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Managing the Structural Funds: Institutionalising Good Practice

IQ-Net Thematic Paper 1(1)

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*IQ-Net
Improving the Quality of Structural Fund
Programming through Exchange of
Experience*

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Preface

'IQ-Net': Networking to improve the quality of Objective 2 programmes

Launched in early 1996 and managed by the *European Policies Research Centre (EPRC)* at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, the network *'IQ-Net'* facilitates exchange of experience in the development, implementation and evaluation of Objective 2 programmes. Funded by a consortium of 13 Objective 2 areas and the European Commission (DG XVI), the network meets twice a year to examine issues of practical relevance to programme-makers and share examples of good, innovative and distinctive practice from across the EU. The first two meetings were held in Glasgow, in association with Strathclyde European Partnership (February 1996), and in Cardiff, hosted by the Welsh Office and Welsh Development Agency (September 1996). Meetings provide the opportunity to discuss the results of a structured programme of applied research and debate, which is steered by the network's partner regions:

- Steiermark and Niederösterreich, Austria
- Nordjylland, Denmark
- Päijät-Häme and South Karelia, Finland
- Aquitaine and Rhône Alpes, France
- Nordrhein Westfalen and Saarland, Germany
- Ångermanlandskusten and Fyrstad, Sweden
- Industrial South Wales and Western Scotland, UK

IQ-NET Thematic Papers

This document is one of four thematic papers produced by EPRC in 1996 as part of *IQ-NET's* 1996 applied research programme:

- Series 1, No 1: Managing the Structural Funds.
- Series 1, No 2: RTD/Innovation policies in Objective 2 programmes.
- Series 1, No 3: Generating Good Projects.
- Series 1, No 4: Monitoring and Evaluation.

Focusing on topics selected by the network's partner regions, each paper places issues in their international context, raises questions for debate and highlights distinctive and innovative practices. For the convenience of readers, executive summaries are included in French, German and English.

The papers were first drafted on the basis of field research (encompassing interviews with Objective 2 programme managers and partners at regional, Member State and Commission levels) and substantial desk research. They were then modified to reflect the discussions of the Cardiff *IQ-Net* meeting and the comments of network sponsors. The papers are being distributed to a wide group of people nominated by the sponsors, and the EPRC welcomes comment and feedback on them.

Readers are reminded that the content of the papers does not necessarily represent the official position of either the partner regions or the Commission, and that errors of fact or interpretation are the responsibility of the authors alone.

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Further Information

Additional copies of the papers and further information on IQ-Net can be obtained from John Bachtler and Sandra Taylor, managers of the network, at the EPRC. The December 1996 edition of '*IQ-Net Bulletin*', a newsletter co-financed by DG XVI and available from EPRC, also contains synopses of the papers.

Managing the Structural Funds: Institutionalising Good Practice

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES

1.	Managing the Structural Funds - Institutionalising Good Practice	3
2.	L'Administration des Fonds Structurels.....	11
3.	Verwaltung der Strukturfonds	19

THEMATIC PAPER

1.	Introduction	29
2.	Institutional Structures.....	29
2.1	National/Regional Differences	29
2.2	Denmark	31
2.3	France	31
2.4	Finland.....	32
2.5	Sweden	33
2.6	United Kingdom	33
2.7	Germany	34
2.8	Austria	35
3.	Programme Management: Distinctive Approaches	35
3.1	Regional Steering Committee (Denmark)	36
3.2	Regional Management Offices (Austria).....	37
3.3	Programme Executives (Scotland, Fyrstad).....	37
3.4	Integration of ERDF/ESF (Bremen)	38
3.5	Advisory Groups.....	38
3.6	Financial Management Techniques	39
4.	Experiences of Implementation.....	39
4.1	Strategic Issues	40
4.2	Organisational Issues	40
4.3	Technical Issues.....	42

Executive Summaries

*Managing the Structural Funds –
Institutionalising Good Practice*

L'Administration des Fonds Structurels

Verwaltung der Strukturfonds

1. MANAGING THE STRUCTURAL FUNDS - INSTITUTIONALISING GOOD PRACTICE

1.1 Introduction

Since the 1988 reform of the Structural Funds, the basic principles underlying EU regional policy have become progressively institutionalised. The majority of EU Member States now have up to eight years' experience of implementing the Structural Funds, in some cases through three programming cycles (1989-91, 1992-93, 1994-96). For certain regions, such as Strathclyde, Groningen-Drenthe and Auvergne, the experience of managing integrated development operations dates back to the mid-1980s.

Member States have reacted in different ways to the institutional demands of implementing EU regional policy. Whereas some countries have attempted to draw up and implement Structural Fund programmes in close association with the objectives and institutional structures of their national regional policies, other Member States have developed new organisational forms and systems for administering Structural Fund expenditure largely separate from their own regional policy approach. The management of Structural Fund 'programming' has proved to be one of the most challenging issues for Member States at both national and regional levels - this paper examines some of the major issues arising from the management of Structural Funds' programmes.

1.2 Institutional Structures

The implementation of the Structural Funds is clearly not a uniform process. Differences between Member States are mainly attributable to divergent national constitutions, administrative cultures and practices, notably the allocation of powers, duties and responsibilities between different levels of government. They also reflect the relationship between national regional policy and the Structural Funds, the size and scale of programmes (within and between Objectives 1, 2, 5b and 6), the attitude and influence of Commission services, and the degree of regional/local experience with regional development strategies.

These factors limit generalisation about the implementation of the Funds. Nevertheless, it is possible to distinguish between groups of countries with respect to their implementation structures and regional arrangements for programme management.

1.3 Implementation Structures

Approaches to Structural Fund implementation generally fall into two categories. The first group of countries is those exercising strong central government control on implementation. Central government plays an important role in Structural Fund implementation in virtually all EU Member States (negotiating with Commission services, supervising strategy formulation, expenditure, monitoring and evaluation). In some countries this central government role is much more marked than in others: in France, the UK, Ireland, Portugal and Greece, central government is the main implementing *authority* and the main implementing *agency*. The regional representatives of central government (eg. *préfectures de Régions* in France or

Government Offices in England) chair the Monitoring Committees and make the final funding decisions, although some aspects of programme management may be devolved.

In a second group of countries, implementation is devolved wholly or partly to regional authorities. This applies mainly to the federal countries such as Germany, where the *Länder* (states) are legally responsible for regional development, as well as Austria and Belgium. Substantial devolution also applies to some non-federal countries like Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden, where there is a high degree of regional autonomy over the implementation process, and programmes are largely managed and controlled by regional authorities. In several of these countries, programming (including budgetary resources) and some Commission liaison is decentralised to the regions, and the role of central government is restricted to general co-ordination of the Funds, higher level Commission negotiation, inter-ministerial co-ordination and evaluation of ‘good practice’.

Italy and Spain tend to share elements of the two groups. In both countries, the central government takes the lead in managing Objective 1 programmes, although the regions have considerable autonomy with respect to the delivery of programmes. By contrast, the management of Objective 2 programmes (including the chairing of Monitoring Committees and some Commission liaison) is largely devolved to regional authorities (Autonomous Communities in Spain, regions in Italy).

These arrangements are not static; Member States with longer experience of Objective 2 programmes have adapted their structures over the past 2-3 programming periods - in most cases in the direction of greater devolution of responsibility to regional/local authorities or special programming groups.

There may also be regional variation within apparently homogeneous structures. France and Italy are good examples: the extent of partnership and the balance of responsibility between central and regional authorities varies significantly between regional programmes, and (it has been claimed) the regional divergence is growing. Such regional differences reflect the disparities between regions in terms of regional political leadership, institutional capability, network relations between regional/local actors and the significance of Structural Fund programme relative to other activities.

1.4 Programme Management

A further aspect of implementation is how programme management is undertaken within regions. The majority of Member States have subsumed project decision-making within their pre-existing institutional structures. This applies in Germany, in particular, where the implementation of the Structural Funds has been integrated, as far as possible, within the existing system and structure of regional policy administration (programme management and project decisions are undertaken by the relevant *Land* authorities). The complexity of Structural Fund administration, however, is such that special programme management arrangements have had to be developed; in some regions, programme management is undertaken by Programme Executives/Secretariats (Scotland, Netherlands, Fyrstad in Sweden).

The following sub-sections highlight distinctive approaches to a number of programme management issues.

1.4.1 *Regional Steering Committee (Denmark)*

The involvement of political interests in Structural Fund management is an issue of concern to several regions. In North Jutland, this issue has been addressed by creating a Regional Steering Committee separate from the programme management executive and Monitoring Committee. The committee's principal role is to ensure political backing at the regional level for major development issues related to the use of Structural Funds. The RSC is composed of local/regional political figures and is chaired by the leader of the county council.

The function of the RSC as a vehicle for coordination between Objective 2 and separate regional development initiatives is particularly important because not all the region's districts have the same degree of coverage by the Structural Fund initiatives. Co-ordination is made possible by the fact that the RSC is at the same time the board of the North Jutland Development Fund, and the fund is backed up by the same secretariat as the Objective 2 programme.

According to local policy-makers, the administrative set-up in North Jutland has two advantages. First, the division of labour between the 'political' RSC and a 'technical' Executive Committee prevents territorial interests from dominating the programme. Second, the generation of regional political consensus is seen as strengthening regional actors, making it more difficult for national bodies to disregard the preferences of North Jutland.

1.4.2 *Regional Management Offices (Austria)*

In Austria, a distinctive approach to programme implementation is being established through the formation of 35 Regional Management Offices, supporting implementation of the Structural Funds at local level, promoting local involvement and project development. The Regional Managers' exact remit is not yet clear, but the following areas have been suggested: the transfer of information into the region; lobbying and information dissemination about the region at state level; assisting co-operation and co-ordination between beneficiary organisations within the region, and providing initial consultancy to programme applicants.

The Regional Managers' contribution to the generation of good projects, and particularly the identification of projects which combine ERDF and ESF, could be very important. The success of the Regional Management system is, however, quite dependent on qualified and motivated people being involved.

1.4.3 *Programme Executives (Scotland, Fyrstad)*

In other Member States, the tasks of the Austrian Regional Management Offices are combined with programme administration through the use of independent *Programme Executives*. In Objective 2 regions in Scotland (UK), programme implementation and management are undertaken by independent management bodies supporting the Member State authority and the wider partnership. Scottish programme executives, such as Strathclyde European Partnership, undertake virtually all aspects of programme administration apart

from payments. Fyrstad in Sweden has also established an independent Secretariat to administer its programme.

1.4.4 Integration of ERDF/ESF (Bremen)

Most Member State authorities have found the integration of ERDF and ESF problematic. In almost all countries, the two Funds are administered separately, in some cases with different decision-making structures and systems.

One innovative approach is the Coherence Fund in Bremen (Germany), included as a separate priority in the Bremen SPD, and setting up formal mechanisms to ensure that ERDF and ESF measures reinforce each other, even though they are administered by separate authorities. Under the Coherence Fund priority, project applications which involve both capital investment and qualification measures may be submitted through either the Economics or Social Ministries.

1.4.5 Advisory Groups

Advisory Groups are used to varying degrees throughout the EU (Finland/Netherlands/UK). These groups assist decision-making with technical advice, in some regions their role is more substantive. For example, advisory groups in Päijät-Häme (Finland) are involved in projects at an early stage, and actively assist with project development. They undertake an initial and unofficial appraisal of possible project applications, and have an active role in improving them.

In Fyrstad (Sweden), various Advisory Groups work on projects before they are submitted to the more politically charged atmosphere of the PMC. They can also act as a ‘filtering mechanism’, notifying programme managers of potential political issues arising from certain projects.

1.4.6 Financial management techniques

An approach used in some French regions (eg Aquitaine) to simplify the financial management of programmes is the ‘paiement alternatif’ - alternating payment system. While each project is informed that it is in receipt of European funding, and is the beneficiary of a package of funding, it will be allocated a single source of finance. Thus, some projects will be funded by the regional councils, some by the state, some exclusively by European funds. As a result, policy-makers can provide their financial support quickly. The main drawback appears to be the delays which can be caused to projects when one tranche of European funding gets used up and the next does not come through immediately.

1.5 Experiences of Implementation

Implementing the Structural Funds has been a substantial challenge. The problems have been amplified for the new Member States like Sweden which have been expected to integrate a complicated system within national structures in a short space of time. Experience in countries like the UK was that it took at least 1-2 programming periods (3-5 years) to adjust to a multi-task, multi-activity programming approach within a single budget - with new

procedures, vocabulary, terminology and human resource requirements - as well as multi-department management and co-ordination vertically and horizontally within (and outwith) government.

Those regions which have been successful in adapting effectively to the programme management task tend to be those which have: a degree of 'regional identity'; coherent economic and geographical areas; considerable experience or traditions of economic development; experience of (or the ability to establish) co-ordination, co-operation or liaison between different economic and social agencies; and strong personalities in charge of programmes.

1.5.1 *Strategic Issues*

The current approach to programming poses several important constraints:

- *Programming periods are too short.* Towards the end of the cycle, there is a rush to spend money and prepare for the next period. One of the most urgent requirements is for longer periods of stability.
- *The Funds involve a substantial administrative burden for a relatively small amount of money.* There is a need for simplification to ensure easier, more effective implementation.
- *The process of area designation is questionable.* There are too many different Objective 2 areas and too many different measures in each area with separate financial allocations. The duplication of initiatives financed under ERDF/ESF and Community Initiatives adds to this problem.
- *The SPD approach is of variable relevance for the implementation of programmes.* Its relevance is limited in some countries, especially in a decentralised and fragmented system (Austria), but more valuable in others (eg. Finland). Disillusionment with Structural Funds among key policy organisations can reduce the overall effectiveness of the programme.

1.5.2 *Organisational Issues*

Few Member State authorities have escaped substantial administrative upheaval in the administration of the Structural Funds. However, increasingly efficient management structures and systems are being implemented.

a. *Vertical co-ordination*

One of the main causes of problems for Member States arises from different actors working at different levels of the implementation process. Lower levels of government have often perceived the Structural Funds as an opportunity to gain more autonomy with regard to their economic development responsibilities and resources (especially in unitary states such as the UK), and this has increased the awareness and involvement of regional and local authorities with respect to strategic planning and development.

These processes may create problems in other areas. For example, in Denmark there is concern that greater local involvement could provide central government with the opportunity to reduce central government contributions, making it difficult for regional authorities to co-finance EU funded projects.

A federal structure does not necessarily make Structural Fund administration easier. The complex tensions and balance of responsibilities between federal and state governments can hinder rather than promote the involvement of the regions.

b. Programme management and partnership

At national and regional levels, a further problem concerns the ‘horizontal interfaces’ between departments and agencies. In general, the experience of programme implementation is that it has increased communication and coordination between funding agencies and beneficiary organisations within a region.

For many regions an important issue is the lack of interest in participation among relevant actors and the wider community, raising the question of how to promote awareness, interest and participation.

In institutionalising partnership, the common feature of all programmes is the establishment of a Monitoring Committee (MC). A frequent complaint is that MC meetings do not invite open discussion on strategic direction because meetings are dominated by technical issues. Solutions advocated to promote a higher quality and different style of debate include the separation of strategic issues from financial/technical matters eg. between MCs and Programme Management Committees (Scotland, Sweden). Elsewhere eg. Germany, there is a division between the national MC and regional sub-committees which consult on and co-ordinate regional perspectives for the MC.

1.5.3 Technical Issues

a. Management Information Systems

A fundamental problem faced by regions is how to ensure standard implementation in a manner that complies with the Structural Fund regulations and national administrative and accounting practices.

The UK approach has been to adopt a ‘single manual’ of good practice applying to all regional programmes; specific guidelines have also been adopted for the Scottish programmes. In the new Member States, the Commission has recommended the creation of Working Groups with representatives of the Monitoring Committees for Objective 2 and 6 regions and the production of a handbook for Structural Fund implementation.

Computerised management information systems have been a critical development in the evolution of Structural Funds management.

b. Funding, additionality and absorption

Co-financing is problematical in many areas. There are problems in determining the eligibility of projects (a common complaint is that Commission guidelines are too imprecise) and there is a perceived need to make rules clearer and simpler. Additionality may be difficult to demonstrate. Regions have been affected by weak economic conditions, which has affected use and absorption of Structural Fund resources. Problems arise in regions which lack sufficient capacity, sufficient development role or funding or where the size, shape and economic characteristics of the area inhibit the effective implementation of priorities and measures. The projection of

spending is commonly found to be difficult. Lack of experience and knowledge about the capacity for private sector involvement in projects make projections problematical for many regions. Local authorities are often constrained by their existing capital programming cycles in which it is difficult to make forecasts.

c. Commission relationships

Many regions have positive experiences of working with the Commission. However, the functions of Commission services give rise to several concerns, especially with respect to the Commission's appreciation of national conditions and systems, its involvement in specific operational issues (eg. use of indicators, project selection), delays in getting timely answers from Commission services because of inter-department and inter-DG differences, and a lack of uniformity in the Commission approach.

2. L'ADMINISTRATION DES FONDS STRUCTURELS

2.1 Introduction

Depuis la réforme des Fonds Structurels de 1988, les principes de base de la politique régionale de l'Union Européenne sont devenus opérationnels. La majorité des Etats Membres de l'Union a maintenant huit ans d'expérience dans la mise en oeuvre des Fonds Structurels. Dans certains cas, cette expérience s'étale sur trois cycles de programmation (1989-1991, 1992-1993 et 1994-1996). Dans certaines régions comme en Strathclyde, en Auvergne ou en Groningue-Drenthe, l'expérience de l'administration d'opérations intégrées de développement remonte au milieu des années 1980.

Les choix des Etats Membres en ce qui concerne l'aspect institutionnel de la mise en oeuvre de la politique régionale européenne sont variés. Certains pays ont cherché à élaborer et à mettre en oeuvre leurs programmes en étroite corrélation avec les objectifs et les structures institutionnelles existants pour leurs politiques régionales. D'autres Etats Membres ont développé, pour l'administration des dépenses des Fonds Structurels, de nouvelles formes d'organisation et de nouveaux systèmes très différents de leur propre approche de la politique régionale. Gérer la programmation des Fonds Structurels s'est révélé être une des questions les plus délicates pour les Etats Membres tant au niveau national que régional. Cet article résume quelques unes des questions principales soulevées par l'administration des Fonds Structurels.

2.2 Structures Institutionnelles

La mise en oeuvre des Fonds Structurels n'est de toute évidence pas uniforme. Les différences observées entre les Etats Membres dans la mise en oeuvre proviennent de la diversité de leurs constitutions, de leurs cultures et pratiques administratives, et notamment de la distribution des pouvoirs, des devoirs et des compétences entre les différents niveaux de gouvernement. Elles reflètent également les relations entre la politique régionale nationale et les Fonds Structurels, la taille et la portée géographique des programmes (au sein des Objectifs 1, 2, 5b et 6 mais également entre eux), l'attitude et l'influence des services de la Commission et de l'expérience régionale et locale pour ce qui est les stratégies de développement régional.

Ces facteurs limitent la généralisation des propos concernant la mise en oeuvre des Fonds Structurels. Toutefois il est possible de classer les pays en plusieurs groupes selon les choix retenus pour la mise en oeuvre et les structures régionales mises en place pour l'administration des programmes.

2.3 Choix Retenus pour la Mise en Oeuvre

Il est possible de distinguer deux approches dans la mise en oeuvre des Fonds Structurels. La première approche est celle des états au sein desquels le gouvernement central exerce un puissant contrôle sur la mise en oeuvre des Fonds. Le gouvernement central joue un rôle important dans cette mise en oeuvre dans pratiquement tous les Etats Membres de l'Union (par exemple pour mener les négociations avec les services de la Commission, pour superviser l'élaboration des stratégies, les dépenses, le suivi et l'évaluation). Dans certains pays, le rôle du gouvernement central est plus pressant que dans

d'autres. En France, au Royaume Uni, en République d'Irlande, au Portugal et en Grèce, le gouvernement central est la principale *autorité* de mise en oeuvre mais également la principale *institution* chargée de la mise en oeuvre. Bien que certains aspects de l'administration du programme soient dévolus, les représentants du gouvernement central au niveau régional (tels que les préfetures de région en France ou les *Government Offices* en Angleterre) président les comités de suivi et prennent les décisions finales de financement.

Dans le deuxième groupe d'états, la mise en oeuvre est, entièrement ou partiellement, dévolue aux autorités régionales. Tel est le cas dans les états fédéraux comme l'Allemagne, l'Autriche et la Belgique. En Allemagne, ce sont les *Länder* (les états fédérés) qui sont légalement compétents pour le développement régional. Une dévolution substantielle est aussi notable dans certains autres états qui ne présentent pas une structure fédérale, notamment le Danemark, la Finlande, les Pays-Bas et la Suède. Dans ces pays il existe un fort degré d'autonomie régionale pour la mise en oeuvre des programmes. Ces derniers sont largement administrés et contrôlés par les autorités régionales. Dans plusieurs de ces états, la programmation (y compris des ressources budgétaires) et certaines relations avec la Commission sont décentralisées au niveau des régions. Le rôle du gouvernement central est limité à la coordination générale des Fonds Structurels, aux négociations avec la Commission au niveau le plus officiel, à la coordination interministérielle et à l'évaluation de "bons exemples".

L'Italie et l'Espagne regroupent des tendances des deux groupes. Dans ces deux pays, bien que les régions disposent d'une large autonomie pour la mise en oeuvre des programmes d'Objectif 1, le gouvernement central en dirige l'administration. Par contre, l'administration des programmes d'Objectif 2 (y compris la présidence des comités de suivi et les relations avec la Commission) est largement dévolue aux autorités régionales (les Communautés Autonomes en Espagne et les régions en Italie).

Ces choix ne sont pas statiques. Les Etats Membres qui ont une longue expérience des programmes d'Objectif 2 ont adapté leurs approches au cours des deux ou trois dernières périodes de programmation - dans la plupart des cas en faveur d'une plus grande dévolution des responsabilités vers les autorités locales et régionales ou vers des comités de programmation particuliers.

Il existe également des variations régionales de ces approches apparemment homogènes. En France et en Italie, par exemple, l'étendue du partenariat et l'équilibre du partage des responsabilités entre autorités centrales et régionales varient sensiblement d'un programme régional à l'autre et il fût même déclaré que ces variations s'amplifient. De telles différences reflètent les disparités qui existent entre régions: certaines ont plus que d'autres la capacité d'exercer une véritable influence politique, les institutions de certaines régions se révèlent plus capables de gérer les Fonds Structurels que d'autres, dans certaines régions, les réseaux de collaboration entre acteurs locaux et régionaux sont plus développés qu'ailleurs et enfin au sein des régions, le poids des programmes des Fonds Structurels, par rapport aux autres activités pour lesquelles les régions ont compétence, est variable.

2.4 Les Structures Mises en Place pour l'Administration des Programmes

Un autre aspect de la mise en oeuvre des Fonds Structurels concerne les choix retenus pour l'administration des programmes au sein des régions. La plupart des Etats Membres ont subsumé la prise de décision concernant les projets dans les structures institutionnelles existantes. Une telle situation s'observe, en particulier, en Allemagne où la mise en oeuvre des Fonds Structurels fût intégrée autant que possible au système et aux structures administratives existantes pour la politique régionale (l'administration des programmes et la prise de décision concernant les projets sont effectuées par l'autorité correspondante de l'état fédéré). Toutefois, la complexité de l'administration des Fonds Structurels est telle que dans certains pays, des structures spécifiques ont été mises en place pour administrer les programmes. Dans certaines régions, comme par exemple, en Ecosse, aux Pays-Bas et dans la région de Fyrstad en Suède, l'administration du programme a été confiée à un secrétariat ou à un bureau exécutif du programme.

Les développements qui suivent décrivent un certain nombre de ces approches originales.

2.4.1 Le Comité Directeur Régional (Danemark)

Une des questions épineuses pour plusieurs régions fût d'assurer la participation des instances *politiques* à l'administration des Fonds Structurels. En Jylland du Nord, la création d'un Comité Directeur Régional distinct, à la fois, de l'instance exécutive chargée de l'administration du programme et du Comité de Suivi, fût la réponse apportée à ce problème. Le rôle principal du Comité est d'apporter un support politique au niveau régional aux questions importantes liées à l'utilisation des Fonds Structurels. Le Comité Directeur Régional est composé des figures politiques locales et régionales et est présidé par la personne à la tête du conseil de comté¹.

Une des fonctions les plus importantes du Comité est celle d'assurer la coordination de l'Objectif 2 avec les autres initiatives de développement régional. Ceci est essentiel parce que tous les *districts* de la région sont couverts au même degré par les mesures des Fonds Structurels. La coordination est possible parce que le Comité Directeur Régional fait également office de comité pour le Fonds de Développement du Jylland du Nord et parce que ce fonds bénéficie du support du même secrétariat que le programme de l'Objectif 2.

Les décideurs politiques locaux estiment que l'organisation administrative en Jylland du Nord a deux avantages. Premièrement, la division du travail entre le Comité Directeur -organe politique- et le Comité Exécutif -organe technique- empêche les intérêts territoriaux de dominer le programme. Deuxièmement, il est reconnu que la génération de consensus politiques régionaux renforce les acteurs régionaux et qu'ainsi il est plus difficile pour le niveau central d'ignorer les préférences du Jylland du Nord.

¹ Au Danemark, l'état est divisé en comtés, eux-mêmes sub-divisés en districts.

2.4.2 *Les Bureaux Régionaux de Direction (Autriche)*

En Autriche, une approche différente a été prise avec la création de 35 Bureaux Régionaux de Direction qui soutiennent la mise en oeuvre des Fonds Structurels au niveau local en favorisant la participation des acteurs locaux et le développement de projets. Les attributions des Directeurs Régionaux ne sont pas encore très clairement définies mais elles pourraient s'étendre aux domaines suivants: la diffusion de l'information au sein de la région, le *lobbying* auprès de l'état fédéré et la diffusion d'informations sur la région², le soutien de la coopération et de la coordination entre organisations bénéficiaires dans la région et enfin fournir une première assistance, sous forme de conseils, aux porteurs de projets.

La contribution des Directeurs Régionaux à la génération de bons projets, et plus particulièrement à l'identification de projets qui combinent FEDER et FSE, pourrait se révéler très importante. Le succès du système de Directions Régionales dépend cependant de l'implication de personnes qualifiées et motivées.

2.4.3 *Les Secrétariats de Programme (Ecosse et Fyrstad)*

Dans certains Etats Membres, les responsabilités des Bureaux Régionaux de Direction autrichiens ont été combinées avec les tâches d'administration du programme au sein de *Secrétariats indépendants*. En Ecosse, dans les régions d'Objectif 2, la mise en oeuvre du programme et son administration sont la responsabilité de secrétariats indépendants qui assistent à la fois l'autorité de l'Etat chargée de la mise en oeuvre des programmes et le plus large partenariat régional. Les Secrétariats écossais, tel que celui du "Partenariat de Strathclyde pour l'Europe"³, sont chargés - à l'exception des paiements - de pratiquement tous les aspects de l'administration des programmes. Dans la région de Fyrstad en Suède, un Secrétariat indépendant a également été mis en place pour administrer le programme.

2.4.4 *Intégrer le FEDER et le FSE: l'exemple de Brème*

La plupart des autorités des Etats Membres ont éprouvé des difficultés pour intégrer le FEDER et le FSE. Dans la plupart des pays, ces deux Fonds sont administrés séparément et, dans certains cas, des systèmes de décision distincts et des structures différentes sont impliqués.

Une approche innovatrice est le "Fonds de Cohérence" de la région de Brème en Allemagne. Ce Fonds fait l'objet d'une priorité à part entière inscrite au DOCUP afin d'assurer que les mesures du FEDER et du FSE se renforcent mutuellement bien qu'elles soient administrées par des autorités différentes. Cette approche a permis de mettre en place des mécanismes formels pour prendre cela en considération. Sous la priorité "Fonds de Cohérence", les projets qui comprennent à la fois un investissement en capital et des actions de formation peuvent être déposés au niveau de l'état fédéré (le *Länd*) soit auprès du "ministère" de l'économie soit auprès du "ministère" chargé des affaires sociales.

² En Autriche, les états fédérés sont composés de régions.

³ Strathclyde European Partnership

2.4.5 *Les Comités Consultatifs*

Les Comités Consultatifs sont utilisés à des degrés divers à travers l'Union européenne (en Finlande, aux Pays-Bas, au Royaume Uni). Ces comités aident la prise de décision en donnant des avis techniques. Dans certaines régions, leur rôle est plus substantiel. Par exemple, les Comités Consultatifs de Päijät-Häme en Finlande prennent part aux projets lorsque ceux-ci n'en sont encore qu'au stade de leurs formulations et prennent activement part à leurs développements. Ils effectuent une évaluation initiale et officieuse des projets potentiels et s'impliquent largement afin d'améliorer les projets.

Dans la région de Fyrstad en Suède, divers Comités Consultatifs travaillent sur les projets avant qu'ils ne soient déposés auprès du Comité de Programmation du Programme⁴ - comité plus politique. Ils peuvent également servir de moyen de "filtrage" en notifiant aux responsables du programme les questions potentielles que soulèvent certains projets.

2.4.6 *Techniques de Gestion Financière*

Certaines régions françaises comme l'Aquitaine utilisent, pour simplifier la gestion financière des programmes, la technique du paiement alternatif. Selon, cette approche chaque porteur de projet est informé qu'il lui a été alloué des fonds européens et qu'il est le bénéficiaire d'un "paquet" de financements divers, mais qu'il ne sera payé que sur une seule source de financement. En pratique, certains projets sont donc financés uniquement sur fonds du Conseil Régional, d'autres uniquement sur fonds de l'Etat et d'autres, enfin, uniquement sur fonds européens. La conséquence est, qu'en Aquitaine par exemple, les responsables politiques peuvent distribuer leurs aides financières rapidement. Le système intégré de gestion en Aquitaine facilite le suivi de l'avancement financier du programme. Le principal inconvénient est les délais qui peuvent être causés pour les projets lorsque l'une des tranches de financements européens est consommée et que la suivante ne suit pas immédiatement.

2.5 **Expériences de la Mise en Oeuvre**

Mettre en oeuvre les Fonds Structurels fût un défi important. Les problèmes ont été amplifiés pour les nouveaux Etats Membres, comme la Suède, pour lesquels il était escompté qu'ils intègrent au sein de leurs structures nationales, et dans un court laps de temps, un système compliqué. L'expérience de pays tels que le Royaume Uni montre qu'il a fallu au moins une ou deux périodes de programmation (entre trois et cinq ans) pour s'adapter à une tâche multiple, à une approche de programmation de plusieurs activités avec un budget unique - avec de nouvelles procédures, un vocabulaire nouveau, des contraintes terminologiques et en ressources humaines nouvelles - mais également à une administration par plusieurs départements ministériels et une coordination tant verticale qu'horizontale au sein (et hors) du gouvernement.

Les régions qui ont réussi à s'adapter efficacement aux tâches de l'administration du programme sont celles qui présentent la caractéristique de regrouper une certaine identité régionale, des zones économiquement et

⁴ Programme Management Committee (PMC)

géographiquement cohérentes, une expérience approfondie du développement économique, une certaine expérience (ou une aptitude) pour coordonner, coopérer ou développer des relations entre les diverses organisations économiques et sociales et enfin des fortes personnalités en charge des programmes.

2.5.1 *Questions Stratégiques*

L'approche actuelle de la programmation présente plusieurs inconvénients sérieux:

- *les périodes de programmation sont trop courtes.* Vers la fin du cycle de programmation, il existe un empressement à dépenser les fonds et à préparer la période suivante. Une des besoins les plus urgents est d'avoir de plus longues périodes de stabilité.
- *L'administration des Fonds impose un fardeau administratif trop lourd pour une allocation budgétaire relativement réduite.* Une simplification est nécessaire afin d'assurer une mise en oeuvre plus facile et plus efficace.
- *Le processus de désignation des zones éligibles est discutable.* Il y a trop de zones d'Objectif 2 différentes et beaucoup trop de mesures, dans chaque zone, ayant une allocation financière distincte. Le fait que des initiatives similaires soient financées par le FEDER et le FSE et par les Initiatives Communautaires contribue à accentuer le problème.
- *L'approche du DOCUP n'est pas toujours appropriée pour la mise en oeuvre des programmes.* Il existe peu de justifications pour un DOCUP dans certains pays, tout particulièrement dans un système décentralisé et fragmenté comme l'Autriche. Toutefois, elle s'est révélée plus utile dans d'autres pays comme en Finlande. Le programme peut perdre en efficacité si les organisations clés chargées des différentes politiques sectorielles sont désenchantées par les Fonds Structurels.

2.5.2 *Questions d'Organisation*

Peu d'autorités des Etats Membres ont échappé à des bouleversements substantiels dans leurs façons d'administrer les Fonds Structurels. Cependant, de plus en plus des structures et des systèmes efficaces d'administration sont mis en place.

a. *Coordination verticale*

Une des principales causes de problèmes pour les Etats Membres vient du fait que divers acteurs travaillent à des niveaux différents du processus de mise en oeuvre. Les autorités locales et régionales ont souvent perçu les Fonds Structurels comme étant une opportunité pour gagner plus d'autonomie au niveau de leurs compétences et de leurs ressources pour le développement économique (tout particulièrement dans les états unitaires tel que le Royaume Uni). Cela a contribué à améliorer la participation et la sensibilisation des autorités locales et régionales au développement et à la planification stratégique.

Ces processus peuvent créer des problèmes à d'autres égards. Par exemple, au Danemark, la participation locale et régionale pourrait fournir au

gouvernement central l'opportunité de réduire ses contributions aux autorités en question, ce qui rendrait difficile pour ces autorités le cofinancement des projets financés par des fonds européens.

Le fait d'avoir une structure fédérale ne signifie pas nécessairement que l'administration des Fonds Structurels est facilitée. Les tensions et le partage complexe de compétences qui existent entre l'état fédéral et les états fédérés peuvent entraver plutôt que de promouvoir la participation des régions.

b. Direction de programme et partenariat

Aux niveaux régional et national, un problème supplémentaire concerne "l'intermédiation horizontale" entre organisations. En général, l'expérience de la mise en oeuvre des programmes démontre qu'il y a eu une augmentation de la communication et de la coordination entre les organismes offrant un soutien financier et les organisations bénéficiaires au sein d'une même région.

Pour beaucoup de régions, le manque d'intérêt à participer des acteurs concernés et de la communauté plus largement, est une question importante. Ceci soulève la question de l'amélioration de la sensibilisation, de l'intérêt et de la participation.

L'institutionnalisation du partenariat a fait apparaître une caractéristique commune à tous les programmes: le Comité de Suivi. Un reproche souvent évoqué est que les réunions du Comité de Suivi ne donnent pas lieu à des discussions ouvertes sur la direction stratégique du programme parce que les débats sont dominés par des questions techniques. Les solutions proposées pour promouvoir une meilleure qualité et un style différent de débats suggèrent de séparer les questions stratégiques des affaires financières et techniques, par exemple entre le Comité de Suivi et le Comité de Direction du Programme (comme en Ecosse et en Suède). Ailleurs comme en Allemagne, il existe une séparation entre le Comité de Suivi national et des sous-comités régionaux qui sont chargés de consulter et de coordonner les perspectives régionales pour le Comité de Suivi.

2.5.3 *Questions Techniques*

a. Systèmes de gestion de l'information

Un problème fondamental auquel font face les régions est celui d'assurer une mise en oeuvre "normale" conforme aux règlements des Fonds Structurels et aux pratiques comptable et administrative nationales.

L'approche du Royaume Uni fût d'adopter un manuel unique de bonnes pratiques qui s'applique à tous les programmes régionaux; des principes directeurs ont également été adoptés pour les programmes écossais. Dans les nouveaux Etats Membres, la Commission a recommandé la création de Groupes de Travail comprenant des représentants des Comités de Suivi pour les régions de l'Objectif 2 et de l'Objectif 6 ainsi que la production d'un manuel sur la mise en oeuvre des Fonds Structurels.

Des systèmes informatisés de gestion de l'information ont représenté un développement crucial dans l'évolution de l'administration des Fonds Structurels.

b. *Financement, additionalité et consommation des crédits*

Le cofinancement est problématique dans beaucoup de zones éligibles. Il existe des problèmes pour définir les conditions d'éligibilité des projets (les indications fournies par la Commission sont trop vagues) et il existe un besoin notable d'édicter des règles plus claires et plus simples. L'additionalité peut se révéler difficile à démontrer.

Les régions ont été affectées par des conditions économiques faibles, qui ont eu un impact sur l'utilisation et le niveau de consommation des ressources des Fonds Structurels. Des problèmes surviennent dans des régions qui n'ont pas suffisamment de moyens, qui ne jouent pas un rôle prépondérant au niveau de leurs développements ou qui manquent de financements. Ils surviennent également là où la taille, la forme et les caractéristiques économiques de la zone forment une barrière à une mise en oeuvre efficace des priorités et des mesures. Prévoir les dépenses est souvent perçu comme une tâche trop difficile. Le manque d'expérience et de connaissance sur les capacités du secteur privé à participer aux projets rend les prévisions problématiques. Les autorités locales ont souvent des contraintes dues à leurs propres cycles de programmation financière pour lesquels il est difficile de faire des prévisions.

c. *Relations avec la Commission*

Beaucoup de régions ont eu des expériences positives de travail avec la Commission. Toutefois, les fonctions des services de la Commission soulèvent plusieurs problèmes, en particulier en ce qui concerne l'appréciation que fait la Commission des systèmes nationaux et des conditions spécifiques nationales, sa participation aux questions opérationnelles spécifiques (par exemple l'utilisation d'indicateurs, la sélection des projets), les délais pour obtenir des réponses opportunes des services de la Commission dus aux divergences entre services et entre Directions Générales, et un manque d'uniformité dans l'approche de la Commission.

3. VERWALTUNG DER STRUKTURFONDS

3.1 Einleitung

Seit der 1988er Reform der Strukturfonds sind die Grundprinzipien der EU-Regionalpolitik mehr und mehr institutionalisiert worden. Der Mehrzahl der EU-Mitgliedsstaaten haben nun bis zu acht Jahre lang Erfahrungen mit der Umsetzung der Strukturfonds gesammelt, in einigen Fällen über drei Programmzyklen (1989-91, 1992-93, 1994-96). Für bestimmte Regionen, wie Strathclyde, Groningen-Drenthe und Auvergne datieren die Erfahrungen mit der Verwaltung integrierter Entwicklungsoperationen auf die Mitte der achtziger Jahre zurück.

Die einzelnen Mitgliedsstaaten haben unterschiedlich auf die institutionellen Forderungen der Umsetzung der EU-Regionalpolitik reagiert. Während einige Länder versuchten, Strukturfondsprogramme in enger Beziehung zu den Zielen und institutionellen Strukturen ihrer nationalen Regionalpolitik aufzustellen und umzusetzen, entwickelten andere Mitgliedsstaaten neue Organisationsformen und -systeme zur Verwaltung der Strukturfondsausgaben, die von ihrem eigenen regionalpolitischen Ansatz weitgehend getrennt sind. Die Handhabung der Programmierung der Strukturfondsprogramme hat sich als eine der größten Herausforderungen an die Mitgliedsstaaten sowohl auf nationaler als auch auf internationaler Ebene erwiesen - diese Studie untersucht einige der Hauptthemen, die sich aus der Verwaltung der Strukturfondsprogramme ergeben.

3.2 Institutionsstrukturen

Die Umsetzung der Strukturfonds ist keineswegs ein einheitlicher Prozeß. Die Unterschiede zwischen den Mitgliedsstaaten sind hauptsächlich divergenten Nationalverfassungen, Verwaltungskulturen und -praxisen, vor allem der Verteilung von Befugnissen, Pflichten und Verantwortlichkeiten zwischen verschiedenen Regierungsebenen zuzuschreiben. Sie reflektieren auch die Beziehung zwischen nationaler Regionalpolitik und den Strukturfonds, die Größe und den Umfang von Programmen (innerhalb und zwischen den Zielen 1, 2, 5b und 6), die Haltung und den Einfluß der Kommissionsdienste und den Grad an regionaler/lokaler Erfahrung mit Strategien regionaler Wirtschaftsförderung.

Diese Faktoren lassen nur beschränkt Verallgemeinerungen bezüglich der Umsetzung der Strukturfonds zu. Nichtdestoweniger ist es möglich, im Hinblick auf die Umsetzungsstrukturen und regionalen Arrangements für die Programmverwaltung zwischen Ländergruppen unterscheiden.

3.3 Umsetzungsstrukturen

Die Ansätze zur Umsetzung der Strukturfonds lassen sich im allgemeinen in zwei Kategorien aufteilen. In der ersten Ländergruppe übt die Zentralregierung eine starke Kontrolle auf die Umsetzung aus. Die Zentralregierung spielt in praktisch allen EU-Mitgliedsstaaten eine wichtige Rolle bei der Umsetzung der Strukturfonds (durch Verhandlungen mit den Kommissionsdiensten, Kontrolle der Strategieformulierung, der Ausgaben, der Begleitung und der Bewertung). In einigen Ländern zeigt sich diese Rolle

jedoch deutlicher als in anderen: in Frankreich, dem Vereinigten Königreich, Irland, Portugal und Griechenland ist die Zentralregierung die wichtigste *Autorität* **und** auch die wichtigste *Dienststelle* für die Umsetzung. Die regionalen Vertreter der Zentralregierung (d.h. die *préfectures de Régions* in Frankreich bzw die Regierungsämter in England) haben den Vorsitz in den Begleitausschuß und treffen die endgültigen Finanzierungsentscheidungen, wengleich einige Aspekte der Programmverwaltung eventuell dezentralisiert sind.

In einer zweiten Gruppe von Ländern wird die Umsetzung ganz oder teilweise den regionale Behörden übergeben. Dies gilt hauptsächlich für föderalistische Länder wie Deutschland, Österreich und Belgien. In Deutschland sind die Länder vor dem Gesetz für regionale Wirtschaftsförderung verantwortlich. Eine starke Devolution gilt auch in einige Länder die nicht föderalistisch sind, wie Dänemark, Finnland, den Niederlanden und Schweden, wo bezüglich des Umsetzungsprozesses erheblich regionale Autonomie besteht und wo die Programme größtenteils durch regionale Behörden verwaltet und kontrolliert werden. In einige diese Länder ist die Programmerstellung (einschließlich Etatressourcen) und Kontakt zur Kommission auf die Region dezentralisiert. Die Rolle der Zentralregierung beschränkt sich auf die allgemeine Koordination der Fonds, Verhandlungen mit der Kommission auf höherer Ebene, interministerielle Koordination und Bewertung der praktischen Anwendung.

Italien und Spanien verwenden im allgemeinen Elemente beider Gruppen. In beiden Ländern übernimmt die Zentralregierung die Führung bezüglich der Leitung von Ziel-1-Programmen, obwohl die Regionen erhebliche Autonomie in bezug auf die eigentliche Ausführung der Programme haben. Im Gegensatz dazu wird die Leitung der Ziel-2-Programme (einschließlich des Vorsitizes im Begleitausschuß und gewisser Kontakte zur Kommission) weitgehend an die regionalen Behörden abgegeben worden (Autonome Kommunen in Spanien, Regionen in Italien).

Diese Abmachungen sind aber keineswegs statisch; Mitgliedsstaaten mit langjähriger Erfahrung mit Ziel-2-Programmen haben ihre Strukturen während der letzten 2-3 Programmperioden entsprechend angepaßt - in den meisten Fällen in Richtung einer größeren Devolution der Zuständigkeit auf regionale/lokale Behörden oder Sonderprogrammgruppen.

Regionale Variationen sind eventuell auch innerhalb scheinbar homogener Strukturen zu finden. Frankreich und Italien sind gute Beispiele dafür: das Ausmaß von Partnerschaft und das Gleichgewicht von Verantwortung zwischen zentralen und regionalen Behörden variiert deutlich zwischen regionalen Programmen, und (so wurde erklärt) die regionale Divergenz nimmt ständig zu. Solche regionale Differenzen reflektieren die Disparitäten zwischen Regionen bezüglich regionalpolitischer Führung, institutioneller Fähigkeit, Verbindungsnetzen zwischen regionalen/lokalen Teilnehmern und der Bedeutung des Strukturfondsprogramms in Relation zu anderen politischen Aktivitäten.

3.4 Programmverwaltung

Ein weiterer Aspekt der Umsetzung ist die Art der Programmverwaltung in den Regionen. Die Mehrheit der Mitgliedsstaaten hat die Entscheidungsfällung für Projekte in ihre bereits bestehenden institutionellen Strukturen integriert. Dies gilt besonders in Deutschland, wo die Umsetzung der Strukturfonds soweit wie möglich in das bestehende System und die Struktur der regionalpolitischen Verwaltung aufgenommen worden ist (Programmverwaltung und Projektentscheidungen werden von den relevanten Landesbehörden unternommen). Die Komplexität der Strukturfondverwaltung erfordert jedoch die Entwicklung besonderer Arrangements zur Programmverwaltung; in einigen Regionen wird sie durch Programmleiter/Sekretariate unternommen (Schottland, Niederlande, Fyrstad in Schweden).

Folgende Unterabschnitte beleuchten verschiedene Ansätze zu einer Reihe von Themen der Programmverwaltung.

3.4.1 *'Regional Steering Committee' (Dänemark)*

Das Engagement politischer Interessen an der Verwaltung der Strukturfonds erregt in mehreren Regionen gewisse Bedenken. In Nordjütland wurde daher unabhängig von der Programmverwaltungsleitung und dem Begleitausschuß ein 'Regional Steering Committee' (RSC) geschaffen. Die Hauptaufgabe dieses Komitees besteht darin, den größeren Entwicklungsfragen im Zusammenhang mit der Verwendung der Strukturfonds politischen Rückhalt zu geben. Das RSC setzt sich aus lokalen/regionalen Persönlichkeiten zusammen unter dem Vorsitz des Leiters des Stadtrats.

Die Funktion des RSC als Koordinationsmedium zwischen Ziel 2 und unabhängigen Initiativen regionaler Wirtschaftsförderung ist besonders wichtig, da nicht alle Distrikte der Region in gleichem Maße durch die Initiativen der Strukturfonds erfaßt werden. Eine Koordination ist möglich, da das RSK gleichzeitig als Vorstand des Entwicklungsfonds für Nordjütland fungiert und der Fonds von demselben Sekretariat bedient wird wie das Ziel-2-Programm.

Lokalpolitikern zufolge hat der administrative Aufbau in Nordjütland zwei Vorteile. Erstens verhindert die Arbeitsteilung zwischen dem politischen RSK und einem technischen Exekutivkomitee, daß das Programm von territorialen Interessen beherrscht wird. Zweitens gilt die Schaffung regionalpolitischer Übereinstimmung als eine Stärkung der regionalen Front, da es dadurch für nationale Körperschaften schwierig ist, Nordjütlands Präferenzen zu ignorieren.

3.4.2 *Regional Management Stellen (Österreich)*

In Österreich wird ein besonderer Ansatz zur Programmumsetzung durch den Einsatz von 35 Regional Management Stellen eingeführt, die die Umsetzung der Strukturfonds auf lokaler Ebene unterstützen und lokales Engagement und Projektentwicklung fördern. Der genaue Aufgabenbereich der Regional Manager liegt noch nicht fest, doch sind folgende Gebiete vorgeschlagen worden: Informationstransfer in die Region; Lobbytätigkeit und Informationsarbeit über die Region auf Regierungsebene; die Förderung von

Kooperation und Koordination zwischen begünstigten Organisationen in der Region und Anfangsberatung für Antragssteller.

Der Beitrag der Regional Manager zur Erzeugung guter Projekte, insbesondere die Identifizierung von Projekten, die EFRE und ESF kombinieren, könnte sehr wichtig sein. Der Erfolg des Regional Managementsystems ist jedoch vom Engagement qualifizierter, motivierter Projektteilnehmer abhängig.

3.4.3 *Programmführung (Schottland, Fyrstad)*

In anderen Mitgliedsstaaten sind die Aufgaben der Österreichischen Regional Management Stellen mit der Programmverwaltung durch die Verwendung einer unabhängigen Programmführung kombiniert. In Regionen des Ziels 2 in Schottland (Vereinigtes Königreich), werden Programmumsetzung und -verwaltung durch unabhängige Verwaltungsgremien unternommen, die die Autorität der Mitgliedsstaaten und die größere Partnerschaft unterstützen. Schottische Programmführungsgremien, wie die Europäische Partnerschaft Strathclyde, unternehmen praktisch alle Aspekte der Programmverwaltung abgesehen von Zahlungen. Fyrstad in Schweden hat ebenfalls ein unabhängiges Sekretariat zur Verwaltung des Programms eingerichtet.

3.4.4 *Integration von EFRE/ESF (Bremen)*

Die meisten Behörden der Mitgliedsstaaten fanden die Integration von EFRE und ESF problematisch. In fast allen Ländern werden die beiden Fonds getrennt verwaltet, in einigen Fällen mit unterschiedlichen Entscheidungsstrukturen und -systemen.

Ein innovativer Ansatz ist der Kohärenzfond in Bremen (Deutschland), eine getrennte Priorität, die in die Bremer DPP aufgenommen wurde, um sicherzustellen, daß EFRE- und ESF-Maßnahmen sich gegenseitig verstärken, selbst wenn sie von getrennten Behörden verwaltet werden. Formelle Mechanismen sollen dafür sorgen, daß dies auch tatsächlich berücksichtigt wird. Nach der Priorität des Kohärenzfonds können Projektanträge, die sowohl Kapitalinvestitionen als auch Qualifikationsmaßnahmen beinhalten, entweder durch das Wirtschafts- oder das Sozialministerium eingereicht werden.

3.4.5 *Beratungsgruppen*

Beratungsgruppen werden in unterschiedlichem Ausmaß in der EU (Finnland/Niederlande/Vereinigtes Königreich) verwendet. Diese Gruppen unterstützen die Entscheidungsfindung durch technische Beratung, in einigen Regionen ist ihre Rolle auch etwas aktiver. So sind z.B. in Päijät-Häme (Finnland) Beratungsgruppen schon in der Anfangsphase an Projekten beteiligt und helfen aktiv an ihrer Entwicklung des Projekts. Sie unternehmen eine erste inoffizielle Bewertung eventueller Projektanträge und spielen eine aktive Rolle bezüglich ihrer Verbesserung.

In Fyrstad (Schweden) arbeiten mehrere Beratungsgruppen an den Projekten, bevor sie in die mehr politisch gefärbte Atmosphäre der PMC weitergeleitet werden. Sie können auch als Filtermechanismen dienen, indem sie die Programmverwalter auf eventuelle politische Probleme aufmerksam machen, die sich aus bestimmten Projekten ergeben könnten.

3.4.6 *Finanzverwaltungstechnik*

Ein Ansatz, der in einigen französischen Regionen (z.B. Aquitaine) zur Vereinfachung der Finanzverwaltung der Programme verwendet wird, ist das 'paiement alternatif' - ein alternierendes Zahlungssystem. Jedes Projekt wird zwar darüber informiert, daß es europäische Finanzmittel erhalten und ein Finanzpaket empfangen wird, doch wird ihm nur eine einzige Finanzquelle zugeteilt. So werden einige Projekte durch die regionalen Räte gefördert, andere durch den Staat, andere ausschließlich durch europäische Mittel. Als Ergebnis können Regionalpolitiker in Aquitaine ihre finanzielle Unterstützung schnell gewähren. Das Informationssystem in Aquitaine ermöglicht eine leichte Begleitung des finanziellen Fortschritts des Programms. Der Hauptnachteil scheinen die Verzögerungen zu sein, die für Projekte entstehen, wenn eine Tranche europäischer Mittel aufgebraucht ist und die nächste nicht sofort nachkommt.

3.5 **Erfahrungen mit der Umsetzung**

Die Umsetzung der Strukturfonds war und ist eine echte Herausforderung. Die Probleme waren noch schlimmer für neue Mitgliedsstaaten, wie Schweden, die erwarteten, ein kompliziertes System in kurzer Zeit in nationale Strukturen zu integrieren. Erfahrungen in Ländern wie dem Vereinigten Königreich zeigten, daß es mindestens 1-2 Programmperioden (3-5 Jahre) braucht, um sich an einen Programmansatz mit mehrfachen Aufgaben und Aktivitäten und einem einzigen Etat zu gewöhnen - mit neuen Verfahren, neuem Vokabular, neuer Terminologie und Anforderungen an Humanressourcen - sowie einer mehrere Abteilungen erfassenden Verwaltung und vertikaler und horizontaler Koordination innerhalb (und außerhalb) der Regierung.

Die Regionen, die sich erfolgreich auf die Aufgabe der Programmverwaltung eingestellt haben, zeigen im allgemeinen folgende Merkmale: ein gewisses Maß an 'regionaler Identität'; kohärente wirtschaftliche und geographische Gebiete; erhebliche Erfahrungen mit oder eine Tradition wirtschaftlicher Entwicklung; Kooperation oder Verbindungen zwischen verschiedenen wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Stellen; und starke Personalitäten, die für das Programm verantwortlich sind.

3.5.1 *Strategische Fragen*

Der derzeitige Programmansatz hat mehrere wichtige Beschränkungen:

- *Die Programmperioden sind zu kurz.* Gegen Ende des Zeitraums wird eilends versucht, noch Geld auszugeben und sich für die nächste Periode vorzubereiten. Eine der dringlichsten Forderungen geht in Richtung längerer Stabilitätsperioden.
- *Die Fonds sind mit einer erheblichen administrativen Bürde für einen relativ kleinen Geldbetrag verbunden.* Vereinfachungen sind notwendig, um eine leichtere und effektivere Umsetzung zu gewährleisten.
- *Der Prozeß der Gebietsabgrenzung ist fragwürdig.* Es gibt zu viele verschiedene Ziel-2-Gebiete und zu viele verschiedene Maßnahmen in jedem Gebiete mit getrennten finanziellen Zuweisungen. Die Verdoppelung von Initiativen, die durch EFRE/ESF und

Gemeinschaftsinitiativen finanziert werden, trägt noch zu diesem Problem bei.

- *Der DPP/EPPD-Ansatz ist von unterschiedlicher Relevanz für die Umsetzung der Programme.* Seine Relevanz ist in einigen Ländern begrenzt, besonders in einem dezentralisierten, fragmentarischen System (Österreich), in anderen aber umso wertvoller (z.B. Finnland). Desillusionierung mit Strukturfonds unter den wichtigsten politischen Organisationen kann die Gesamteffektivität des Programms reduzieren.

3.5.2 Organisatorische Fragen

Wenige Autoritäten der Mitgliedsstaaten sind den wesentlichen verwaltungsmäßigen Umwälzungen in der Verwaltung der Strukturfonds entkommen. Doch werden zunehmend effektivere Verwaltungsstrukturen und -systeme eingeführt.

a. Vertikale Koordination

Eine der Hauptursachen für Probleme der Mitgliedsstaaten ergibt sich dadurch, daß verschiedene Teilnehmer auf verschiedenen Ebenen am Umsetzungsprozeß mitwirken. Niedrigere Regierungsebenen sehen die Strukturfonds oft als Gelegenheit, um mehr Autonomie für ihre Zuständigkeiten und Ressourcen in der Wirtschaftsförderung (besonders in unitären Staaten wie dem Vereinigten Königreich) zu gewinnen, was das Bewußtsein und Engagement regionaler und lokaler Behörden bezüglich strategischer Planung und Entwicklung erhöht.

Diese Prozesse können Probleme in anderen Gebieten schaffen. So ist man z.B. in Dänemark besorgt, daß ein größeres lokales Engagement der Zentralregierung die Gelegenheit bieten könnte, die Beiträge der Zentralregierung zu kürzen, wodurch es für die regionalen Behörden schwierig wäre, von der EU finanzierte Projekte mitzufinanzieren.

Eine föderalistische Struktur macht die Verwaltung der Strukturfonds nicht unbedingt leichter. Die komplexen Spannungen und das Gleichgewicht von Zuständigkeiten zwischen Bundes- und Landesregierung können das Engagement der Regionen eher behindern als fördern.

b. Programmverwaltung und Partnerschaft

Ein weiteres Problem auf nationaler und regionaler Ebene betrifft die horizontalen Berührungspunkte zwischen Abteilungen und Dienststellen. Im allgemeinen hat man bei der Umsetzung des Programms die Erfahrung gemacht, daß sie Kommunikation und Koordination zwischen Finanzierungsstellen und nutznießenden Organisationen in einer Region verstärkt.

Ein wichtiges Problem vieler Regionen ist die mangelnde Anteilnahme vieler relevanter Operatoren und der größeren Gemeinschaft, woraus sich die Frage erhebt, wie Bewußtsein, Interesse und Beteiligung gefördert werden können.

Bei der Institutionalisierung einer Partnerschaft ist ein gemeinsames Merkmal aller Programme die Einrichtung eines Begleitausschusses. Eine häufige Beschwerde ist, daß Versammlungen des Begleitausschusses keine offene Diskussion über die strategische Richtung herbeiführen, da sie von

technischen Fragen beherrscht werden. Um bei diesen Debatten höhere Qualität und einen unterschiedlichen Stil zu fördern, wird als Lösung u.a. die Trennung strategischer Fragen von finanziellen/technischen Angelegenheiten vorgeschlagen, also zwischen Begleitausschuß und Programmverwaltungs-komitees (Schottland, Schweden). Ansonsten gibt es z.B. in Deutschland eine Teilung zwischen dem nationalen Begleitausschuß und regionalen Unterkomitees, die das Begleitausschuß über regionale Perspektiven beraten und sie koordinieren.

3.5.3 Technische Fragen

a. *Informationssysteme zur Verwaltung*

Ein fundamentales Problem für die Regionen ist, wie man eine einheitliche Umsetzung sicherstellt, die mit den Vorschriften der Strukturfonds und nationaler Verwaltungs- und Buchführungspraxis übereinstimmen.

Der Ansatz des Vereinigten Königreichs war 'ein einziges Handbuch' für gute Praxis für alle regionalen Programme; besondere Richtlinien gelten auch für die schottischen Programme. In den neuen Mitgliedsstaaten hat die Kommission die Schaffung von Arbeitsgruppen empfohlen, mit Vertretern der Begleitausschuße für Ziel 2 und 6 Regionen und die Herausgabe eines Handbuchs für die Umsetzung der Strukturfonds.

Computerisierte Informationssysteme zur Verwaltung sind eine wichtige Entwicklung in der Evolution der Verwaltung der Strukturfonds.

b. *Finanzierung, Zusätzlichkeit und Absorption*

Kofinanzierung ist in vielen Gebieten problematisch. Es ist schwierig, die Förderfähigkeit von Problemen zu bestimmen (eine häufige Beschwerde ist, daß die Richtlinien der Kommission zu ungenau sind) und die Vorschriften müssen zweifelsohne klarer und einfacher gemacht werden. Die Zusätzlichkeit läßt sich u.U. schlecht beweisen. Die Regionen sind von einer schwachen Konjunkturlage betroffen, die die Verwendung und Absorption der Strukturfondsressourcen beeinflußt hat. Probleme entstehen in Regionen, die nicht genügend Kapazität, keine ausreichende Entwicklungsrolle oder Finanzmittel haben oder wo die Größe, Gestalt und die wirtschaftlichen Charakteristiken des Gebiets eine effektive Umsetzung der Prioritäten und Maßnahmen behindern. Die Ausgabenplanung wird allgemein schwierig befunden. Mangelnde Erfahrung und Kenntnisse hinsichtlich der Kapazität des Engagements des Privatsektors an Projekten machen eine Planung für vielen Regionen problematisch. Die lokalen Behörden werden oft durch ihre bestehenden Kapitalprogrammzyklen behindert, für die nur schlecht Voraussagen gemacht werden können.

c. *Beziehungen zur Kommission*

Viele Regionen haben bezüglich der Arbeit mit der Kommission positive Erfahrungen gemacht. Doch verursachen die Funktionen der Kommissionsdienste mehrere Bedenken, vor allem in bezug auf ihre Anerkennung nationaler Bedingungen und Systeme, ihrem Engagement bei speziellen betrieblichen Fragen (z.V: die Verwendung von Indikatoren, Projektauswahl), Verzögerungen von Antworten der Kommissionsdienste

aufgrund von Schwierigkeiten zwischen Abteilungen und DG, und mangelnder Einheitlichkeit im Ansatz der Kommission.

Thematic Paper

*Managing the Structural Funds –
Institutionalising Good Practice*

Managing the Structural Funds - Institutionalising Good Practice

1. INTRODUCTION

Among the reforms to the Structural Funds introduced in 1988, the management of ‘programming’ has proved to be one of the most challenging issues for Member State authorities at national and regional levels. Although some countries may have had prior experience of the programming approach - for example under the state-region *Contrats de Plan* in France - most administrations were confronted with radically new procedures, structures and terminology for implementing Structural Fund expenditure from 1989 onwards (1995, in the case of the new Member States).

This paper examines the management of Structural Funds’ programmes in Objective 2 regions. Its aim is to provide an overview of the organisation and operation of regional programmes among Objective 2 regions in the Consortium. Specifically the objectives of the paper are:

- to give Consortium members insight into how the Structural Funds are being managed across the EU and, in particular, how their own approach to management fits in with the wider practice;
- to identify unique or distinctive management approaches, organisational structures or operational practices in individual Objective 2 regions that could be of interest (or transferable) to other regions; and
- to highlight some of the experiences of management, notably common problems or bottlenecks in the implementation process.

The paper is structured in four parts. It begins by reviewing the institutional structures for managing Structural Funds expenditure in different EU countries, highlighting problems or issues that have emerged over the past seven years. The paper then focuses on the regional arrangements for programme management, discussing in detail some of the distinctive approaches to management in individual Objective 2 regions. Subsequently, the paper examines the experience of programme implementation, describing the strategic, organisational and operational issues of concern to programme managers. The paper concludes with a list of questions for debate.

2. INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES

2.1 National/Regional Differences

The implementation of the Structural Funds is not a uniform process. Differences between EU Member States occur in all facets of implementation, reflecting:

- national administrative structures and practice, and the allocation of responsibilities between different levels of government;

- the relationship between national regional policy and the Structural Funds;
- the size and scale of programmes;
- the autonomy from central/regional/local government available to programme partnerships;
- the attitude of Commission services with respect to regional arrangements; and
- the degree of regional/local experience with regional development strategies, especially Structural Fund programmes.

Add to this the mosaic of political allegiances at the regional level, and a picture of substantial diversity emerges. Together, these complex ingredients prohibit generalisation about the implementation of the Structural Funds. Nevertheless, in considering the institutional structures for managing Objective 2 programmes among EU Member States, it is possible to classify countries into two categories.

The first group of countries is those exercising *strong central government control* on implementation. It is a feature of virtually all EU Member States that central government plays a key role in Structural Fund implementation, certainly in negotiating with Commission services, but also in supervising strategy formulation, expenditure, monitoring and evaluation. In some countries this central government role is much more marked than in others; in France, the UK (England and Wales), Ireland, Portugal and Greece, central government is the main implementing authority and takes a leading role in programme management. The regional representatives of central government (eg. *préfectures de Région* in France or Government Offices in England) chair the Monitoring Committees and make the final funding decisions, although some aspects of programming management may be devolved.

In a second group of countries, implementation is *devolved wholly or partly to regional authorities*. This applies mainly to federal countries such as Germany, where the *Länder* (states) are legally responsible for regional development, as well as Austria and Belgium. Substantial devolution also applies in some non-federal countries like Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden, where there is a high degree of regional autonomy over the implementation process, and programmes are largely managed and controlled by regional authorities. In several of these countries, programming (including budgetary resources) and some Commission liaison is decentralised to the regions, and the role of central government is restricted to general coordination of the Funds, higher level Commission negotiation, inter-ministerial co-ordination and monitoring/evaluation of ‘good practice’.

Italy and Spain tend to share elements of the two groups. In both countries, the central government takes the lead in managing Objective 1 programmes, although the regions have considerable autonomy with respect to the delivery of programmes. By contrast, the management of Objective 2 programmes (including the chairing of Monitoring Committees and some Commission liaison) is largely devolved to regional authorities (Autonomous Communities in Spain, regions in Italy).

It should be noted, however, that the institutional arrangements for implementing the Structural Funds are not static. Those Member States with longer experience of Objective 2 programmes have adapted their institutional structures progressively over the past three programming periods - in most cases in the direction of greater devolution of responsibility to regional/local authorities or special programming groups. The following sections review the particular structures of the Consortium member countries in more detail, summarised in tabular form in Annex 1.

2.2 Denmark

Regional policy in Denmark has traditionally been managed in a fairly centralised manner; local and regional authorities (districts and counties) have strictly regulated powers to pursue economic development measures. Thus, co-ordination and supervision of the Structural Funds is exercised by the National Agency for Industry and Commerce (NIAC - the main regional policy body in Denmark) which also sets the general policy orientation of Objective 2 programmes and chairs the Monitoring Committees for the two programmes in North Jutland and Lolland. Given that the Objective 2 programmes are relatively small, Denmark has attempted to create a single Monitoring Committee for the two Objective 2 programmes in the recent programming period, but this has been opposed by the Commission.

Notwithstanding the important role played by national government, the formulation of Objective 2 programmes was led by the regions (counties) which were responsible for drawing up the SPDs and were given considerable freedom for drafting regional development strategies. The responsibility for management and administration of SPDs differs between the Funds. ESF administration is almost entirely devolved to the county level (including application decisions and payments). By contrast, for ERDF, central government (through the NAIC) makes the final decisions on applications and undertakes payments and project monitoring; the counties process applications and make recommendations.

At county level, programme administration is delegated from the Monitoring Committee to an Executive Committee, which is the main decision-making body within the implementation process. In assessing and judging applications, the Executive Committee is assisted by an administrative secretariat within the county council. Although rarely usurping decisions made by the Executive Committee, final approval of applications is ultimately sanctioned by central government. A distinctive feature of the North Jutland programme is the existence of a third body, a Regional Steering Committee, introduced to ensure *political* backing for regional implementation of the Structural Funds (described in more detail below). It is composed of elected representatives and chaired by the leader of the county council.

2.3 France

As in Denmark, central government in France has a primary role in Structural Fund management. The main authority is the regional development agency, DATAR (*Délégation à l'Aménagement du Territoire et à l'Action Régionale*), an agency of the central government responsible for co-ordinating the government's various territorial development policies). DATAR has

responsibility for negotiating with the Commission on Structural Fund issues and undertakes overall co-ordination of the Funds as well as ERDF administration (ESF is administered by the Ministry of Employment). However, the DATAR role is to offer guidance rather than proscribing approaches: it is ultimately up to the region to decide what they want to do and how.

At the regional level, management and implementation of the Funds is the responsibility of the regional office of the state (*Préfecture de Région*). The *Préfet de Région* is legally responsible for the decisions taken and organises an appropriate partnership at local level for implementation of the Plan. An office is usually set up to administer the European programmes (known as a *Mission* or *Cellule Europe*) and to liaise with the other partners, including the decentralised agencies of state in the region. The office is generally housed within the secretariat for regional affairs (*Secrétariat Général aux Affaires Régionales*, SGAR). Each region typically has three main types of committee: a Monitoring Committee; an Evaluation Committee, consisting mainly of Monitoring Committee members and with responsibility for steering evaluations; and a Programme Management Committee which makes project application decisions.

Although the formulation and implementation of SPDs is primarily a state responsibility at the regional level, regional councils have considerable influence over programmes, if only because they are usually the main source of co-financing. (What they can fund is largely constrained by the *Contrats de Plan*, a five-year planning framework and expenditure schedule which is agreed in advance with central government.) The approach to programme management varies between regions: for example, some regions take all project decisions at the regional level programme management committee, while others, such as Rhône Alpes and Midi Pyrénées, devolve some of these down to PMCs at the lower ‘département’ level.

2.4 Finland

Central government in Finland also exercises a strong influence on programme management. Co-ordination of the Funds and administration of ERDF is undertaken by the Ministry of the Interior, and ESF administration by the Ministry of Labour. There is a single Monitoring Committee for the six Objective 2 programmes, chaired by the Ministry of Interior, and funding decisions are taken by the regional-level district offices of national government ministries. This structure reflects the historical approach to regional development in Finland which has traditionally been dominated almost exclusively by ‘state authorities’ - government departments or specialised state agencies (eg. KERA, TEKES, FGB). Only recently has an ‘intermediate’ level of regional councils been established with a remit to formulate regional development strategies, but these are still in their infancy.

The growing importance of the regions is reflected in the fact that regional Programme Management Committees have been placed in the regional councils in each of the six Objective 2 regions. Advisory groups also exist with a pro-active role to assist in project development at an early stage,

working on issues such as tourism, technology and training. A notable feature of the Finnish system is that there is a separate decision-making structure for business aid applications; special working groups on business aid exist in each region which discuss business development applications in tandem with the local PMC.

2.5 Sweden

While there is a distinct delineation between EU and national regional policy, Sweden is implementing the Structural Funds using the same organisational apparatus used for national regional policy implementation. At the national level, the Ministry of Industry and Trade oversees implementation, while NUTEK (National Board for Industrial and Technical Development) provides the Secretariat for the Funds and deals with project payments. With the notable exception of Fyrstad, the delivery of Objective 2 programmes is co-ordinated by the local County Administration Boards (CABs) at local level, each area having its own Monitoring Committee. CABs are essentially the local arm of national government, and are used as a vehicle for implementing national policies at the local level. This is the same framework as national regional policy, the main difference being the level of local partnership participation for EU programmes. Each Objective 2 region also has its own Project Management Committee (PMC) which decides on project applications. The decision-making of the PMC is supported by the various committees and advisory groups, but their importance varies across regions.

Although implementation is relatively decentralised in Sweden, central government can influence the Structural Funds in a variety of ways. The Programme Management Committee is normally chaired by the Governor of the County, but the Monitoring Committee is chaired by the Ministry of Industry and Trade. Given that national government also funds the CABs, it can also indirectly influence the ability of CABs to co-finance EU approved projects.

2.6 United Kingdom

Although the practices used in implementation and management of the Structural Funds vary throughout the UK, central government generally has a leading role, reflecting the national approach to regional development policy.

Management of the Objective 2 programmes is partly subsumed within existing government structures. There are programme Monitoring Committees for each Objective 2 region, chaired by central government - the Department of Trade & Industry (DTI) in England, the Welsh Office in Wales, and the Scottish Office in Scotland. Co-ordination at central level is exercised through an inter-departmental committee bringing together all of the sectoral ministries and territorial departments and UKREP, and chaired by the DTI. Similar arrangements exist at regional level, for example through the 'General Practitioners' groups within the regional Government Offices in England and the Welsh/Scottish Offices.

Programme management in England is undertaken by the regional offices of central government ministries, led by DTI. Four government departments (Trade & Industry, Environment, Employment & Education, Transport) have

co-ordinated their regional operations within integrated Government Offices. Award decisions are made by these Government Offices, followed by approval of Monitoring Committees. Programme management in Wales is run by the Welsh Office, although implementation may be partly devolved to an independent secretariat during the current programming period.

In Scotland, there is a different approach to programme management through a 'triangular' structure. Monitoring Committees are chaired by the Scottish Office but independent 'programme executives' manage the programmes and undertake their day to day running (especially project development). Programme Management Committees deal with project decisions and financial management issues. Applications are submitted in the first instance to Programme Executives, and decisions are made at Programme Management Committee meetings, although payments are made by government departments. Expert advisory groups assist decision making under the different priorities in the programme.

2.7 Germany

The Federal Republic of Germany has attempted to integrate the implementation of the Structural Funds within the structure of national regional policy insofar as possible. Under German regional policy, known as the *Gemeinsschaftsaufgabe 'Verbesserung der regionalen Wirtschaftsstruktur'* (Joint Task for the Improvement of Regional Economic Structures), the respective responsibilities of the federal and *Land* (state) governments are clearly defined. Regional development is legally the responsibility of the *Länder*, with the federal government exercising a co-ordinating and co-financing role. Decisions relating to the framework of regional policy are taken by a federal-state planning committee where the two levels of government have equal weight.

Within this system, the *Länder* generally have a policy of integrating the Structural Funds into their state economic development strategies, using the Funds to co-finance the existing regional policy instruments and administering them via existing departments/agencies. For Objective 2, state governments are responsible for the planning, implementation and evaluation of programmes and in each state there is normally a strict division of ERDF and ESF administration between the two state ministries responsible for economics and labour/social affairs respectively.

Although there is a strong degree of devolved implementation, the federal government has a significant influence on Structural Fund programmes, particularly those of the smaller western programmes and the Objective 1 programmes of the new eastern *Länder*. The federal level is responsible for formal communication with the Commission and the allocation of resources among regions. For Objective 2, there is a single Monitoring Committee chaired by the Federal Ministry of Economics. In the current programming period, each of the larger Objective 2 regions has created a regional sub-committee of the national Monitoring Committees (originally the Commission wanted fully fledged regional Monitoring Committees); other regions have more informal consultative committees.

2.8 Austria

The Austrian approach has been to integrate the Funds into the existing regional policy system, as in Germany; the Austrian Objective 2 areas generally being regarded as too small to justify the creation of a totally new administrative structure. The system is distinctive in terms of its complexity, lack of formalised division of responsibility and the importance of informal links and contact networks. A major administrative burden arises from the large number of participating agencies with small budgets. Federal government has a co-ordinating role (with a single, national Monitoring Committee for all Objective 2 programmes) but programme management is the responsibility of the *Länder* (states).

The implementation structure for the Structural Funds is highly fragmented, and existing promotional authorities have been used to implement EU programmes ie. a range of federal ministries, *Land* government departments and the regional development agency. The Federal Chancellery is responsible for overall coordination, while overarching Austria-wide coordination (federal, Land and local levels) is the task of ÖROK, the Austrian Conference on Regional Planning. *Land* government authorities are responsible for management of all programmes in their state, and Programme Groups and Working Groups exist at state level to assist coordination. Award decisions are taken by individual funding agencies at federal, *Land* and sometimes regional level, with the principal funding agency taking the coordination role on an informal basis. As well as administration taking place generally through existing funding agencies, it is also through existing assistance schemes, with existing rates of award. At sub-regional level, Regional Management offices support local implementation of the funds - they promote project applications, disseminate information and coordinate multi-fund cross-border projects.

3. PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT: DISTINCTIVE APPROACHES

A variety of different approaches have been taken to the actual management of the Objective 2 Structural Fund programmes across Member States. In some regions, programme management is undertaken by the local arms of state organisations (France, Sweden, England), in others it is partly or wholly the responsibility of regional councils or equivalent (Finland, Germany, Austria), while in others it is undertaken to differing degrees by Programme Executives/Secretariats (Scotland, Netherlands, Fyrstad in Sweden). Secretariats may have largely administrative responsibilities with little autonomy or may be more independent. The nature and form of implementation structures adopted has, of course, reflected the Member States' existing institutional structures, as discussed in the previous section.

The following sub-sections highlight examples, drawn from the regions in the Consortium, of distinctive approaches to the following programme management issues: political involvement, regional management offices, programme executives, integration between ERDF/ESF, Advisory Groups and financial management techniques.

3.1 Regional Steering Committee (Denmark)

The representation or involvement of political interests in Structural Fund management is an issue of concern to several regions from different perspectives - the need to keep politicians aware of the challenges and implications of the Structural Funds in the locality/region, and the need to promote co-ordination between different government departments. In North Jutland, this issue has been addressed by creating a Regional Steering Committee separate from the programme management executive and Monitoring Committee. The principal role of this third committee is to ensure political backing at the regional level for major development issues related to the use of Structural Funds. The RSC is composed of local/regional political figures, and is chaired by the leader of the county council. It includes representatives from the main local and regional social partners. This situation contrasts with the other Danish Objective 2 regions where the Executive Committee comprises both elected politicians and technical-administrative staff.

The RSC can thus be seen as a way of institutionalising a partnership approach to programme implementation and as such it would seem to be very much in line with the spirit of the Structural Funds. The committee is designed to generate regional political consensus in three areas, in particular:

- to obtain backing from local political actors and social partners for new initiatives and programmes,
- to improve co-ordination between Objective activities and the region's own development efforts, and
- to ensure regional political backing for major individual projects and applications.

The RSC functions as a permanent forum for dialogue between actors on the regional level, but it is by no means the only way in which the social partners are involved in the process of programme development. In connection with the on-going preparations for the next round of programmes, the RSC established a special committee with five sectoral sub-committees to review key areas of the regional economy and prepare revised and/or new policy proposals in considerable detail.

The function of the RSC as a vehicle for coordination between Objective 2 and separate regional development initiatives is particularly important because not all the region's districts have the same degree of coverage by the Structural Fund initiatives. Co-ordination is made possible by the fact that the RSC is at the same time the board of the North Jutland Development Fund, set up in 1992 and sponsored by the county. The development fund is responsible for organising the discharge of county-sponsored development initiatives covering the entire region and the fund is backed up by the same secretariat as the Objective 2 programme (i.e. the county's).

According to local policy-makers, the administrative set-up in North Jutland has two distinct advantages. First, the division of labour between the 'political' RSC and a 'technical' Executive Committee prevents parochial territorial interests from dominating the programme. Second, the generation of regional political consensus is seen as strengthening the regional actors *vis-a-vis*

national ones, making it more difficult for national bodies to disregard the expressed preferences of North Jutland.

3.2 Regional Management Offices (Austria)

Along with political involvement, a major challenge for all regional programme managers is how to promote public awareness. In Austria, a distinctive approach to programme implementation is being established through the formation of Regional Management Offices. A planned total of 35 Regional Management Offices are to be put in place to support the implementation of the Structural Funds at local level, promoting local involvement and project development. While regional managers or consultants had operated in conjunction with national regional policy in some areas prior to EU accession, the comprehensive coverage of the structure which has now been introduced to help implement the Structural Funds is a new development. The Regional Managers' exact remit is not yet clear, but the following areas have been suggested:

- transfer of information into the region,
- lobbying and information dissemination about the region at state level,
- assisting co-operation and co-ordination between beneficiary organisations within the region, and
- providing initial consultancy to programme applicants.

The Regional Managers do not, however, have a role in the operational implementation of schemes, or political or interest group activity.

The identification and stimulation of good projects is an area not generally cited in official descriptions of regional managers' tasks - in some *Länder* this is seen as the next stage of development. However, their contribution to the generation of good projects, and particularly the identification of projects which combine ERDF and ESF could be very important. The success of the Regional Management system is dependent on securing the involvement of qualified and motivated people.

3.3 Programme Executives (Scotland, Fyrstad)

In other Member States, the tasks of the Austrian Regional Management Offices are combined with programme administration through the use of independent *Programme Executives*. In Objective 2 regions in Scotland (UK), programme implementation and management are undertaken by independent management bodies supporting the Member State authority and the wider partnership. Termed the 'oil in the machine' Scottish programme executives, such as Strathclyde European Partnership, undertake virtually all aspects of programme administration apart from payments: management of project application processes for ERDF and ESF, servicing partnership committees and implementing committee decisions; monitoring financial and physical progress; and liaison with implementing authorities and the European Commission. In some cases, these executives have moved or are moving towards private sector status.

Fyrstad in Sweden has also established an independent Secretariat to administer its programme. The other Swedish Objective 2 regions administer the Structural Funds through the existing County Administration Boards (CABs). The autonomy which the Secretariat in Fyrstad has from the local state apparatus allows it to work more freely when dealing with other regional actors. It may, therefore, make the Funds more acceptable to other local political bodies in Fyrstad compared with Sweden's other Objective 2 regions.

3.4 Integration of ERDF/ESF (Bremen)

Most Member State authorities have found the integration of ERDF and ESF problematic given the different approaches and regulations of the Funds and their sponsoring Directorates-General in the Commission. In almost all countries, the two Funds are administered separately through industry/economics and labour/social affairs ministries respectively, in some cases with different decision-making structures and systems.

One innovative approach to the integration problem is the Coherence Fund in Bremen (Germany), a separate priority included in the Bremen SPD to ensure that ERDF and ESF measures reinforce each other even though they are administered by separate authorities. The innovation explicitly recognises that the separate administration of the two Funds may present problems of co-ordination and sets up formal mechanisms to ensure that this is seen to be taken into account. Under the Coherence Fund priority, project applications which involve both capital investment and qualification measures may be submitted through either the Economics or Social ministries. The Fund was exhausted in December 1995 and has been evaluated by external experts (report due for completion in September/October 1996).

3.5 Advisory Groups

Specialist Advisory Groups are used to varying degrees throughout the EU (Finland/ Netherlands/UK) to provide support in the management of specific types of project. In some countries, these groups assist decision-making with technical advice on certain issues, while in others their role is more substantive. For example, the three advisory groups in Päijät-Häme (Finland) are involved in tourism, technology and training projects at an early stage, actively assisting with project development through group meetings. They undertake an initial and unofficial appraisal of possible project applications, and have an active role in improving them - co-ordinating the resources which could be drawn upon, bringing proposers of similar projects together, improving the case for applications etc.

Fyrstad is alone among the Swedish Objective 2 areas in establishing Advisory Groups. Composed of local civil servants and officials from local municipalities, these groups aid project applications prior to them reaching the more politically charged atmosphere of the PMC. They can also act as a 'filtering mechanism', notifying programme managers of potential political issues arising from certain projects. Similarly, the use of more general reference groups (composed of banking interests, trade unions and cooperative organisations) is different across Objective 2 regions in Sweden.

3.6 Financial Management Techniques

An approach used in some French regions (eg Aquitaine) to simplify the financial management of programmes is the ‘paiement alternatif’ - alternating payment system. While each project is informed very clearly that it is in receipt of European funding, and is the beneficiary of a package of funding, it will in fact be allocated a single source of finance for its implementation. Thus, some projects will be funded by the regional councils, some by the state, some exclusively by European funds. The maximum number of sources of finance is two, and this in the case of projects also including an element of private finance alongside the public funds. As the programme progresses, the aggregate amounts allocated by each fund should more or less equal the amounts programmed. As a result of this system, policy-makers can provide their financial support quickly. Some other French regions choose to work with a range of agencies contributing to the same project. The determining factor seems to be whether, as in Aquitaine, there are management information systems in place which enable the financial stage of advancement of the programme to be monitored easily. The main drawback appears to be the delays which can be caused to projects when one tranche of European funding is exhausted and the next does not come through immediately.

4. EXPERIENCES OF IMPLEMENTATION

Implementing the Structural Funds has universally been a substantial administrative and technical challenge for Member State authorities at national and regional levels. These problems have been amplified for the new Member States which have been expected to create/impose a complicated system on national structures in a short space of time. Experience in countries like the UK was that it took at least 1-2 programming periods (3-5 years) to adjust to a multi-task, multi-activity programming approach within a single budget - with new procedures, vocabulary, terminology and human resource requirements - as well as multi-department management and co-ordination vertically and horizontally within (and outwith) government.

Those regions which have been successful in adapting effectively to the programme management task tend to be those which have:

- a degree of ‘regional identity’,
- coherent economic and geographical areas,
- considerable experience or traditions of economic development,
- experience of (or the ability to establish) co-ordination, co-operation or liaison between different economic and social agencies, and
- strong personalities in charge of programmes.

The remainder of this section summarises the experience of programme management of Objective 2 regions represented in the Consortium, divided into strategic, organisational and technical issues.

4.1 Strategic Issues

The challenge for programme managers begins with the nature of the Structural Funds and specifically the reforms of 1988 and 1993 which determined the current approach to programming. These pose several important constraints on programmes.

- Objective 2 programming periods are too short. Within the current three-year programming cycle, the demands of strategy formulation, SPD negotiation and approval mean that there is a maximum of two years to implement programmes. Delays in establishing implementation structures in some new Member States (eg throughout Austria) have exacerbated this problem. Towards the end of the cycle, there is inevitably a rush to spend money and prepare for the next programming period. One of the most urgent requirements is for longer periods of stability.
- The Funds involve a substantial administrative burden for a relatively small amount of money. Complicated rules of financial management and control, the marriage of EU rules/guidelines with national regulations/practice, and the assignment of grant values to different headings all make the administrative burden of the Structural Funds disproportionate to the size of the Funds. Too much time is often spent with the administrative side of programmes involving numerous different actors, with insufficient time devoted to the strategic issue of regional economic development. There is a need for simplification to ensure easier, more effective implementation.
- The process of area designation is questionable. Spatial objectives have encouraged a ‘map bureaucracy’ with artificial divisions between activities. There are too many different Objective 2 areas, some of which are too small and unrelated to their wider economic area, and too many different measures in each area with separate financial allocations. The duplication of initiatives financed under ERDF/ESF and Community Initiatives adds to this problem.
- The SPD approach is of variable relevance for the implementation of programmes - limited in some countries, especially in a decentralised and fragmented system (Austria), but more valuable in others (eg. Finland) where they are said to reflect real development needs of the regions, and the strategy and sub-programmes really do guide the operation of programmes. Not all the actors involved in implementation are convinced of the appropriateness of the SPD as a regional development strategy (e.g. Fyrstad). Disillusionment with Structural Funds among key policy organisations can reduce the overall effectiveness of the programme.

4.2 Organisational Issues

Few Member State authorities have escaped substantial administrative upheaval in the administration of the Structural Funds. However, the experience of most ‘old’ Member States is that programme management has largely ‘bedded down’ with increasingly efficient management structures and systems being implemented.

4.2.1 *Vertical co-ordination*

One of the main causes of problems for Member States, both old and new, arises from different actors (national, regional and local levels) working at different levels of the implementation process, often with conflicting goals and agendas, and with differing relationships with Commission services. In this context, the level of local involvement in programme management is a hotly contested issue. Lower levels of government have often perceived the Structural Funds as an opportunity to gain more autonomy with regard to their economic development responsibilities and resources (especially in unitary states such as the UK), and this has increased the awareness and involvement of regional and local authorities with respect to strategic planning and development.

Although positive in some regions, these processes may create additional problems in other areas. For example, in Denmark there is concern that greater local involvement could provide central government with the opportunity to reduce central government contributions, making it difficult for regional authorities to co-finance EU funded projects. It has also been argued that the increased local involvement makes the Funds' administration too transparent and demagogic, leading to too many people/bodies scrutinising applications.

A federal structure does not necessarily make Structural Fund administration easier. The complex tensions and balance of responsibilities between federal and state governments can actually hinder rather than promote the involvement of the regions (because of federal-state relations, and region-subregion relations).

4.2.2 *Programme management and partnership*

At national and regional levels, a further problem concerns the 'horizontal interfaces' between departments and agencies. Although there is no standard approach to partnership or how it is managed, the experience of programme implementation is that it has increased the level of communication and coordination between funding agencies and beneficiary organisations within a region. Experience suggests that partnership is only useful if the partners all bring something to the process.

Inevitably some partners are more important than others. Key economic development actors are involved in preparing the SPD strategy for example. There is therefore the risk of a programme's 'committee community' effectively becoming an 'exclusive club' which could alienate key groups such as the social partners. This underlines the importance of having open proceedings and publicising them widely. For some regions, the problem arises of how to finance the staffing of programme management - the Commission will not finance them entirely and other sources of financing are difficult to find.

For many regions an important issue is the lack of interest in participation among relevant actors and the wider community ie. the operations of programme managers and the proceedings of partnership committee meetings may be open but poorly supported and attended. This raises the important question of how to promote awareness, interest and participation. In some

countries (eg. Austria) this may be exacerbated by implementation through the existing system, therefore nothing changes for applicants. Lack of interest can also be associated with hostility to the EU.

In institutionalising partnership, the common feature of all programmes is the establishment of a Monitoring Committee (MC). As noted earlier, some countries operate a single national committee representing all Objective 2 regions, while other states have created an MC in each Objective 2 regions. A frequent complaint is that MC meetings do not invite open discussion on strategic direction because meetings are dominated by technical issues. The technical character of meetings also suppresses the input of some partners (eg. political figures, minor partners) as they are intimidated by the process, lack understanding of the issues and feel they have no part to play. Solutions advocated to promote a higher quality and different style of debate include the separation of strategic issues from financial/technical matters eg. between MCs and Programme Management Committees (Scotland, Sweden). Elsewhere eg. Germany, there is a division between the national MC and regional sub-committees which consult on and co-ordinate regional perspectives for the MC.

4.3 Technical Issues

The final set of issues relating to the implementation of programmes are operational or technical matters identified as particularly problematic during interview research at regional level. These are summarised in brief below.

4.3.1 Management information systems

A fundamental problem faced by regions is how to ensure standard implementation of the Funds across regions, and across government departments at central, regional and local levels in a manner that complies with the Structural Fund regulations and national administrative and accounting practices. There are inevitably great difficulties in maintaining a transparent overview of programmes, especially in decentralised/regionalised systems.

The UK approach has been to adopt a 'single manual' of good practice applying to all regional programmes; specific guidelines have also been adopted for the Scottish programmes. In the new Member States, the Commission has recommended the creation of Working Groups with representatives of the Monitoring Committees for Objective 2 and 6 regions and the production of a handbook for Structural Fund implementation - Sweden and Finland set up such groups in December 1995.

Computerised management information systems have been a critical development in the evolution of Structural Funds management. Several effective computerised information systems have been developed in different parts of Europe (Scotland, England & Wales, the Netherlands, Bremen, Aquitaine). However, such systems also entail problems: in Sweden, the implementation process has been hindered by the installation of a national computerised system which was intended to coordinate all the Structural Fund programmes.

4.3.2 *Funding, additionality and absorption*

There are three funding-related issues of particular concern. First, the co-financing of the Funds is problematical in many areas. The problems are exacerbated by the growing complexity of programmes and trends such as Commission control on infrastructure investment - which has always allowed relatively straightforward co-financing possibilities in the past. In the UK, such problems have been exacerbated by local government reform (and the issue of major commitments inherited from previous councils) and the impact of capital investment funding under the National Lottery which is affecting the expenditure profile of most programmes.

Second, there are problems in determining the eligibility of projects. A common complaint is that Commission guidelines are too imprecise and that it is hard to work out what is required and whether or not projects are eligible (problematic areas include joint ERDF/ESF funded projects, revolving funds, financing of depreciation allowances and community projects). Although some Member States have partially overcome this issue by establishing common manuals and guidelines, there is a perceived need to make rules clearer and simpler.

Third, additionality may be difficult to demonstrate. In Austria, a small amount of money is spread thinly over numerous aid schemes, and the Structural Funds areas do not coincide with national assisted areas - hence additionality/visibility is a problem. Some regions admit that many of the projects financed by the Structural Funds would have taken place anyway.

Fourth, over the past few years, regions have been affected by weak economic conditions (slow recovery from recession) which has affected use and absorption of Structural Fund resources. Problems arise in regions which lack sufficient capacity, sufficient development role or funding (e.g. Ångermanlandskusten) or where the size, shape and economic functional characteristics of the area inhibit the effective implementation of priorities and measures.

Lastly, the projection of spending is commonly found to be difficult. Lack of experience and knowledge about the capacity for private sector involvement in projects make projections problematical for many Objective 2 regions. In some regions, especially during initial programming periods, expenditure allocation may become largely an exercise in selecting 'eligible' projects from an existing pool rather than devising projects to meet established long-term economic development goals. Local authorities are often constrained by their existing capital programming cycles in which it is difficult to make forecasts.

4.3.3 *Commission relationships*

Inevitably, the functions and activities of Commission services give rise to a range of criticisms on the part of regions, the most notable of which are as follows:

- The Commission sometimes has insufficient appreciation of national conditions and systems, leading to recommendation of inappropriate approaches or systems.

- There is too much Commission involvement in specific operational issues such as the use of indicators or project selection. Although the Commission are not officially involved in project selection, desk officers may have a role to play in assisting the selection of good projects by ‘asking questions from time to time’.
- The Commission may put pressure on regions to absorb money into existing aid schemes as a way of spending funds quickly, thereby defeating the purpose of Objective 2 as a new mechanism for stimulating strategic regional development.
- Regions sometimes encounter great difficulty in getting ‘straight answers’ from Commission services because of inter-department and inter-DG differences, especially between DGV and DGXVI and between DGXVI and DGXX (budgets). Desk officers are also perceived to vary greatly in knowledge and experience. Intra-Commission conflicts may be carried over into MC meetings which creates poor impressions among local partners.
- There is a lack of uniformity in the Commission approach, for example representation on MCs, constraining familiarity and the establishment of trust and good working relations.
- Commission services may be unwilling to respect the deadlines to which MCs are working. Relations with the Commission can be eased by using officials with experience of working in the Commission, facilitating understanding of Commission approaches and ‘culture’.

Annex:

*Member State Approaches to Structural Funds
Implementation*

a. Austria Objective 2: Implementation of the Structural Funds

Functions, tasks	Responsibilities
Overall co-ordination of the Funds (including negotiation with the Commission)	Federal Chancellery
Co-ordination of individual Funds ERDF ESF	Federal Chancellery Federal Ministry for Labour & Social Affairs
Other national government departments	Federal ministries for foreign affairs, economic affairs, science, transport, the arts environment and finance
Interdepartmental coordination	Austrian Conference on Regional Planning (OROK) co-ordinates federal, Land and local levels and services Advisory Committees
Monitoring committees	National Monitoring Committee for all Objective 2 programmes, chaired by the Federal Chancellery. No regional Monitoring Committees.
Regional management	Land government authorities are responsible for management of all programmes in their state. Programme Groups and Working Groups exist at Land level to facilitate co-ordination between actors. At sub-regional level, Regional Management offices exist to promote project applications, disseminate information and co-ordinate multi- Fund, cross-border projects.
Application procedures	Applications are submitted to the relevant federal, Land or local promotion agencies as under the national system, in some cases via other intermediaries. Award decisions and payments are made by the same authorities.
Distinctive features	The implementation structure in Austria is virtually the same as the national system. One new feature is the Regional Management system comprising a network of 35 regional managers or consultants whose remit is to support local Fund implementation. Apart from assisting with information flows, they increasingly help with project development.

b. Denmark Objective 2: Implementation of the Structural Funds

Functions, tasks	Responsibilities
Overall co-ordination of the Funds (including negotiation with the Commission)	Department of Trade and Industry
Co-ordination of individual Funds ERDF ESF	NAIC - the National Agency of Industry and Commerce. The administration of ESF is devolved to the regional level. DGEPVT (Directorate General for Employment, Placement and Vocational Training) provides general guidance and supervision.
Other national government departments	Ministry of Labour involved in general issues relating to ESF (DTI maintains overall responsibility).
Interdepartmental coordination	Various levels of government are represented on the Monitoring Committee, Executive Committee, and in the case of North Jutland, the Regional Steering Committee. RSC is a forum for dialogue between actors at regional level.
Monitoring committees	There are two regional Monitoring Committees, chaired by NAIC.
Regional management	Programme administration is split between national and regional levels for ERDF, while ESF is devolved to regional level. Programme management is undertaken by an Executive Committee, an administrative secretariat, and a Regional Steering Committee (North Jutland). Central government keeps a role in ERDF administration and the final approval of applications.
Application procedures	Projects are submitted to the Executive Committee, which, in the case of ERDF, makes a recommendation to NAIC.
Distinctive features	The central level NAIC has an integral role in the ERDF approval process. This is linked to the limited powers of councils/districts to pursue economic development and offer support for private sector investment.

c. Finland Objective 2: Implementation of the Structural Funds

Functions, tasks	Responsibilities
Overall co-ordination of the Funds (including negotiation with the Commission)	Ministry of Interior
Co-ordination of individual Funds ERDF ESF	Ministry of Interior Ministry of Labour
Other national government departments	Ministry of Trade and Industry
Interdepartmental coordination	
Monitoring committees	There is a national Monitoring Committee for all the Objective 2 programmes, which meets in a different Objective 2 area each time.
Regional management	The programmes are administered by European Funding Offices housed in the Regional Councils. The six regional Programme Management Committees approve the European funding element of project applications. Meetings of the Programme Management Committees are preceded by more technical meetings of the "working groups on business aid" at which the more commercially sensitive apps are considered.
Application procedures	Complex. Projects go first to relevant decentralised state agency or regional council/municipality. May be worked on by Advisory Group. Assessed according to co-financing agency criteria. If result is positive - goes to regional PMC/working group on business aid to be considered according to EU project criteria. They approve EU portion of funding, then co-funding authority takes final decision on its portion.
Distinctive features	Parallel structures to PMCs - working groups on business aid. Ensures specialist appraisal and commercial confidentiality. Co-funder has final approval - so retaining systems in place prior to SFs.

d. France Objective 2: Implementation of the Structural Funds

Functions, tasks	Responsibilities
Overall co-ordination of the Funds (including negotiation with the Commission)	DATAR
Co-ordination of individual Funds ERDF ESF	DATAR Mission FSE at Ministry of Employment
Other national government departments	Ministere Generale des Collectivites Locales. D. des Peches Maritimes et des Cultures Marines. Direction de l'Espace Rural et de la Foret. D Generale de l'Alimentation.
Interdepartmental coordination	The Mission/Cellule Europe office set up within SGAR undertakes coordination and administrative work, liaising with other offices of the state in region - prefecture, DRIRE, DIREN, DRAF, DRTEFP, with the local councils etc.
Monitoring committees	One Monitoring Committee per region, whose meetings may be preceeded by a technical meeting. Evaluation committees advise the Monitoring Committee on evaluation (choice of consultant, terms of reference for studies etc.)
Regional management	The main agency responsible for the programme is the Prefecture de Region - the decentralised office of the state in the regions. An office is usually set up in the offices of SGAR to administer the programmes. Some administrative work may be devolved to the prefectures de departement, sous prefectures or collectivites locales. If decisions taken at regional level - 1 PMC, if devolved, there will be a regional PMC and PMCs in dept.
Application procedures	The approach taken may vary between regions. In Rhone Alpes, applications taken to Guichet unique' in relevant dept. Then passed on to relevant agency in dept or regional level. Formal dossier passed to Comite Technique to check. Then goes to dept. or regional PMC.
Distinctive features	

e. Germany Objective 2: Implementation of the Structural Funds

Functions, tasks	Responsibilities
Overall co-ordination of the Funds (including negotiation with the Commission)	Federal Ministry of Economics
Co-ordination of individual Funds ERDF ESF	Land Ministry of Economics Land Social Ministry
Other national government departments	Federal ministries represented at MCs - economics, employment and social affairs, and finance are permanent members
Interdepartmental coordination	Federal Ministry of Economics
Monitoring committees	There is one National Monitoring Committee for all Objective 2 regions. Some regions have sub-committees or consultative committees.
Regional management	The Land Ministry of Economics coordinates the programmes overall. Working Groups at Land level advise on specific measures.
Application procedures	Applications are dealt with through the existing Land procedures for regional programmes i.e. they are dealt with by the appropriate Land ministries; other agencies are involved where appropriate: e.g.. banks, benefit offices, local government, technology transfer centres.
Distinctive features	The implementation of the Structural Funds is tailored to existing structures, and European funding programmes are integrated into the overall Land strategy.

f. Netherlands Objective 2: Implementation of the Structural Funds

Functions, tasks	Responsibilities
Overall co-ordination of the Funds (including negotiation with the Commission)	Ministry of Economic Affairs (MEZ). Regions are allowed to debate with the Commission directly rather than going through central government.
Co-ordination of individual Funds ERDF ESF	Ministry of Economic Affairs Ministry of Social Affairs. These bodies have overall national responsibility, but implementation is handled by the regional Monitoring Committees.
Other national government departments	Main departments involved are the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Ministry of Social Affairs. Their involvement is coordinated by the MEZ.
Interdepartmental coordination	The various levels of government are represented on the Monitoring Committees (central government, province, regional/local authorities).
Monitoring committees	Each region has a regional Monitoring Committee.
Regional management	Responsibility for implementation is divided between the Programme Secretariat, the Project Management Group (which generates projects) and the Steering Group, which takes decisions on projects.
Application procedures	Project selection is the responsibility of the Steering Group. Some regions have expert Advisory Groups to assist the Steering Group in the context of project decisions.
Distinctive features	Highly decentralised approach, with responsibility for Objective 2 activities lying primarily at regional level. The MEZ has a "hands off" approach, leaving the main responsibilities to the regional level. The main role of the national government is to coordinate, ensuring a uniform approach as and when relevant.

g. Sweden Objective 2: Implementation of the Structural Funds

Functions, tasks	Responsibilities
Overall co-ordination of the Funds (including negotiation with the Commission)	Ministry of Industry and Trade (formerly the Ministry of Labour)
Co-ordination of individual Funds ERDF ESF	Ministry of Industry and Trade Ministry of Labour
Other national government departments	Ministry of Labour, National Labour Market Board, Agricultural Board and Nutek
Interdepartmental coordination	The main actors involved in the Structural Fund implementation have established a reference group. This is composed of various actors from different national Ministries, Nutek, Labour Market Board, Association of County Councils etc.
Monitoring committees	All Sweden's Objective Two Monitoring Committees are chaired by personnel from the Ministry of Industry and Trade
Regional management	With the exception of Fyrstad where an independent Secretariat manages the programme, the County Administration Boards are responsible for the implementation process at the regional level.
Application procedures	Applications are submitted to the relevant CABs. Award decisions are taken by the Programme Management Committee in each region. All payments are administered by the national Structural Funds Secretariat based in Nutek.
Distinctive features	The implementation structure for the Objective 2 Funds is in fact very similar to national regional policy. Fyrstad, however, has adopted a different organisational structure which is separate from the local state apparatus (i.e. CABs).

h. UK (England and Wales) Objective 2: Implementation of the Structural Funds

Functions, tasks	Responsibilities
Overall co-ordination of the Funds (including negotiation with the Commission)	Department of Trade and Industry (DTI)/ Welsh Office
Co-ordination of individual Funds ERDF ESF	Department of Trade and Industry (DTI)/ Welsh Office Dept of Education and Employment
Other national government departments	Departments of trade and industry, environment, employment and education, transport, natural heritage agriculture and Fisheries, finance, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Offices.
Interdepartmental coordination	An Interdepartmental Group brings together the DTI, DoE, DE, DoT, DNH, MAFF, Treasury, SO, WO, NIO and UKREP Chaired by DTI. Also General Practitioners Group - a regional version of the IDG representing all govt. depts. in region.
Monitoring committees	SPD Monitoring Committees
Regional management	Management structures are partly subsumed within existing government structures. Programmes are run by regional offices of central government, led by the DTI, and in Wales by the Welsh Office. In some regions, an independent secretariat may be set up.
Application procedures	Award decisions are made by regional government offices, who suggest a package of projects with allocations to Monitoring Committee. Move in some regions to Independent Secretariat. ESF funding also to move to Secretariats from 1997.
Distinctive features	