PARTNERSHIP WORKING:

MODELS AND EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP IN DEVOLVED REGIONS OF EUROPE

Office of the Chief Researcher
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The views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and do not necessarily represent those of the Department or Scottish Ministers.
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PARTNERSHIP WORKING:
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DEVOLVED REGIONS OF EUROPE

SUMMARY:

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This paper is an exploratory piece of work to look at the models of social partnership in the devolved regions of Europe. The work was carried out by the Office of the Chief Researcher in the Scottish Executive to inform thinking on Social and Economic Partnership in Scotland. Three related papers on partnership working¹ are also available on the Scottish Executive website http://www.scotland.gov.uk/publications/

1.2 Research was undertaken between July and October 2002 to gather information on social partnerships in these devolved regions, and to produce analyses of these models in terms of issues for government on both an operational and organisational basis.

1.3 The following devolved regions were looked at in detail:

- Flanders (Belgium)
- North Rhine Westphalia (Germany)
- Catalonia (Spain).

1.4 The main findings are split into four sections:

- General Definition of Social Partnership
- General Principles and Purposes of Partnership
- Specific Models and Experiences in the Devolved Regions
- Important Issues Arising from Research

2. GENERAL DEFINITION OF SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP

2.1 There is no easy or precise definition of ‘social partnership’. Below are some of the main points in relation to the concept of social partnership:

- In some regions ‘social dialogue’ or reference to ‘social partners’ is the preferred terminology. This may be influenced by whether the region has a partnership ‘approach’ or institution in practice.
- History of relations between the social partners and the context in which the partnership was formed has a distinct effect on how the partnership is approached.

‘Social partners’ are traditionally representatives from government, trade unions and employer’s organisations. However, there can also be representation from organisations in the ‘third sector’.

Partners can be involved in policy making, development of strategy, and implementation of strategy. There appears evidence to suggest that partners are more strongly linked to the latter two options.

Partners can be involved at national, regional, sub regional and local level. This can be on a voluntary or mandatory basis.

The majority of evidence available suggests that the partners are largely involved in policy relating to the economy, employment and training.

3. GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND PURPOSES OF PARTNERSHIP

3.1 Throughout Europe, there appears to be a move towards recognising some of the benefits of partnership working at various levels. The inclusion of ‘social partners’ in policy issues and strategy implementation would appear to aid ‘social development’ and fight against ‘social exclusion’.

3.2 Specific purposes of partnership vary according to the level and objectives of partnerships. Nevertheless, some general principles have recently be drawn up and are listed below: ²

- Societal Aims
- Innovation
- Multi-constituency
- Voluntary
- Mutual benefit and shared investment
- Alchemical effect

3.3 The only notable difference in this list of principles when looking at some of the regional examples in Europe is the voluntary element. For instance, in Flanders and North Rhine Westphalia the involvement of partners in certain aspects of policy and implementation is laid down in statute.

4. SPECIFIC MODELS AND EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP

4.1 Examples of partnership are largely concerned with enterprise, employment and training issues.

Flanders (Belgium)

4.2 The Flanders administration has two main elements that make up the social partnership:

- SERV (Flanders Social and Economic Council)

² TCC (The Copenhagen Centre) Definition of New Social Partnerships: 6 Key Principles
VESOC (Flemish Economic and Social Consultative Committee)

4.3 The social partners are also highly involved in the running of the VDAB (the Flemish equivalent of the Employment Service). The VDAB are also involved in setting up subregional partnerships.

4.4 The social partners comprise the government, employer, and employee’s organisations, as well as some participation from the community groups.

North Rhine Westphalia (Germany)

4.5 On a regional level, North Rhine Westphalia includes the social partners through:
- Regional Advisory Boards
- The Regional Secretariat

4.6 The partnership is made up of the representatives from business groups, trade unions and government. However, there may be moves to include other relevant organisations in due course.

Catalonia (Spain)

4.7 In Spain the role of social partners at regional level is relatively weak. However, Catalonia is involved in social partnership through
- CES (Economic and Social Council).

4.8 The partners involved are largely drawn from government, labour organisations and business associations.

5. IMPORTANT ISSUES ARISING FROM RESEARCH

5.1 The partnerships outlined above, as well as the general concept of social partnership have had their critics as well as praise. The following points highlight the relevant issues arising from the research.

Communication

5.2 Communication is seen as a key aspect in a successful partnership. To succeed partners must:
- Recognise the specific objectives and individual roles within the partnership.
- Accept the various motives, viewpoints, rights and responsibilities of individual partners. This can also include the resources available to each group.
- Be aware of the potential importance of maintenance and access to relevant database and filing systems. (This is very important at implementation level).
Consensus

5.3 Social partnership can offer consensus on policy issues, which can:

- Encourage stability and co-operation in producing policy and implementing strategy.
- Balance out any extreme views, and reach a ‘middle ground’.
- Divert criticism that policy is politically biased.

5.4 However, due to the partnership process:

- Negotiation on policy can be lengthy.
- Development and implementation of policy can not easily be instigated quickly.

Composition of the Partnership

5.5 There is some concern over partnerships and the fear that each partnership is only as good as its components. Successful partnerships must consider

- The exact remit and responsibility of each partner
- The reputation, experience and knowledge of each partner and what they can bring to the partnership
- How the partnership can encourage ‘best practice’
- How to evaluate the partnership and who the partnership is accountable to.

Evaluation and Accountability

5.6 In trying to assess the effectiveness of partnership it became clear that:

- Some critics accuse partnership of being undemocratic due to a lack of accountability and transparency
- Some allege that individual partners bring their own agenda to the partnership

5.7 Evaluation mechanisms may look at the role of the partnerships, its effectiveness, and how it is called to account. However, not all partnerships have formal evaluation measures in place. This could be a point of criticism.

Forward looking agenda

5.8 The majority of the examples given in this research relate to the more traditional sense of ‘social partners’ and ‘partnership’. ³ Some partnerships are challenged with looking towards the future, which may include encouraging wider participation from representatives outside of ‘traditional’ social partners.

1. INTRODUCTION:

1.1 In July 2002, the Scottish Executive’s Policy Unit asked the Office of the Chief Researcher to prepare an internal and exploratory piece of work to look at the models of social partnership in the devolved regions of Europe.

1.2 The aim of this research was to review and analyse what different models of partnership mean for government on an operational and organisational basis. The three devolved areas of Europe from which sufficient material was gathered are listed below. The research was undertaken in-house between July and October 2002.

Focus of Paper:

1.3 The focus of this paper will concentrate on social partnerships in the following three devolved regions of Europe:

- Flanders (and Belgium)
- North Rhine Westphalia (and Germany)
- Catalonia.

1.4 In turn, each region will be looked at in terms of:

- Background and definition of social partnership
- Policy areas devolved to the regions (where information is available)
- Models and experiences of social partnership
- Strengths and weaknesses in the ‘partnership’

1.5 The paper will also look at the principles and purposes behind ‘partnership’ in general.

Cautionary note on evidence:

1.6 The research was conducted over three months. Information was taken from various methods, including literature searches, searching the Internet and contacts with appropriate ‘experts’.

1.7 The aim of the research was to seek information on:

- The precise nature of the work of social partners at regional level
- The effectiveness of social partnership in terms of impact on:
  - the political process,
  - policy making and implementation
  - economic and social benefit.
1.8 Despite efforts, the evidence that was available was limited in places. This area appears to be very much under researched. The majority of the findings from this paper come from impressionistic and subjective accounts of social partnership, or else from sources that endorse social partnership as a concept and in practice.

1.9 This being said, there appears to be enough information to produce a skeleton outline of some of the models in the European regions, and some interesting material about the strengths and weaknesses of social partnership.

Cautionary note on terminology and context:

1.10 Through the research it has become apparent that there is a significant issue with regards to the definition of partnership and the context in which individual partnerships emerge. In essence, the terms social partnership or ‘social partners’ appear to mean something different to each region and this very much depends on the history of relations between the ‘partners’ and the context in which relations were forged.

1.11 Therefore, it is difficult to cut across all the devolved areas and to produce a truly comparative or analytical piece, as like can not easily be compared with like. Nevertheless, the models and background information that has been collated enables us to see what examples of ‘partnership’ are working in the various devolved regions listed above. This may still be useful, but should be looked at with the knowledge that one model will not necessarily transfer without difficulty to another region.

2. DEFINITION OF SOCIAL PARTNERSHIPS:

2.1 An exact and strict definition of social (and economic) partnership does not seem to exist. What we may see as social partnership is not recognised by other devolved regions. Some prefer to use the term ‘social partners’ or ‘social dialogue’ as oppose to incorporating the word ‘partnership’. This may be related to the level in which the ‘partnership’ is recognised as an institution or as an approach.

2.2 In addition, the whole definition ‘social partners’ is not universal either. Definitions of ‘social partners’ can be divided into two broad camps. Firstly, there is the more traditional school of thought that defines social partners as representatives from the government (local, regional or national); employer’s organisations; and employee’s organisations. Within this interpretation the role of social partners tends to revolve around issues in employment and the economy.

2.3 However, there is another definition of social partners that includes representatives from various community groups or organisations from ‘civic’ society, as well as those involved in the more traditional sense of partnership. Partnership projects or initiatives organised or implemented by this second group tend to extend their remit to other social issues outside of employment, but these can be interrelated. Certainly, there are examples where the more ‘civic’ of the social partners are involved in employment and training issues.
2.4 ‘Civic’ social partners are also very much involved at community level (community planning and implementation of strategies from above and at community level), and this is a particular area, which may be of future interest.  

2.5 As hinted at above, social partners can be involved in both policy making and implementation of such policy. This can be at various levels- national, regional sub-regional or local. In some cases these partnerships are linked. What areas of policy the partners are involved in, is naturally dependent on the level at which they are working.

2.6 In the context of this paper, the terms ‘national’, ‘regional’, ‘sub-regional’ and ‘local’ are explained below. The examples used are drawn from the UK experience.

National: UK government
Regional: Devolved Regional Government (Scottish Parliament/ Executive or National Assembly of Wales).
Sub-Regional: A combination of local communities or councils
Local: Individual community or council

3. PRINCIPLES AND PURPOSES OF SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP:

3.1 In some cases the general principle of social dialogue is seen as ‘fundamental’ to the culture in which region the partnership is based. In the case of Belgium, the principle of social partnership has been established since 1944 at national level through the ‘Social Pact’, and has developed a strong regional aspect. The traditional social partners and the ‘medeveld’ (Belgian middle field- community groups, charities etc) work with government at national and regional level to develop and implement policy.

3.2 However, as with the ‘definition’ issue, there are many different views as to what the precise principles or purposes of social partnerships are. Naturally, specific objectives change according to each region and initiative or policy area. However, there may be some benefit in attempting to collate the general of social partnerships and social dialogue.

3.3 The following excerpt is taken from the TCC (The Copenhagen Centre) website, in which it refers to the principles behind New Social Partnerships. Generally speaking, the TCC tend to place an emphasis on the sub-regional level, however there are still some interesting points raised:

**TCC definition of New Social Partnerships 6 key principles:**

1. **Societal aims**

Participants come together specifically to achieve societal benefits through joint actions. These benefits are understood here as meaning primarily benefits to individuals and groups who are economically and therefore often socially and politically disadvantaged, and so excluded from fully participating in and contributing to society. This is achieved in part by

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enabling individual partners to pursue their own interests, which may include the direct or indirect commercial interests of participating companies as well as the interests of other partners.

2. **Innovation**

*The partnership seeks to explore new approaches to addressing social and economic problems and opportunities.* These often challenge traditional rules and patterns of interaction between different actors, even in situations where a known model is being replicated or scaled up.

3. **Multi-constituency**

*Participants are drawn from two or more of the following: public bodies at local, national, European, or international levels; private sector entities, ranging from individual companies to business associations; and civil society, ranging from local community initiatives to trade unions, academic institutions and national and international non-governmental organisations.*

4. **Voluntary**

*Participation is voluntary in the sense that it is based on the active decision by each partner to engage, rather than the imperative of statutory compliance.* Having said this, some partners may be pressured to join the partnership for reasons of risk management, conflict avoidance or peer pressure rather than an entirely self-motivated desire to participate.

5. **Mutual benefit and shared investment**

*There is a resource contribution and associated risks or costs (financial, human, political or social) on the part of each partner and each partner benefits in some defined way.*

6. **Alchemical effect**

*Participants seek to achieve more than the sum of their individual parts by creating leverage and synergy based on and between key components of the partnership—context, purpose, participants, organisation, and outcomes.*

3.4 These relatively new ‘principles’ which the TCC have endorsed are not necessarily reflected in the more established forms of partnership which are predominant in some devolved areas of Europe. For example there is mandatory involvement of social partners in Germany and its regions with regard to the Federal Labour Institute and the labour courts. 

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5 TCC (The Copenhagen Centre) Definition of New Social Partnerships 6 Key Principles.

6 This was stated in a response to a written request for information.
Nevertheless, the above principles appear to compliment or bear some similarity to the general endorsements or workings of social dialogue among the partnership models of Europe’s regions.

3.5 According to the TCC ‘social development is no longer a concern for governments alone’.7 Partners from the public and private sector, which aim to combat social exclusion, are now a relevant part of the process. This statement withstanding, there is acknowledgement that there are potential problems along this route. For instance, barriers need to be broken down and the partners need to understand the position of each other, the expectations, and resources available to them individually and collectively.

3.6 It is argued that working through these barriers can produce better relations and pioneering solutions to problems. In the Netherlands, a formal regional partnership developed from an approach to working together to create long term jobs for unemployed people. This project (Flevo Werk) came into being when employment offices, labour market organisations and businesses worked side by side to solve the ‘supply’ and ‘demand’ need in employment. One of the reasons for the success was the acknowledgement that all the players involved had different motives and interests, but that these were not necessarily uncomplimentary. What sustained the project was the open and continual dialogue between the partners.8

3.7 Also, in reference to the Catalonian region, Brown and McCrone suggest that any policy or action that occurs is ‘best supported by a popular consensus’. Social dialogue provides this opportunity, lessening the level of conflict or disagreement regarding a particular action.9

4. EXAMPLES OF MODELS: DEVOLVED REGIONS

Belgium and the Flanders

Background:

4.1 Social partnership in Belgium is broadly defined as ‘... a triangular relationship between representatives of employers, employees and the Government’. (However, there are also elements of the third sector or ‘middle field’ that are involved in national and regional level policy making and delivery).

4.2 The involvement of social partners appears to date back to the period shortly after the Second World War when Belgium looked to develop and implement a new ‘infrastructure’ to address the social and economic needs of the country. Although the modern concept of partnership is a national one, there is a strong regional element. This appears to be both at policy making level and in the implementation process. Social partnership is recognised in the ethos of Belgium and its regions.

4.3 The regional administration in Belgium has responsibility for the following areas of policy:

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7 TCC website
8 Taken from partnership database on TCC website
Economic policy
Energy
Environment
Housing
Transport
Public works
Employment
Training and education (at community level)

4.4 Although social partners are highly involved at regional level, some argue that the majority of this responsibility is concerned with the ‘management and delivery’ of these policies as oppose to the formulation of them. It is argued that policy formulation is usually left to the regional government. (Although it is also maintained that there is a fine line between policy making and delivery).  

4.5 The extent to which social partners are involved varies according to policy area. However, employment, welfare to work and training are areas in which the ‘partners’ have a highly prominent role.

Examples of involvement of social partners at regional level:

SERV and VESOC

4.6 The two main components of the social partnership in the Flemish region appear to consist of the Flanders Social and Economic Council (SERV) and the Flemish Economic and Social Consultative Committee (VESOC).

4.7 The SERV acts as the consultative body of the Flemish social partners and its defined role is as follows:

- To advise, issue recommendations and points of view and publish case studies.
- Consult between the social partners mutually and with the Flemish government.
- Investigate technological and organisational innovations relating to human labour.

4.8 The SERV also houses a number of other committees which include the STV (Innovation and Work); the VOV (Flemish Women’s Consultative Committee); Health and Welfare Committee; and the Committee on Environment and Economy to name but a few.

4.9 The VESOC, despite its name is not limited to pure ‘consultation’. The committee, which consists of the Flemish government and the social partners, also works to obtain ‘concrete agreements’. Protocol agrees that the government will deliver all decisions that are reached by consensus.  

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10 Information taken from response to written request for information.
11 Taken from SERV website
The social partners are also highly involved in running the Employment Service. They are responsible for funding and delivering training programmes for those who have been long term unemployed. They are also involved in negotiating ‘collective’ agreements on provision of training for those in and out of employment. The social partners negotiate budgets, targets and priorities concerning employment, as well as ensuring quality of vocational training.  

In Flanders, the VDAB (Flemish Service for Employment and Vocational Training) appears to fulfil this role. The VDAB has been involved in establishing and developing a number of more sub-regional partnerships, with a particular focus on training and guidance for the unemployed.

There are three examples of partnerships that the VDAB have been instrumental in developing in Flanders. These are the ‘Tracks to Work’, ‘Working for Employment’ and ‘Network Genk’ initiatives.

**Tracks to Work**

The Tracks to Work partnership was launched by the VDAB in Limburg, in 1997. It was initially established to address two main problems. These were, the lack of qualifications among the long-term unemployed, and the ‘bottleneck’ problem in getting appropriate vacancies filled in the construction and metal industry. As a response to these problems, the partnership’s objective was to *combine business demands for qualified labour with intensive training initiatives which are deliberately targeted towards the construction sector and metal industry*.

The partnership model concentrated on the following efforts:

- Extensive co-operation between educational and training institutions, social organisations, and public employment authorities. (the partners).
- Ongoing dialogue about qualification needs in the ‘bottleneck’ sectors as a large number of companies fell into these sectors throughout the region.
- Links to the 17 local employment offices.

Through these efforts each long term unemployed person who came under the scheme was interviewed and had a ‘qualification profile’ drawn up. These individuals could then be directed towards appropriate training courses that were tailored to the needs of the companies in the ‘bottleneck’ sectors that had long term vacancies. As one might expect, the companies were very enthusiastic about such measures, as this helped to solve their recruitment problem.

In 1998, 718 people were offered a ‘pathway’ on to Tracks to Work’, and 387 found job placements. Success has been linked to the detailed knowledge of the partners of the local labour market demands, and the careful exchange of information among the partners. Trainers on these programmes are now receiving additional training themselves to have a deeper knowledge of market issues.

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12 Taken from SERV website
Working for Employment

4.17 At a similar time to the launch of *Tracks to Work*, the VDAB set up the *Working for Employment* partnership. Through EU funds, the VDAB established sub regional consortia, which consisted of employer and employee organisations, representatives from VDAB, private businesses and associations and various organisations that were involved in training or guidance.

4.18 The *Work for Employment* objective was to guarantee:

‘...a well balanced supply of pathway processes, stimulating, complementary actions within the process, increasing the inflow of unemployed persons in training and guidance programmes and optimising a labour market oriented approach’.

4.19 In Limburg, Working for Employment operated on three levels:

- A steering committee was made up of representatives from the VDAB, private training and guidance organisations, and the Flemish Institute for Self Employment, Education and Labour Market Observatory.
- A team was set up to develop the ‘pathway processes’ for unemployed people.
- Working groups were set up on an ad hoc basis to deal with specific themes.

4.20 Although there were some problems due to miscommunication between the relevant parties, when exchange of information was successful (mainly thanks to the use of the AMI registration database), the results of sharing resources were also a success.

Network Genk

4.21 This partnership was sealed in February 1998. The partnership consisted of representatives from 16 private and public sector organisations that were connected to training and/or guiding the unemployed. It was co-ordinated by two secondees from the VDAB.

4.22 The objectives were as follows:

- To fine tune the number of training programmes, job simulation projects and guidance programmes between the partners in order to increase employment opportunities for the target groups.
- To improve existing information and communication channels between the organisations and to develop new channels where shortcomings in information streams are detected.
- To improve the information streams in relation to the target groups by means of structured meetings between partners within the same pathway process.
- To improve the quality of pathways through the exchange of know how.

4.23 It may be interesting here to note the interest in the AMI database as a resource in exchanging information among partners in order to enhance the likelihood of a successful pathway. The use of such a system, as well as the high level of co-ordination (both the
approach and the human resource of two co-ordinators) allowed for a synergy among the partners.

4.24 Significantly, terminology such as ‘pathway’ is apparent in all these examples of partnership. It would seem that without the fulfilment of all the ‘pathways’ (routes by which targets and principles are met) the partnership fails to work effectively.

Strengths and weaknesses:

4.25 The strengths of partnership in the Belgian regions include an apparent ‘consensus’ which offers stability. It offers an opportunity for different viewpoints and objectives to be discussed, whilst encouraging people of these differing standpoints to work together. Extreme views can be balanced out and this avoids dramatic shifts in policy that could cause potential criticism. It can also avoid criticism that policies are politically biased.

4.26 Weaknesses however include the criticism that social partnership is not democratic, so far as there can appear to be a distinct lack of accountability or ‘transparency’. Social partners also face criticism that the process can not react rapidly to emerging trends or needs and that there is a high level of bureaucracy involved. There has also been allegation that some social partners act on specific, individual interests as oppose to the broader public interest.

4.27 It may be appropriate to consider these points when looking at partnership in other regions of Europe.

Germany and the North Rhine Westphalia Region

Background

4.28 In Germany, it would appear that the ‘social partners’ are involved in policy making and implementation of policy in both a formal and informal way.

4.29 The ‘social partners’ that are involved in policy making and implementation of policy come from various backgrounds, although the most influential appear to be the trade unions, employers groups, major community representative groups and chambers of industry and trade. The others include craft groups, special interest groups, churches and welfare groups. Although it would seem that the extent to which these other groups are included in the traditional understanding of ‘social partnership’ is something of a contentious issue. (Some responses to enquiries appear to suggest that influence in ‘civil society’ is very different to influence among the ‘social partners’).

4.30 The national ‘Alliance for Employment, Education, Training and Competitiveness’ allowed the social partners (State government, employer’s groups and trade unions) to bring together a framework for creating jobs. Initial discussions in this field also included those representatives from the less ‘traditional’ social partners, including the Protestant and

13 All information on sub-regional partnerships taken from partnership database on TCC website
14 Taken from written response to request for information
Catholic Church. It is also interesting to note that North Rhine Westphalia’s employment office service was present at these early discussions.

4.31 The policy areas that the partners contribute to on a regional level are listed below. However, the majority appear to have a cut across to business and employment issues.

4.32 The following policy areas are devolved to the regions or ‘Lander’ of Germany:

- State planning and regulation
- State finances
- Media, telecommunication and broadcasting
- Justice
- Business and SMEs
- Energy and transport
- Employment and social affairs
- Qualifications and technology
- Schools
- Science and research
- Town planning and housing
- Culture and sport
- Environment and nature/conservation
- Agriculture and consumer protection
- Women, young people and families
- Health

Examples of social partnership at regional level

4.33 Alongside the ‘collective’ employment law, North Rhine Westphalia government has developed a ‘regionalised, integrated, preventative employment market policy and structural policy’ which is recognised as a model across the Federation. This attempts to find employment or appropriate training towards finding work for unemployed persons.

4.34 In North Rhine Westphalia, social partners (trade unions and employer’s groups) are involved with running regional advisory boards and regional secretariats. These have been set up to pay specific attention to the regional needs in terms of the labour market. The regional secretariat holds great responsibility in that it implements the employment market policy on behalf of the Ministry for Employment and Social Affairs, Qualifications and Technology of the Federal State of Nordrhein-Westfalen.

Regional Advisory Boards are responsible for:

- Development of regional development strategies for employment and qualification policy
- Bringing together partners in structural policy and employment policy
- Advising on and determining the number of jobs to be provided by specific projects in the region
- Setting priorities and objectives for the work of the regional secretariats.
The Regional Secretariat has the following responsibilities:

- Acts as advisor and contact point for projects relating to employment market
- Acting as information point in the regions
- Acting as secretariat for the Advisory Board
- Stimulating and overseeing initiatives relating to qualifications and employment

4.35 It is likely that, in the future, more groups will be encouraged to participate in such activity, in order to focus on the distinct need of the region involved. With a clearer knowledge brought to the sub regional or local partnership, it is hoped that the aim of a project will be more readily realised.

Strengths and weaknesses:

4.36 Although the example of social partners in North Rhine Westphalia has been welcomed by national government as a model for the Federation, problems or flaws in the system have been highlighted. One point that was raised by a representative of North Rhine Westphalia was that there was none, or very little formal method, of evaluating social partnerships in their various forms. For this reason it was claimed that it was difficult to assess the ‘effectiveness’ of the workings between the individual partners in the partnership.

4.37 However, high levels of co-operation amongst partners is encouraged in North Rhine Westphalia. It would seem to be of uppermost importance in both social dialogue and the political domain. Therefore, if communication and co-operation are principles that are adhered to by successful partnerships, it could be argued that this belief in North Rhine Westphalia is a strength. The forward-looking plan to extend the partnership may also be deemed to be a positive step.

The Catalonian Region

Background

4.38 From the evidence gathered, it would appear that any sense of a formal social partnership is somewhat weak at the regional level in Spain. Nevertheless the Catalonian authority does work with the social partners.

Example of involvement of social partners at regional level

4.39 In particular, Catalonia has its own Economic and Social Council (CES). This is a senior government body that advises on socio-economic themes and labour issues. The Council comprises three groups, these are made up from representatives from:

- Labour organisations
- Business organisations

15 Taken from written responses to requests for information
- Representatives from farming and fishing,
- Consumer groups
- Government ‘experts’ on socio-economic matters.

Its main objectives are:

- To provide a formal channel for participation by the economic and social partners in the process of introducing laws concerning social- economic and labour matters.
- To provide government decisions on such matters
- To provide a permanent institutional forum for dialogue and debate between social partners and to encourage them to review and consider economic and social issues, making such proposals as may be in order to the relevant public authorities.

4.40 The development of a technology policy at national level helped to formalise relations between the government and social partners. In 1998, an ‘employment pact’ was signed between the trade unions and the employer’s association CEOE. Although partnership was much more recognised at national level, the regional effort concentrated on training and brought together players from the regional government, technology centres and local business.

Strengths and weaknesses:

4.41 There was some general criticism, however, from a Catalan Minister who suggested that, if a business person with limited knowledge became involved in a model of partnership, (whether at national or regional level), the partnership risked producing ‘worst’ practice, instead of ‘good’ practice. This would discredit potentially important policies. 16

4.42 However, there was also general recognition of partnership as a tool by which to ensure an appropriate level of support for the final policies and implementation thereof. Where all relevant social partners have been included in this procedure, then there is less chance of direct conflict to the measures set in place. 17

5. CONCLUSION

Findings

5.1 In conclusion, the issue of social partnership brings up several points of interest.

5.2 First and foremost, any understanding of specific models of partnership must be taken in to account alongside the history and context of the relations between the partners. Each model of partnership came via a different route, and this can affect the exact approach to working in partnership.

16 Taken from Brown and McCrone, Ibid.
17 Taken from Brown and McCrone, Ibid.
5.3 The precise definition of social partnership is quite complex, both in terms of the make up of the partnership and in the principles and purposes behind it. Whilst being dependent on context, and specific objectives of each partnership model, some general themes emerge:

- Social partners traditionally include representatives from the government, trade unions and employer’s organisations. However, representatives from ‘civic’ society can also be involved.
- Social partners can be involved in partnership working at national, regional, sub-regional and local level. They can be included in discussion and debate on policy making, however it is more likely that they are involved in practical development of strategy and implementation.
- The majority of social partnerships appear to be connected to employment and training issues.

5.4 Important issues that have arisen from the research about the workings of social partnership (some issues compound both strength and weakness), include:

- Debate and negotiation with social partnerships can bring about a certain degree of consensus in society with regard to strategies undertaken by government.
- Final policy decisions are more likely to be welcomed and implemented more effectively. Nevertheless, the process of negotiation can be lengthy.
- Further issues with regard to social partnership include the need to:
  - Develop best practice and appropriate membership
  - Incorporate evaluation mechanisms into frameworks
  - Communicate effectively as a ‘partnership’ and between partners
  - Develop data systems where appropriate
  - Be forward looking as a partnership.

5.5 Certainly, there are those that would suggest that social partnership encourages discussion and debate on important issues, which leads to a more open and inclusive approach to governance and development of policy. Models of partnership that aim to implement change in tackling social exclusion (e.g. challenging unemployment), would seem to be of benefit on a social and economic level.

5.6 Nevertheless, there are critics of social partnership, who accuse the process of being open to ‘bad practice’ for a variety of reasons including, lack of accountability.

**Gaps in Research and Recommendations for Future Work**

5.7 It should also be taken into account that the degree to which the social partnership works is dependent on the context in which it was forged. It has not been appropriate to follow this argument in detail. However, it might be useful to note the theoretical model that has been researched by Compston. This ‘Configurational Model’ approach, may be worth further study as it draws on common contextual issues that may have an effect on the stability and effectiveness of partnership. 18

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5.8 Unfortunately, this paper has not been able to clarify to what extent social partnerships are involved in policy areas outside of enterprise, employment and training. It is thought that there is at least one example of social partnership in the ‘youth justice’ area in North Rhine Westphalia. (Referred to in recent relations between Scotland and North Rhine Westphalia). It is unclear how unique this is, or to what extent it is in operation. Unfortunately this was not referred to in the responses from representatives in the region or in any literature search. For this reason it was not included in the paper. Future research may wish to follow this up.

5.9 It may also be useful to look more closely at the role of social partnership in community planning, and implementation of government strategy at local level. This would probably look outside of the traditional view of social partners and include representatives from the voluntary sector and community groups.

5.10 It may also be of use to look closely at other devolved regions of Europe which do not follow any social partnership model, and the reasons behind this.

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ANNEX 1:

1. METHODS AND BARRIERS:

1.1 Information for this paper was gathered through various methods. These included searching the Internet, literature searches, developing questions (using translations where relevant) and sending these out to appropriate contacts to disseminate to organisations and individuals known to them. All responses and information gathered by other means were then analysed.

1.2 A number of problems in gathering material were experienced, however. The period in which the research began coincided with the ‘summer recess’ in Europe. This meant that a number of relevant individuals were simply not available for comment. Likewise, a number of academics both in this country and abroad were not available immediately. For this reason, email or hard copy requests for information were sent to relevant people for response on their return.

1.3 When possible and where appropriate, individuals were approached a second time, once it was clear that deadlines had passed and no response had been received.

1.4 The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) guidelines were followed to the best of knowledge. However, the recommended time scale for requesting information left little time for analysis, and so deadlines were shortened. The help of the FCO in urging a quick response was appreciated. The FCO could also direct the requests to appropriate individuals.

1.5 Language barriers were also evident. These were overcome by translating the requests for information into Spanish and German, and translating any response back into English. However, any analysis had to take into account the fact that some of the information may be lost in translation.

Any analysis had to also consider the different cultural issues and approaches around partnership. There was also the issue of sensitivity.

1.6 Despite efforts to involve a range of regions in Europe, the information received was relatively limited. However, material was received from representatives in Germany and Belgium with emphasis on North Rhine Westphalia, and the Flanders. This information when read alongside the data taken from literature searches, and Internet searches, allows examples of models to be seen in these regions.

1.7 The focus of the paper therefore relates to:

Flanders and Belgium
North Rhine Westphalia and Germany
Catalonia

1.8 The aim of the search was also extended to include more locally based partnerships where there was a relevant link to the regional level. There was particular evidence of such a link in the Belgian region of Flanders.
ANNEX 2:

LIST OF QUESTIONS INCLUDED IN WRITTEN REQUEST FOR INFORMATION:

_Could you please answer as many of these questions as you feel appropriate in relation to any of the above regions of which you have knowledge?_

- What policy areas are devolved to the region?

- Are the 'social partners' (government, trade unions, business, community groups/third sector) involved in policy making at regional level?

- If so, please indicate which of the social partners are involved.

- Please indicate what areas of policy each of the social partners are involved in.

- Where possible, give details of specific 'partnerships' and explain in what ways the social partners are involved in policy making.

- Is the involvement of the social partners mandatory or voluntary?

- What sources are available to fund social partnerships?

- What arrangements are in place to fund social partnerships?

- Does the 'social partnership' act in an advisory capacity?

- Does this act in any other capacity other than advisory? Please state.

- In terms of working together, how effective are the relationships between government, trade unions, business and community groups/third sector? Please give reasons for your answer.

- How are 'social partners' and their representatives appointed?

- Are women represented in the social partnerships?

- Are ethnic minorities represented in the social partnerships?

- How do 'social partnerships' at national, regional, and sub regional level interact with each other?

[Responses were received from two representatives for Flanders, and three from North Rhine Westphalia. Two individuals duplicated information on North Rhine Westphalia. Responses varied in length and detail, and were quite subjective in nature. Some respondents were native to the regions, while others were British nationals.]
ANNEX 3:

RELEVANT WEB-SITES

TCC website
www.copenhagencentre.org/main

Flanders governmental website
www.flanders.be

SERV website
www.serv.be

VDAB website
www.vdab.be

Directory for web-sites on regional institutions (incl. government)
http://directory.google.com/Top/Regional

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Texts:


Local Partnerships for Better Governance (OECD, 2001)

Journal Articles:


Govaerts, ‘Regional Institutes for Community Development in Flanders, Belgium: Their Relationship to Regional and Local Authorities’ (in Community Development Journal Vol. 26 No. 2, 1991) pp. 147-152

Government Publications:

‘Coalition Agreement 1999- 2004: A New Project for Flanders. Part II: Welfare and well being in Flanders’

‘VDAB: Key Figures’ (VDAB, 2000)