

Regional Learning and Regional Results in South West, UK

The experiences connected to this project for the regional partnership in South West builds on a recognition that increasingly both national and global pressures and opportunities are played out at sub-regional and regional level.

Working in partnership, managing collaboration, is not about having to agree to do the same thing but to share understanding of what variously constitute priorities and the skills needed to address those and to co-develop and share various methodologies that generate 'competence'. NIACE and SLIM have found that working with the Regional Key Competencies project is providing insight into many of these issues. The collaboration between the SLIM and NIACE is being further enhanced as a result of this project and discussions have begun regarding formal arrangements for working together in the future.

As a national level, research and policy development organisation, NIACE has had both something to learn and something to contribute to the project's work in developing better understanding and more effective methodologies for regional competencies in the management of responding to national and global pressures. NIACE is unusual in working across many areas of policy, engaging with commercial, public sector, Government and commercial organisations, and also working at national, regional and local level. In working in this way it is evident to NIACE that while pressures and issues can be common, their prioritisation and the ways in which they are perceived and approached can be very different.

It is clear that the work in the project has led to outcomes that are of considerable value. As well as the website and the three tools/methodologies, a good deal of value has been derived from the way in which the work has developed - with the emphasis being in the process rather than the defined products. It has been necessary to focus on three key aspects:

- 1) The development of regional intelligence;
- 2) The interpretation of regional intelligence;
- 3) The deployment of regional intelligence for the development of strategy

Through Work Packages 1 and 2 the UK partnership gained understanding of the contexts within each of the regions. It is very interesting for them to see the holistic way in which the Reconversion Units are set up in Wallonia and compare this to the processes which take place in the UK, which can be much more 'quick-fix' and short term in nature. Also the 'Centres Competences' in Wallonia have some similarities to the Sector Skills Councils in the UK with some important differences to do with skills provision.

We have also noticed the differences and similarities in the ways in which the partner regions gather and use information. For instance, in the UK there is a National Employer Skills Survey which is disaggregated to local level and is used for planning of skills provision on a regional and sub-regional level, and in Ribe County there is the set of 3 employer surveys which focus more on occupational needs, and are more specific to the company's own needs than a way of gathering statistics. The two methods are valuable for different reasons. This sharing of methodologies led to the development of the signal panel. A version of the signal panel has already been adopted by a working group within

the South West Regional Skills Partnership, looking at an all-age Adult Guidance Service.

It is interesting for the UK partnership to see how effective the direct and more democratic processes are which take place in the Ribe County. We can see that social and cultural dimensions are as important as structures when seeking to anticipate change. The benchmarking in the project has encouraged us to look at the processes we have in place, in a different way.

As well as learning about the European partner regions, while reviewing processes and methodologies in the UK, the UK partnership has also been able to benchmark their region against other UK regions. This has been useful for them to share with their partners in the South West in particular the South West Regional Skills Partnership.

It is timely for us that we have produced the scenario planning tool. It is evident that within the UK there is increased interest in using scenario planning to enlighten policy making both at national and regional level. The Department of Trade and Industry for example have a dedicated 'futures facility' which develops and uses scenarios constantly. Through presenting the Regional Key Competencies work at one of their workshops in September 2006, useful contacts have been made which both highlight our regional issues at the centre and legitimise the use of scenario planning at regional level. To have produced this easily accessible multimedia training tool creates the potential to enable more people to learn how use the principle of scenario planning for their own set of issues.

The scenario planning exercise has raised awareness of the potential/scope for this process and the UK partnership can use and recommend this as a process for helping to anticipate change. They found both the preliminary interviewing process and then the workshops thought provoking and a good tool for stimulating and refining thinking. Within NIACE much interest has been raised in this process at different levels within the organisation. There is so much information and work about demographic change, that tools to assist clarity of thinking and strategic direction are highly beneficial for those having to tackle such systematic and cross-cutting issues.

All partner regions have identified that there is no shortage of information in our regions and that not nearly enough time is spent on analysis of the whole picture. This project has helped to highlight this as we see the vast amounts of data available to us with very little in the way of explanation of the linkages to the actual policy decisions that are made in the regions. Looking more in depth into these linkages and the methodologies which are used has provided us with a useful resource.

The focus of the South West Observatory (of which SLIM is one of the modules) for the next 12 months is to be on regional well-being and the quality of life. The methods we have developed in this project and the focus on well-being ties in very well with this.