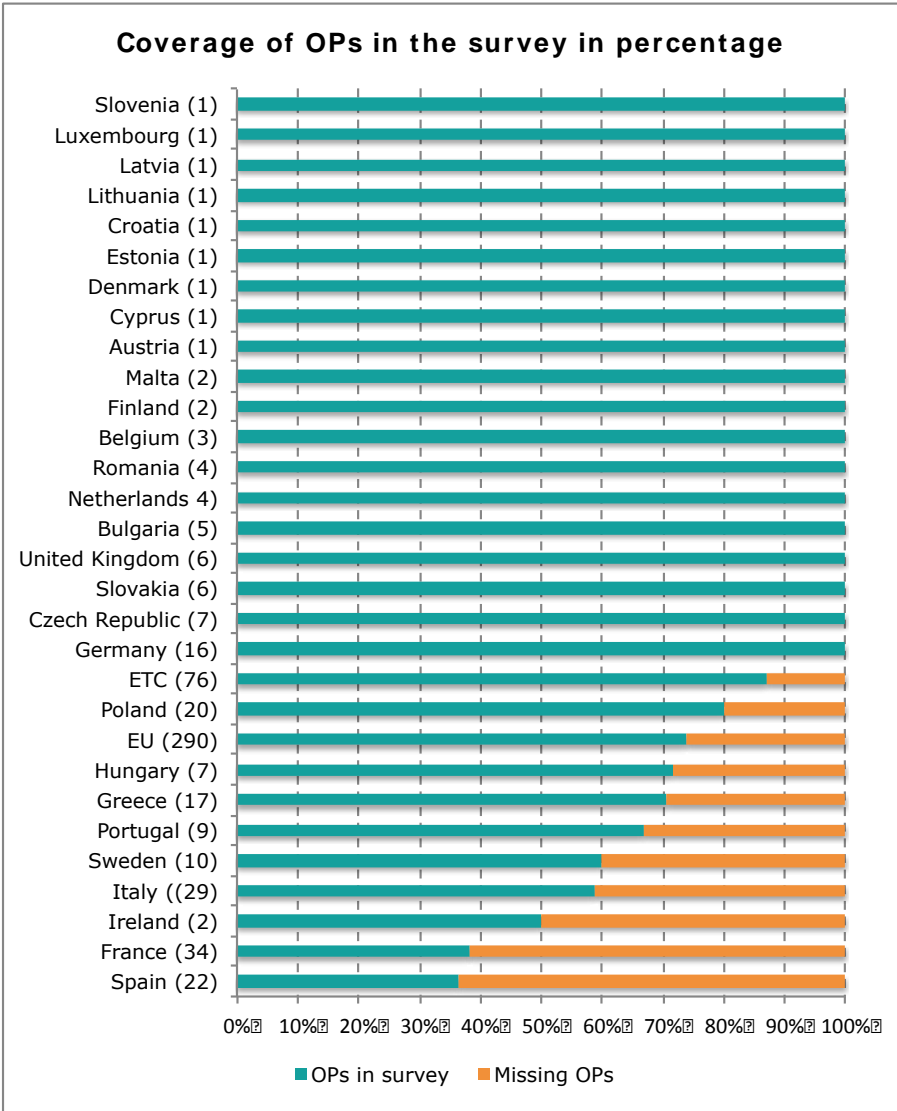
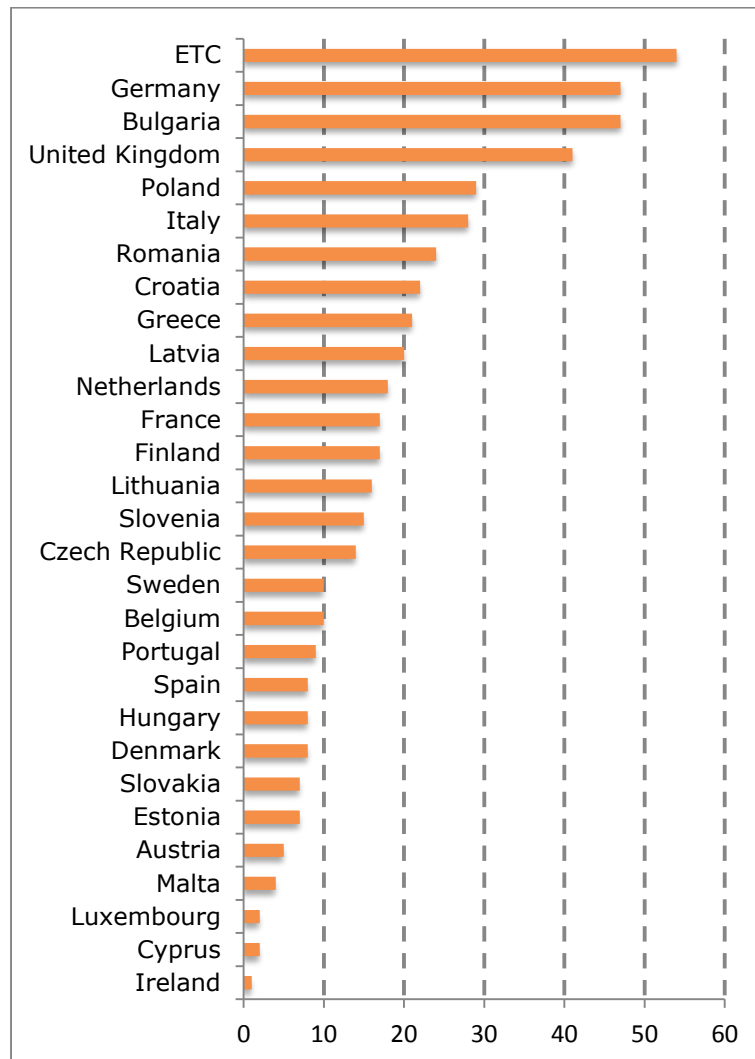


Figure 4: Number of survey respondent per country



The programmes have been categorised by type, enabling differences in partnerships to be reviewed. IGJ programmes are differentiated by national and regional programmes of which the national programmes can have a geographical coverage or a specific policy sector focus. The survey covers 61 national programmes of which 17 have a geographical focus, 44 a policy sector focus. There are 95 regional programmes.

The 44 sector programmes have been further differentiated into five categories which are the same as for the database analysis.

The ETC programmes are further specified along their geographical coverage. The survey covers 48 Cross-Border Cooperation programmes, fourteen Transnational Cooperation programmes and four Interregional Cooperation programmes. The Transnational Cooperation and Interregional Cooperation programmes have been combined in the analysis to reach a suitable threshold.

The programmes have further been differentiated along complex priorities. The survey covers 148 single-fund programmes and 84 multi-fund programmes. This can include all kind of combinations, e.g. ERDF and ESF, ERDF, ESF and YEI, or ERDF and ENI. Lastly, survey results are differentiated in multi category programmes (40) and multi-thematic programmes (57).

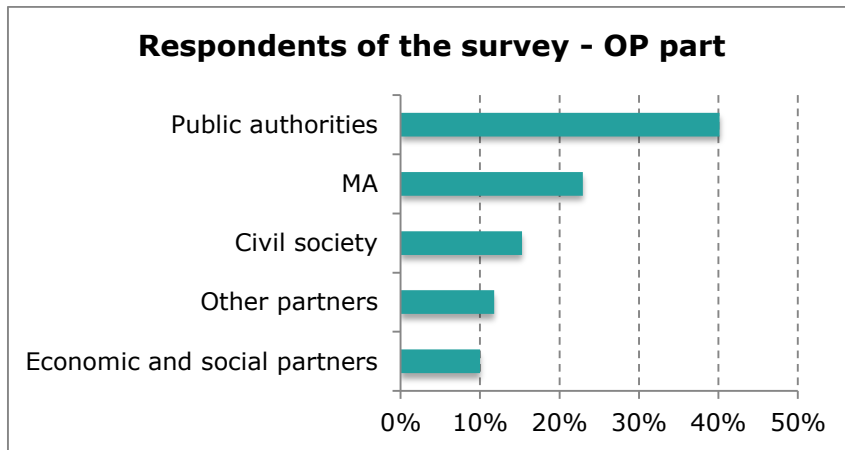
The programme included 117 responses from MAs (23% of respondents). The partners were categorised per Article 5 of the CPR.

1. Competent urban and other public authorities - further specified in the survey as local authorities, regional authorities, national authorities and representatives from research and education.

2. Economic and social partners - further specified in the survey as representatives from business associations or chambers of commerce and representatives from social partners, i.e. employer organisations and trade unions.
3. Relevant bodies representing civil society, including environmental partners, NGOs, and bodies responsible for promoting social inclusion, gender equality and non-discrimination.

Furthermore, the survey distinguished EGTC and the general public. These are included under 'other partners'. Different partner groups covered by the survey are presented in figure 5.

Figure 5: Respondent of the survey -programmes

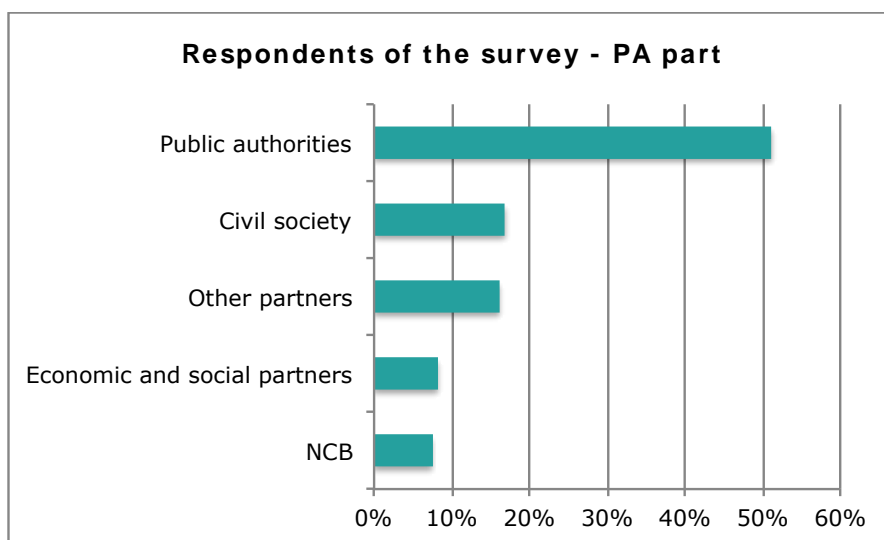


MAs and partners covered by the survey differ by Member State. The programmes do not cover perceptions from MAs in Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, Lithuania, Latvia, Malta, Slovenia and Spain.

In most Member States most partners covered by the survey represent public authorities. This is highest in Portugal and Ireland (both 100%), followed by Greece (91%) and Croatia (80%). The survey covers a high number of social and economic partners from Italy and Germany and relatively more civil society partners from the Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania and Slovenia.

The Partnership Agreement section included 266 useful responses, of which 20 came from NCBs. The survey results do not cover responses from NCBs in every Member State. The survey includes responses by representatives of NCBs from Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Croatia, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Romania and Slovakia.

Figure 6: Respondents of the survey – Partnership Agreement



The number of respondents per Member State and thus Partnership Agreement differ, although in all Member States national coordinators and MA representatives have been invited to participate and forward the survey to relevant partners, and also the members of the Structured Dialogue

have been asked to forward the invitation to their member organisations. Most respondents were from Bulgaria (27), Poland (24) and Italy (19). The survey on the Partnership Agreement does not cover Ireland and only one respondent from Cyprus and Luxembourg. Therefore responses have been weighted by Partnership Agreement, aggregating responses to a total of 1.

The survey includes mostly public authorities. The survey covers answers from other partners in only a few Member States. In Austria, two of four responses are from the NCB. The sole respondent from Cyprus represents social and economic partners, more specifically a respondent representing business associations or chambers of commerce. In the Czech Republic, Estonia and Lithuania most respondents represent civil society. In Italy and Sweden, the majority of respondents represent social and economic partners in the Partnership agreement.

1.2.2 Analytical method

Participation in the survey differs per Member State and per document as illustrated above. The survey included disparities in the number of respondents between Member States which does not necessarily reflect the most populated Member States or the Member States with the most programmes.

Therefore the responses have been weighted by programme (and Partnership Agreement when relevant). Responses are aggregated to a total of 1.

The weights given to programmes have been summed-up by question and category.

1.3 Interviews

In total 88 interviews were carried out to obtain a better understanding of implementation rationale for the partnership principle. There were approximately two interviews per Member State; one with the NCB and one with an MA and/or the ex-ante evaluator. In countries with only one Operational Programme, only one interview was conducted. Representatives from six ETC programmes were also interviewed. In addition to Member State and ETC programme interviews, 18 interviews were performed with representatives of EU level interest organisations. The interviews were semi-structured following the guidance questions below. In preparation for the interviews, attention was given to the EC's formal observations on Partnership Agreements, which can indicate the issues at Member State level during the negotiations. Where necessary, interview questions were adjusted accordingly.

Interview Guidance

ABOUT THE RESPONDENT

- In which PA / Operational Programme(s) were you involved?
- In what capacity?

PARTNERSHIP COMPOSITION

- How have the stakeholders involved in the partnership been selected?
- How was the balance between different partnership groups?
- Were there particular differences between types of partner as regards their involvement?
- What was the added value of the strengthened legal basis, including the CoC on partnership?

PROGRAMMING PHASE

- Through which mechanisms have the partnerships been involved?
- How have documents and information been made easily available to allow the partnership to prepare their responses?
- In your perception, has enough time been allocated for the consultation process?
- In what sections of the PA / OP were the partnerships involved?
- What were the main points raised by the partnership?
- How have the points raised by the partnership been taken on board in the drafting process?
- To what extent (or how) did the informal dialogue between the EC and the Member State improve implementation of the partnership principle?
- What were the main challenges of the partnership process?
- What were the main benefits of the partnership process?
- Has stakeholder involvement improved compared to the 2007-2013 period?

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

- Through which mechanisms will the partnership be involved in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation?
- What actions are planned to strengthen the institutional capacity of the partners as provided for in Article 5(3) of the CPR?

The interview guidelines worked satisfactorily during interviews. In Table 7, the respondents per Member State are presented. The corresponding list regarding ETC programmes are presented in Table 8. Table 9 shows the interviews with interested organisations overall.

There is no separate reporting of the interviews, but the results have been used by the national experts in their analysis.

In addition to interviews with Member State officials, a focus group involving geographical desks of DG REGIO and representatives of DG EMPL and DG MARE took place in July 2015. This allowed results from the First Interim Report to be used as a basis for discussion. The discussion focused on findings for types of programmes and Member States. The aim was to test the robustness of the categories / typologies developed in the draft analysis and to raise awareness for additional categorisations or typologies. As the discussion on the work conducted for the First Interim Report it allowed to make fine-tuning and adjustment of the analysis for the upcoming work.

Table 2: Partnership Agreement and programme level interviewees

MS	PA-level (national coordinator)	Programme-level (MA)	NGO & social and economic partners
AT	Austrian Conference on Spatial Planning, national Managing Authority		WKÖ (Austrian chamber of commerce)
BE	Department of agriculture and fishery of the Region of Flanders	Managing Authority	
BG	CCU, Council of Ministers	Managing Authority, OP Science and Education for Smart Growth	
CY	DG for European Programmes, Coordination and Development	Ex ante evaluator, LKN ANALYSIS Ltd	
CZ	Ministry of Regional Development, Department for Partnership agreement	Ministry of Industry and Trade	
DE	BMWi (Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy)	Ministry for Economic and European Affairs of the State of Brandenburg	
DK	Danish Business Authority		
EE	State Budget Department of the Ministry of Finance		
ES	ERDF Management, DGFC, Ministry of Treasury and Public Administration	Directorate Evaluation and Programme Planning, DGFC, Ministry of Treasury and Public Administration	
FI	Ministry of Employment and the Economy	The Åland Government	
FR	DATAR	Picardie Region	
GR	Ministry for Economy, Infrastructure, Shipping and Tourism	OP Competitiveness, Entrepreneurship and Innovation	
HR	Directorate for Management of Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds		
HU	National Coordination Authority	Economic Development and Innovation OP	
IE	Department for Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER)	Southern Regional Assembly	
IT	UVAL-DPS (Unità di valutazione del Dipartimento per lo Sviluppo e la Coesione Economica), Draft team Partnership Agreement	Ex-ante evaluator Region Marche and Bolzano Province, MA Region Marche and MA Bolzano - Sud Tyrol	
LT	EU Cohesion Policy Division of the Ministry of Finance	EU Structural Support Management Department of the Ministry of Finance.	
LU		Direction de la politique régionale, Ministry of Economie of Luxembourg	
LV	Evaluation Unit of EU Funds Strategy Department, Ministry of Finance	EU funds Strategy Department, Ministry of Finance	
MT	EU Funds Programming Unit	Planning and Priorities Coordination Division, Managing Authority	
NL	Ministry of economic affairs	Municipality of Rotterdam, Management Authority of the Operational Programme West Netherlands	
PL	MIR, Ministry of Infrastructure and Development)	Infrastructure and Environment programmes.	Human Being and Environment foundation in Lodz
PT	Board of Cohesion and Development Agency	Ex-ante evaluator of OP Algarve: CEDRU enterprise	
RO	DG APE	DG APE	
SE	Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation	Västra Götalandsregionen Programme	
SI	Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy		
SK	Central Coordination Authority of the Government Office	Central Coordination Authority of the Government Office	
UK	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)	Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)	Wales Council for Voluntary Action

Table 3: Interviewees ETC programmes

ETC	Program
Interregional	URBACT
Crossborder	Sweden-Finland-Norway
Crossborder	Rhin supérieur-Oberrhein
Crossborder	Netherland-Germany
Transnational	Northern Periphery Arctic
Transnational	Central Europe

Table 4: Interviewees EU level organisations and other organisations

Type	Organisation
Regional & local level	Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)
Regional & local level	Eurocities
Regional & local level	Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe (CPMR)
Economic and social partners	Business Europe
Economic and social partners	Business Europe (Italy)
Economic and social partners	European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
Economic and social partners	Eurochambers
Economic and social partners	European Confederation of Trade Unions
Economic and social partners	European Association of Research and Technology Organisations
Civil society	CEE Bankwatch Network / Friends of the Earth
Civil society	Euclid Network
Civil society	Housing Europe
Civil society	European Anti-Poverty Network (Spain)
Civil society	European Women's Lobby
Civil society	European Disability Forum
Other	Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions
Other	Wales Council for Voluntary Action & EESC

1.4 Calculation of Performance indices based on survey and database results

Based on the survey results and the database, two separate indices are used to appraise the implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in the Member States.

The two data sources represent different perspectives. The database is based on what is written in the programme documents and Partnership Agreements, whereas the survey represents the perception of the process by involved stakeholders.

The **index based on the survey** incorporates the questions 1-8 below. Data regarding both the Partnership Agreement and the programmes are used.

1. Have the stakeholders been identified in a transparent procedure? Based on the survey results, a score for each country is calculated (yes: weight 2, mostly; weight 1, hardly; weight 0,5, not at all: weight 0) which is divided by the number of programmes. Based on this score indices are calculated using the formula: $(\text{Country index} - \text{minimum index}) / (\text{maximum index} - \text{minimum index})$.
2. Was any stakeholder group under- or over-represented in the partnership? Based on the survey results, a score for each country is calculated (number of answers indication balanced minus number of answers indicating unbalanced) which is divided by the number of programmes. Based on this score indices are calculated using the formula: $(\text{Country index} - \text{minimum index}) / (\text{maximum index} - \text{minimum index})$
3. To what extent did you have access to documents and information in time to prepare for participation in partnership meetings etc.? Based on the survey results, a score for each country is calculated (yes: weight 2, mostly; weight 1, hardly; weight 0,5, not at all: weight 0) which is divided by the number of programmes. Based on this score indices are calculated using the formula: $(\text{Country index} - \text{minimum index}) / (\text{maximum index} - \text{minimum index})$

4. Has enough time been allocated for the consultation process? Based on the survey results, a score for each country is calculated (yes: weight 2, mostly; weight 1, hardly: weight 0,5, not at all: weight 0) which is divided by the number of programmes. Based on this score indices are calculated using the formula: $(\text{Country index} - \text{minimum index}) / (\text{maximum index} - \text{minimum index})$
5. Do you have the impression that the comments of all stakeholders have been treated in the same way? Based on the survey results, a score for each country is calculated (yes: weight 2, mostly; weight 1, hardly: weight 0,5, not at all: weight 0) which is divided by the number of programmes. Based on this score indices are calculated using the formula: $(\text{Country index} - \text{minimum index}) / (\text{maximum index} - \text{minimum index})$
6. Are any particular actions envisaged to strengthen the institutional capacity of the involved partners (data only available for programmes)? The number of capacity building actions mentioned in each country are counted resulting in a score 1-7. Based on this score indices are calculated using the formula: $(\text{Country index} - \text{minimum index}) / (\text{maximum index} - \text{minimum index})$
7. How did you experience the participation of different stakeholder groups in the development of the document? A score for each country is calculated using the number of positive answers regarding involvement through: Drafting (weight 1), Reviewing / discussing (weight 0,75), Public consultation (weight 0,5), Receiving information (weight 0,25). Based on this score indices are calculated using the formula: $(\text{Country index} - \text{minimum index}) / (\text{maximum index} - \text{minimum index})$
8. Do you see a risk that in the implementation process stakeholder groups are missing or over-represented in the partnership (data only available for programmes)? A score for each country is calculated based on if the different partners groups are anticipated to be Missing, Hardly involved, Over represented, Well over represented. Based on this score indices are calculated using the formula: $(\text{Country index} - \text{minimum index}) / (\text{maximum index} - \text{minimum index})$

Summarising all above indices (1-8) an arithmetic average is calculated for each country based on the results above. These country-wise averages are then used to calculate relative indices using the formula: $(\text{Country index} - \text{minimum index}) / (\text{maximum index} - \text{minimum index})$. This produces a ratio where each country gets a value between 0 and 100. 100 represents the country/counties with the highest score on the question and 0 the country/counties with the lowest score. Therefore **the index shows the relative performance between countries rather than the absolute performance.**

The **index based on the documents** incorporates the questions 1-5 below. Data regarding both the Partnership Agreement and the programmes are used.

1. Are all categories of partners; local, regional, national authorities, economic and social partners, education providers and civil society, included in the partnership? Yes=100 No=0
2. Average of:
 - Is there any description of comments raised from the partnership? Yes=100 No=0
 - Is there any description of how comments from partners have been taken on board? Yes=100 No=0

An arithmetic average is calculated for each programme/partnership agreement based on the two questions above and in next step the average of the programmes and partnership agreements for each member state is calculated. This average is then used to calculate relative indices using the formula: $(\text{Country index} - \text{minimum index}) / (\text{maximum index} - \text{minimum index})$.

Average of:

- Have partners been involved in any committees, i.e. Steering Committee, Monitoring Committee 2007-2013 during the drafting process? Yes=100 No=0
- Have partners been involved in any consultation, i.e. Target Consultation, Public Consultation Event, Written / online public consultation during the drafting process? Yes=100 No=0

An arithmetic average is calculated for each programme/partnership agreement based on the two questions above and in next step the average of the programmes and partnership agreements for each member state is calculated. This average is then used to calculate relative indices using the formula: $(\text{Country index} - \text{minimum index}) / (\text{maximum index} - \text{minimum index})$.

Average of:

- Will partners participate in any committees i.e. Steering Committee, Monitoring Committee during the implementation process? Yes=100 No=0 (data only available for programmes)
- Will partners be involved in any consultation i.e. Target Consultation, Public Consultation Event, during the implementation process? Yes=100 No=0 (data only available for programmes)

An arithmetic average is calculated for each programme/partnership agreement based on the two questions above and in next step the average of the programmes and partnership agreements for each member state is calculated. This average is then used to calculate relative indices using the formula: $(\text{Country index} - \text{minimum index}) / (\text{maximum index} - \text{minimum index})$.

Number of actions planned to strengthen the institutional capacity of partners i.e. Training of partner, Networking measures, Strengthening of the social dialogue, Activities jointly undertaken by the social partners? (data only available for programmes)

An arithmetic average is calculated for each programme/partnership agreement based on the questions above and in next step the average of the programmes and partnership agreements for each member state is calculated. This average is then used to calculate relative indices using the formula: $(\text{Country index} - \text{minimum index}) / (\text{maximum index} - \text{minimum index})$

Summarising all above indices (1-5) an arithmetic average is calculated for each country based on the results above. These country-wise averages are then used to calculate relative indices using the formula: $(\text{Country index} - \text{minimum index}) / (\text{maximum index} - \text{minimum index})$

This produces a ratio where each country gets a value between 0 and 100. 100 represents the country/countries with the highest score on the question and 0 the country/countries with the lowest score. Therefore **the index shows the relative performance between countries rather than the absolute performance.**

In the last step the index based on the survey is combined with the index based on the documents in a scatterplot figure.

ANNEX II: ADDITIONAL FIGURES

As explained in Chapter 6.4, the assessment of partnership based on the documents can also be used to test whether there is any correlation on programme level between the assessment of partnership and various programmes characteristics such as aid intensity and types of programmes. As shown in the two figures below, the general conclusion is that the assessment of partnership based on the documents does not show any correlation with the above mentioned programmes characteristics.

Figure 1: Correlation between the assessment of partnership and aid intensity per programme

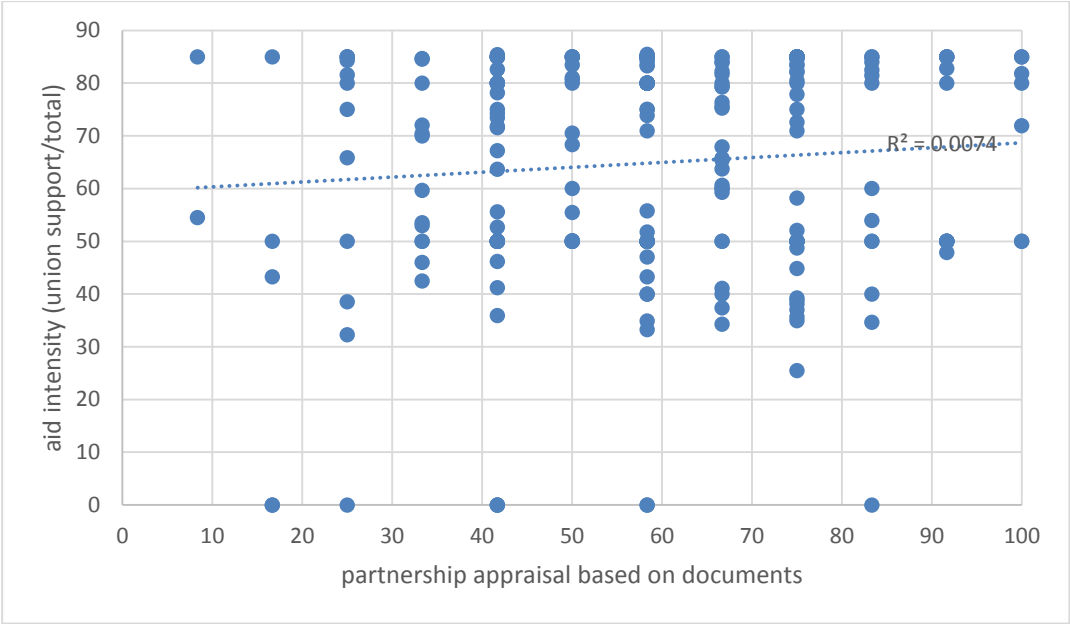
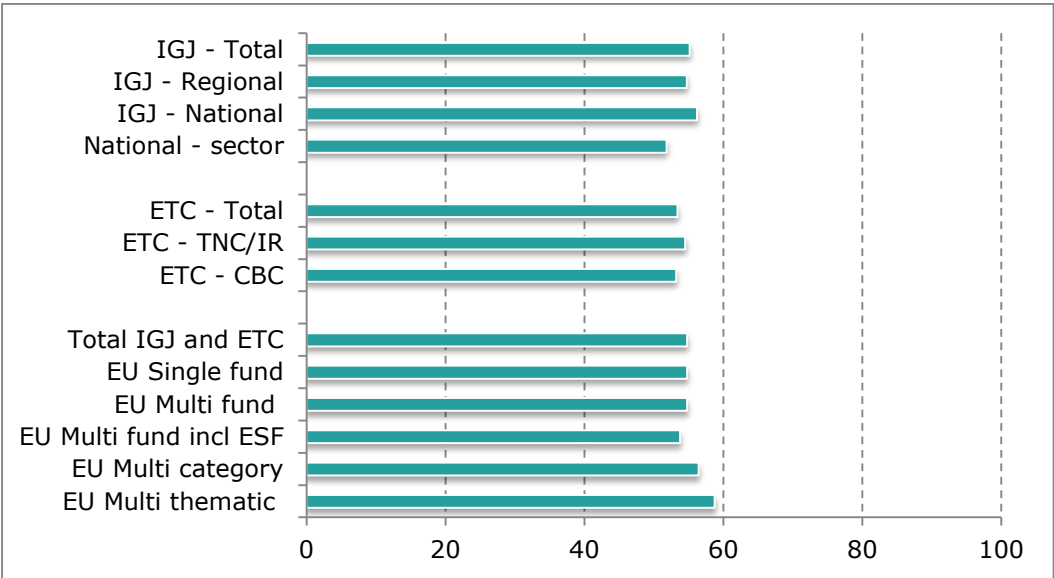


Figure 2: Average assessment of partnership based on documents for various types of programmes



2. ANNEX III- DATABASE

Separate excel file.

3. ANNEX IV – MEMBER STATE FACTSHEETS

Separate excel file.

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