



Interreg IIIB Project, Alpine Space Programme, EU

Participation processes in regional development: the DIAMONT perspective



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The WPs 10-11 were mainly aimed at implementing a participation process in selected test regions, including a bottom-up approach in order to assess the instruments identified as suitable for steering development and, particularly, land resource management towards sustainability. Special care was devoted, by applying the same participatory approach throughout, to seeking appropriate solutions to problems detected in these regions. With such an approach we were better able to assess local populations' needs and consequently identify instruments that best fit the specific situation of the test regions.

From the methodological point of view, workshops represent the basic tool used to host stakeholder discussion and gain practical feedback on theoretical analyses. For conducting the discussion the World café method was used.

The workshops were held in six test regions, which had been delimited (by broad functional common criteria) to group together a number of municipalities: two are located in Germany (Immenstadt-Sonthofen and Traunstein-Traunreut), one in Austria (Waidhofen/Ybbs), France (Gap), Italy (Tolmezzo) and Slovenia (Idrija) respectively (the core centres are mentioned here).

Work Package 10/11 (WP10/11)

Discussing the future: participation processes in regional development - Confrontation of theory and practice

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Main activities and objectives: Testing the tools and discussing their use for sustainable regional development in selected test regions & presenting strategies for the solution of conflicts within the selected regions

Duration: March 2007 until December 2007

The World Café method

The workshops used within the project should provide a suitable framework to ground theory-driven considerations and evaluations (derived from previous DIAMONT Work Packages) on assessment from local Alpine actors and stakeholders, with special reference to gaining their feedback on both proposed instruments to steer regional development – and particularly, land resource management – towards sustainability, and suitable strategies to tackle potential conflicts and problems affecting the test regions.

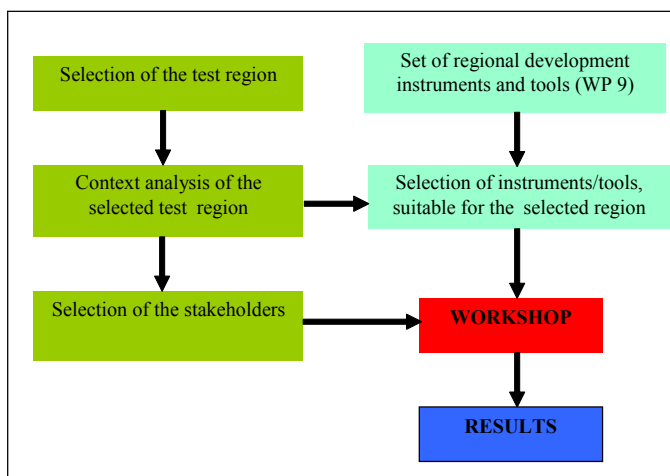


Fig. 1: The working process.

The method applied in the workshops is a simplification of the World Café Conversations, which is a creative process for leading collaborative dialogue, sharing knowledge and creating possibilities for action in groups of all sizes. This flexible

method can be organized and facilitated by one or two persons. The role of the facilitator is to maintain a pleasant



environment, keep the discussion focused on the selected topics and mix the people at the tables in order to get a multisectoral contribution; he/she can freely organize the meeting according to the topic, the type of stakeholders and the available time.

The World Café is structured as follows: the environment is set up like a café, with tables for four or five, tablecloths covered by flipchart paper, some coloured pens and refreshments. People sit four or five to a table and have a series of conversational rounds lasting from 20 to 40 minutes on one or more issues. At the end of each round, one person remains at each table as the host, while the other three or four move on to different tables. Table hosts welcome newcomers to their tables and share the essence of that table's conversation so far. The newcomers relate any conversational threads which they are carrying and then the conversation continues, deepening as the round progresses. At the end of the second round, participants return to their original table or move on to other tables for one or more additional rounds, depending on the design of the Café. In subsequent rounds they may explore a new issue or go deeper into the original one. After three or more rounds, the whole group gathers to share and explore emerging themes, insights and learning, which are captured on flipcharts or by other means

that make the collective intelligence of the whole group visible to everyone so that they can reflect on what is emerging in the room. At this point the Café may end or further rounds may begin of conversational exploration and inquiry.



Fig. 2: First workshop in Idrija.

In the DIAMONT workshops the basic structure of the method was maintained. In some cases instead of changing tables after each round, it was decided that people should move after two rounds; instead of presenting results after 2 to 3 rounds, it was decided that a reporter should present results after each round and ask the other tables if they had recorded something different or if they wanted to add something, which saved time and avoided repetitions. Some other minor deviations consisted of having spontaneous plenary discussion on certain topics (this was the case with the first workshop in Tolmezzo) in some rounds, due to stakeholders' shared opinion and high sensitivity on the topics, or to the perceived urge to pass ad-hoc comments on the questions before settling down to concentrating on the answers. Another deviation from the original method was to use a second person who supported the facilitator in summarizing the results of the rounds and presenting them at the end of the workshop during the plenary session. This procedure has the advantage to get participants' final approval on what was discussed during the meeting by checking the accuracy of the summary.

No particular problems arose in managing the workshops. In most cases the facilitator was a member of the DIAMONT expert team; in one case only (Immenstadt-Sonthofen in Germany) an external facilitator was involved. At the end or during the workshops, coffee breaks or aperitifs were organized, so that stakeholders could get to know each other better and interact with the DIAMONT team.

Preparatory work for the workshops

After selection of the test regions, the next step was identifying the key stakeholders. Each partner proceeded according to their contacts in the area to identify potentially interested people among representatives of the municipalities and other local authorities, land management and spatial planning experts, NGOs, associations, research institutions and universities, private citizens etc.

Prior to the workshop, each DIAMONT partner prepared a set of documents to be displayed during the event and in some cases forwarded in advance to previously identified stakeholders; in particular, these consisted of project description, context and SWOT analyses, explanation of the World Café method.

The first workshop

The first workshop mainly focused on identifying the key problems concerning land resource management within the test regions with the preliminary help of the results from the context and SWOT analyses, and to start getting stakeholders' assessment of the proposed instruments drawn from DIAMONT database as developed within the WP 9 activities.

The shared problems resulted in the selection of similar strategic thematic fields, which were discussed within the workshops:

1. Economy and society;
2. Land use;
3. Quality of services;
4. Institutions and cooperation;
5. Conflicts in the region.

The second workshop

After the completion of the first workshop, each project partner filled in a matrix containing the main problems of the test region (from the first workshop), instruments discussed within the first workshop, conflicts identified and proposals for conflict resolution strategies, possible best practices, and actions needed. So problems common to all test regions emerged, among them a lack of inter-municipal cooperation came to the fore as the crucial and most comprehensive problem.

The second workshop focused on solutions for the problem (and the frequently ensuing conflict) in the general perspective of enhancing sustainable regional development and based on the application of identified instruments and best practice examples and the impulses received from stakeholders.

Theoretical background - Participation processes in regional planning applied to DIAMONT

The basic idea of partnership and participation is to unite various actors in a new constellation with the common goal of finding shared solutions to problems, innovations, and policy-making. The traditional "top-down" approach is giving way to the multi-actor model of management and the network model. In these, local actors enter into the points of departure of all development issues and they are equal with other actors. Forming networks blurs the boundary between the public and private spheres and is expressed in a new form of policy making, i.e. governance, which is characterized by the close connection between regional actors and the division of tasks and responsibilities among them. Because the relations between actors are no longer hierarchical, they are based on trust, reputation, customs and habits, reciprocity, reliability, and openness to learn

ning. Such an approach seeks to transcend the partial interests of individual regional actors and tends towards partnership and joint management.

Initiation of bottom-up processes with the involvement of various stakeholders, building up networks, cooperation, and communication are crucial factors for the success of sustainable development. Sustainable development can be attained through participation processes and bottom-up network structures. This approach is considered a normative participation process based on people participating in the decision-making process from the very beginning. The main advantage of adopting a bottom-up approach is participants' identification with decisions that concern their environment.

In regional planning, participation often primarily occurs in seeking original solutions (regional visioning), solving social and economic difficulties, and seeking shared values among the population. This requires the actual participation of all actors because it is only in this way that all of their expectations and aspirations can be included in the whole. The participation process must therefore be continually open to all forms of desired participation, and at the very beginning it is necessary to eliminate all obstacles that might impede this type of cooperation. It is particularly important to be attentive to groups that are often neglected: the young, the poor, and minorities. Because well-organized and wealthier groups of participants have easier access to information, making information known is essential because this also ensures the participation of other (marginalized) social groups.

The role of participatory planning is exceptionally important because local cultures, geographical conditions, the urban economic composition, local management styles, and local governance conditions are site-specific and have a significant influence on planning decisions.

For this reason the DIAMONT project stimulated participation processes in six Alpine test regions with the aim of fine-tuning selected development instruments where adaptation to the local environment is of crucial importance. We gained some interesting results, which are, *inter alia*, described in this folder.

The selected test regions in the respective workshops facilitators' perspective

Immenstadt-Sonthofen (Germany)

Area: 254.46 km²

No. of municipalities included in test region: 5

No. of inhabitants: 48,373 (1999)

Average population density: 190.1 inh./km²

The participation process in Immenstadt-Sonthofen proved to be very successful. In the first workshop already plans for a regional development agency were launched. For the second workshop therefore we chose to go deeper into details and specify problems and ideas for solutions. The discussion in the second workshop remained intensive and dedicated, but showed that concrete concepts and strategic ideas were still missing. This was a very important experience for all participants and finally let them conclude firmly that the process should be continued.

Given this background, the participants decided to set up a working group with representatives from the five municipalities in order to structure the further process. The chair of the working group was appointed and some concrete steps

were decided upon. Thanks to the very active participation of the mayors of the five municipalities, one can expect the results of both workshops to be of political relevance. In addition, some transnational approaches were offered as tools for the resolution of existing problems (SCOT, Economic Development Profile). Our impression was that it was rather difficult for the participants to assimilate the SCOT, as the French planning system is very different from the German one. In contrast, they felt attracted to the Economic Development Profile. A more intensive discussion on the peculiarities of different instruments and country-specific preconditions could have possibly opened stronger transnational perspectives.



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Traunstein-Traunreut (Germany)

Area: 554.3 km²

No. of municipalities included in test region: 12

No. of inhabitants: 83,979

Average population density: 151.5 inh./km²

The workshops in Traunstein–Traunreut also showed a high degree of cooperation of the participants as well as their gratefulness for the facilitation of such a platform of exchange within the framework of DIAMONT. Due to the low turnout of political decision-makers, participants were not in the position to take immediate decisions, which might be interpreted as an advantage as it allowed participants to discuss the issues creatively. On the other hand and as a result of the absence of municipal decision-makers, no tangible results could be achieved by the end of the workshops.



On the basis of the theoretical input given at the beginning of each workshop, participants were particularly interested in good practice examples of these instruments, which shows that initiatives of intra-regional cooperation can in fact be realized in similar spatial contexts.

With the Labour Market Regions, a new spatial category has been introduced by the DIAMONT project that workshop participants had not been familiar with. Participants clearly welcomed the opportunity to discuss issues of land management on a smaller geographical scale than existing large-scale entities and with a more diverse range of participants.

Waidhofen/Ybbs (Austria)

Area: 802.12 km²

No. of municipalities included in test region: 12

No. of inhabitants: 36,171 (2001)

Average population density: 68.1 inh./km²

Participants in both workshops showed great interest in having such a platform for participative regional exchange within the DIAMONT framework. However, during the second workshop participating stakeholders explained the low number of participants with an over-saturation of events of all kinds, arguing that an initiative on supra-regional cooperation had already taken place some years ago.



The World Café method proved to be an excellent instrument to stimulate discussion and bring stakeholders (policy-makers, businessmen, administrators, public services providers and local population)

together and to start implementing participatory work and intra-regional cooperation.

University students were included in the process of the first workshop to develop their professional skills for their future jobs in planning, moderation or public relations; the presentation of their results and experiences, realized at the University of Innsbruck, was attended by over 50 people. It helped disseminate the DIAMONT approach within the academic community and proved to be a leverage instrument for the DIAMONT mission, ideas and instruments. Students who participated in the workshop maintained that they learnt a lot, and one student is even planning to work with the DIAMONT World Café method in her diploma thesis. Participants in the presentation (university teachers and students) expressed their positive impression of the DIAMONT approach.

Gap (France)

Area: 1816 km²

No. of municipalities included in test region: 74

No. of inhabitants: 64,741 (1999)

Average population density: 35.6 inh./km²

Within the French test region the so-called DIAMONT instruments were not revised, but problems were tackled to implement them more efficiently. No panacea solutions to conflicts within the region were found, but guidelines were proposed for smoothing out sources of tensions. In fact, choosing the Gap region has led to reviewing issues and interrelated problems that could not be ranked from the beginning. We took the risk of addressing many topics



instead of focusing on those issues which are already well acknowledged in the region, or were envisaged from the beginning to orient WP10 and 11 activities in all test regions, for which results would have possibly proved more operational.

In fact, slight adaptations in terms of method, approach and expected results were needed to complete WP10 and 11 activities in a test region where issues are perceived very differently in towns and in small rural villages. Besides, we tried to benefit from previous DIAMONT results, notably the indicators, even when they were seen as pertaining to top-down approaches. Since such adaptations proved efficient in Gap, we think they would also be justified in other comparable regions, for example the Digne-les-Bains or Draguignan regions in the French southern Alps. However, we think it would be desirable to analyse time cooperation and local governance issues at the same, as they are interrelated and sometimes conflict with one another.

Tolmezzo (Italy)

Area: 736.9 km²

No. of municipalities included in test region: 18

No. of inhabitants: 31,943 (2005)

Average population density: 43.3 inh./km²

In the Italian test region, workshop participants showed a high degree of involvement which proved that the choice of the moderation method has been correct. Also the instrument database at Alpine Space level, created within the DIAMONT project, was appreciated by all participants and perceived as an important source of knowledge. Italian stakeholders paid particular attention to the presented selection of transnational instruments (including the French SCOT and the German Pool of Commercial/Industrial Areas and Municipal Land Policy Resolution): comparison with local instruments allowed deeper insight into actual and potential applications. Stakeholders expect further

relevant inputs to come from the envisaged opening of the database to the public. A clear message coming from the stakeholders was also to obtain concrete and lasting results in the test region: the current effort at cooperation between different ongoing EU projects is aimed at that and this has been acknowledged. Participants showed a very good knowledge of problems affecting the test region as well as of available instruments to tackle them; they also hinted at the objectives to be attained.



Concerning intra-regional cooperation it was remarked, especially by planners and experts, that recent tentative voluntary agreements for cooperation between municipalities have shown poor effectiveness so far, possibly

due to competition between municipalities or valleys and lack of awareness; on the other hand, local governmental stakeholders tend to stress the fact that many intermunicipal associations have been established in the wider area of the upper Tagliamento river basin, and that successful instances of public participation in decision making exist. Besides overcoming the crucial drawback represented by the small size of single municipalities, a sound resolution strategy for the problem of insufficient intra-regional cooperation should include the following: 1) An easily accessible standardized and updated knowledge base; 2) Formalized public participation structures; 3) A strategic spatial planning framework based on sustainability, unifying the sectoral policies under a common vision.

Idrija (Slovenia)

Area: 239.7 km²

No. of municipalities, included in test region: 1

No. of inhabitants: 11,990 (2002)

Average population density: 41 inh./km²

Although Idrija is not a typical Alpine municipality, it is characterized by some typical Alpine aspects such as poor accessibility and lack of space for settlement and industry. Since the main workshop focus was on land-use management, Idrija represents a good example for a region with problems due to rapid economic development which faces certain spatial and human resource limitations. In addition, mining heritage and tourist potential based on the technical background have influenced development of the region.

The topics selected for workshop discussion proved adequate for conditions in the region. The lively discussion was directed towards identifying problems, conflicts and present/future opportunities.

Idrija will have to steer its current situation through careful land management and sustainable planning. This could prevent it from experiencing a structural crisis and ensure long-term evolution into a successful high-tech economy. In addition, Idrija

should strive for better care of the environment, creating quality conditions for younger people, increasing the level of self-employment and stimulating enterprise development. Idrija could also become a



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research and educational centre in mercury-based research and alternative psychiatry. The abundance of forest in the countryside offers prospects for biomass-based renewable energy production.

Stakeholders expressed scepticism about inter-municipal cooperation because of previous mostly negative experiences. Only a few topics that do require an inter-municipal cooperation were recognized.

Potential financial sources for achieving these goals are the municipality, the state and the EU, but stakeholders will primarily have to rely on their own sense of creativity and strong will to succeed.

Lessons learned

The significance of the participation process

Although the results of the workshops are case-study dependent and thus not easily comparable, we could discern some important lessons that can be learnt from the whole process. First of all, we should emphasize that development-related questions have to be put to the respective local populations who could/should decide on the further development. Consequently, there is a constant need for different participation process techniques, which could be implemented and fine-tuned within projects similar to DIAMONT. These techniques provide not only new information-gathering instruments, but also concrete impulses for further development of respective test regions. The workshop participants have put a lot of effort into finding solutions to the problems identified and therefore are willing to strive for better use of regional potentials and sources.

On the adequate territorial level

The municipal level is too small to adequately pursue sustainability, innovation and visioning; therefore a new territorial entity is needed, which would reflect the peculiarities of the Alpine regions. In DIAMONT the Labour Market Regions were developed, which could, due to their functional elements, represent a suitable territorial unit for the resolution of different development problems in the Alps. As supra-municipal entities composed of many municipalities are unlikely to reach consensus on crucial issues, a strong effort is needed to ensure the appropriate level of cooperation, based on joint functions (nodal regions). Not only functional elements should be respected but also local/regional identities and specifics. Furthermore, to assure sustainability, all actions should be adapted to natural potentials and capacities of the regions.

The relevance of time

In assuring sustainable regional development different time perspectives could be considered. The long-term perspective of the development process, which should include intra-generational solidarity and which is based on constant effort and purpose often finds itself in conflict with the short time frames of elected decision-makers within which sustainability is likely to be regarded as uselessly time-consuming and poorly rewarding.

And the participation process again

The Alpine-wide approach of the DIAMONT project has powerfully shown the need of cooperation among Alpine areas which face similar development problems. However, the solutions and even the best practices cannot be automatically transferred from one region to another. On the contrary, they need to be adapted to regional specifics: as the problems are site-specific, solutions should be tailored to the same spatial level. For this reason the local population should be regarded as a useful filter for new ideas and solutions. In this regard the participation process gains even more importance, when local populations act as evaluators of possible resolution strategies.

Conclusions

According to recent concepts, the main potential for sustainable regional development should be sought in the region itself, starting with human, social, and environmental capital, followed by tacit knowledge, institutional innovation and flexibility, regional identity and interpersonal contacts. Not only should local/regional potential be used, but local/regional ideas, expectations and initiatives must also be respected in order to attain harmonized development and avoid further centralization on the one hand, and marginalization and depopulation on the other. These concepts have clearly been confirmed during the workshops: use of all types of local assets has appeared crucial for gaining competitiveness and attractiveness and sustainably fostering development. Together with local initiatives, interregional cooperation should also be established, based on exchange of knowledge and, if possible, also on common actions, especially in regions where problems are shared and can be effectively solved through cooperation between local and transnational actors.

For this reason, the DIAMONT project sought an adequate response from the selected communities on the instruments and tools developed within the project, being well aware of the fact that all research is limited if not verified and tested in real situations. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of research-based knowledge with the needs and opinions of local stakeholders has helped local communities identify their problems and seek opportunities for solving them. In addition, impulses were not only local given locally, but interregional comparison and exchange were also enabled by the workshops being carried out in five different countries and six different regions and with the establishment of a transnational database containing over 100 entries on instruments and best practice examples available in

the above countries and regions and suitable for steering development and land resource management. From this database DIAMONT moderation teams selected tools to be submitted to stakeholder scrutiny during the workshops; besides, stakeholders claimed they were eagerly awaiting the planned imminent opening of the database to public access.

It is satisfying to acknowledge that the participation process has resulted in free discussion and promising prospect cooperation between local stakeholders, basing on one crucial aim – to improve the situation in the regions and enable further development. In this way, local dynamics can be strengthened, some new ideas have appeared and – through DIAMONT expert research findings – exchange of transnational knowledge has started. For all these reasons, DIAMONT workshops have proved successful, enhancing learning processes in the regions and among the regions. In the end, we believe that DIAMONT can be regarded as a good example of a bottom-up approach, especially if workshop results and envisaged follow-ups can find further application and additional concrete actions are performed in the test regions and other similar Alpine contexts.

Participation processes and test regions on DVD

During the second workshops some scenes from the discussions were filmed and key stakeholders interviewed by DIAMONT staff. Together with snapshots from different landscapes and typical situations in the test regions, a filmed database was created, used for preparing a DVD documentary focusing on the problems of land resource management in the test areas.



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