

Urban Governance in Practice

Final report of the interact network

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[Interact]

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I. SETTING THE SCENE ON PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Why we need partnerships: cities in transition

The environment in which cities develop and implement strategy has changed dramatically during the last thirty years, and will continue to change. As a result, the role of many Western European cities has also changed. Increasingly, they are no longer the heartlands of an industrial society but the centres of knowledge services, cultural facilities and 'lifestyle' in an affluent, post industrial era. The cities of the new EU member states will no doubt follow the same trajectory.

Economic globalisation has increased the importance of place competition. To establish a sustainable economic role in the global economy, attracting high value added industries and skilled people, cities need to be competitive. Access to an international airport, a critical mass of business, conference and cultural facilities, a strong R&D base in the local universities, a high quality environment and lifestyle, adequately resourced city administrations – these are all now critical success factors for major cities.

Place competition increases the need for stronger 'vertical' partnership between city, regional and national Government - and the EU - as a city cannot achieve competitiveness solely by its own endeavours. Yet building partnership and collaboration between different levels of government remains difficult politically and organisationally.

The growing importance of place competition has also increased the strategic focus on the city as a whole, rather than on neighbourhoods within it. And this in turn has raised questions about the relevance of historic city boundaries. These boundaries are not recognised by the key decision makers in the global economy. They simply see the 'city-region', the wider metropolitan area embracing the core city and its economic and residential hinterland. **While building partnerships across the city-region has become more important, the political tensions and organisa-**

tional complexities involved in creating city-region collaboration remain as difficult as ever.

Whilst globalisation, and the changing role of European cities within the global economy, has resulted in increased attention being given to city-wide competitiveness strategy, other trends have forced cities to review their strategies at neighbourhood level. Growing affluence has not eliminated poverty and social inequality.

Arguably, the growing power of the global market economy, the economic restructuring that accompanies it, and the increase in migration resulting from the liberalisation of labour markets, have strengthened the socio economic forces that lead to social inequality. Many European cities are increasingly characterised by a two tier labour market, with the growth of highly paid jobs being mirrored by the growth of poorly paid, and often casual or temporary, employment. At the same time, however, the increased emphasis given to place competitiveness and the creation of conditions favoured by global decision makers, reinforced by the 'new public sector management', has resulted in the privatisation of some public services, the internal decentralisation of others, the introduction of market principles into public service provision, growing constraints on public spending, and the deregulation of market forces. These trends in turn constrain both the resources and the policy options available to cities to tackle social inequality in a systematic way.

Not surprisingly in this context, three decades of local area regeneration have often failed to deliver sustainable improvements to disadvantaged neighbourhoods and communities. **Within the new political and financial environment, cities are therefore exploring new approaches to social policy. This, too, leads to a search for partnership based solutions.**

At the same time, an increasingly educated and assertive population is demanding greater rights – to be consulted, to participate in decision making, to share in the running of projects and services, and to judge the performance of public agencies afterwards. The growing range of community organisations, representing the complex multicultural and multi layered populations of cities, also demand a place at the table. **New approaches to social policy and public service provision are therefore mirrored by the development of new processes for building partnership with citizens.**

Both city competitiveness policy and city social policy are therefore feeling their way towards new sets of partnerships – vertical partnerships with different tiers of government, city-region partnerships, and new forms of partnership with citizens. But city administrations themselves are no longer ‘unitary’, providing the bulk of strategic services themselves. Privatisation, outsourcing and the creation of single purpose public agencies means **that city administration itself is now a partnership between a whole range of public or quasi public agencies.** Increased pressure on public budgets, and the growing interest in the economic competitiveness of cities, means that private sector actors, too, are now key stakeholders in the strategic planning and implementation process.

Interact: who we were and how we worked

INTERACT took as its starting point the above analysis, the inevitable growth of partnership working that it implies, and the reality that partnership working often results in less than satisfactory outcomes. **The overall aim of the project was to develop a deeper understanding of the potential and limitations of partnership working, and to identify ways of making it more effective as a means of delivering urban governance.**

INTERACT was a network of cities funded by the European Commission under the 5th Framework Research Programme, within Key Action 4 – ‘City of Tomorrow and Cultural Heritage’. The network was funded for three years from 2002 – 2004. The network comprised:

- Officers responsible for strategic planning and implementation in the cities of Belfast, Birmingham, Brno, Budapest, The Hague, Genoa,

Finally, there is a growing awareness that the affluent society makes excessive demands upon the world’s ecosystem resources. Issues about city competitiveness and social inequality will therefore need to be resolved in ways that begin to reduce to more sustainable levels the demands on the environment. This will have profound economic and social implications. For example, businesses will no longer be free to grow their operations and profitability at the expense of the environment. Similarly, public policies based upon using faster overall economic growth as the solution to social inequality will become less of an option, and will need to be replaced increasingly by a greater emphasis upon a more equitable redistribution of existing wealth. These trends will in turn potentially add to the existing conflicts between different sections of the community over the distribution of power and resources, and therefore create additional tensions for, and within, partnerships.

These, then, are some of the ways in which the policy environment of cities is changing. All of these trends, in their own different ways, increase the pressures to formulate and implement strategy through partnership, but at the same time make partnership working more complex and difficult. It is these complexities that INTERACT sought to explore.

Greater Lyon, Malmö, Munich, Utrecht, Venice and Vienna.

- A Training Team comprising staff from the School of Governance at the University of Utrecht and the French National Centre for the Territorial Civil Service. This team was responsible for developing training and learning material from the project. As the project progressed, training officers from a number of the participating City Councils also became involved with the Training Team to help shape the learning materials so that they would be most relevant to practitioners.

- Most cities in the first half of the project, and all cities in the second half of the project, employed a research student based at a local university. These researchers undertook two case studies in each city. Each case study explored in depth a particular strategic project in the city to critically analyse its experiences of partnership working.

■ A Scientific Committee comprising academics from Milan Polytechnic, the German Institute for Urban Affairs and the French Laboratory for Techniques, Territories and Societies. The role of the Scientific Committee was to support the municipality practitioners and university researchers in developing an intellectual rigour to their analysis of their experiences.

■ The Eurocities network, the largest Cities network in Europe. Eurocities offer an interesting platform for exchanging experiences in urban affairs and disseminating knowledge.

■ Each city arranged about four officer exchanges with other participating cities. These exchanges gave officers the opportunity to look in depth at the way other cities addressed strategic issues.

Meetings were held in each city. These meetings typically comprised presentations from the host and one other city on their INTERACT case stu-

dies, visits to major projects, workshops focused on specific issues concerning strategic implementation and/or partnership working, and sessions on shaping and delivering the INTERACT outputs. During each visit to a city, the Steering Committee met separately to plan and manage the work programme.

INTERACT's outputs comprise this Final Report, a Fieldbook 'Urban Governance in Practice', 24 in depth case studies (two per city), reports from the exchange officers, 13 Newsletters (a presentation of the project and one per city), and a video of how the INTERACT network itself developed as a vehicle for transnational learning.

For those who want to know more about INTERACT, Appendices to this report list the contact details for the project members, the titles of the 24 case studies, the list of exchange officers, and the INTERACT web site address, where the outputs are all stored.

The interact mindset: from pragmatism to critical analysis

Local government officers are responsible for getting things done; for making things happen. To achieve this they have to negotiate and compromise. To find ways forward that are acceptable to all, or most, stakeholders requires identifying less than perfect solutions. Pragmatism and a sense of the practical are key skills.

These requirements do not easily lend themselves to the development of a critical mindset that challenges 'common sense' assumptions to find the underlying 'reality'. Moreover, a critical mindset can be uncomfortable. It raises challenging ethical issues about power, conflict and manipulation – issues that, if raised, can damage the fragile trust that has been constructed within a partnership.

One of INTERACT's strengths was the interplay between the academics comprising the Scientific Committee and the local researchers, on the one hand, and the practitioners on the other. Frequently, the researchers would draw conclusions in their case studies that practitioners found uncomfortable. The Scientific Committee, too, often asked challenging questions that created tensions amongst the practitioners.

As INTERACT analysed issues in more depth, it became increasingly apparent that the practitioners' 'pragmatic' perspective was unable to answer many of the questions that INTERACT was established to explore. Why are there so many tensions between the leaders and other partners in a partnership? Why is public participation such an unsatisfactory experience for both the general public and the partnership? Why is it so difficult for partnerships to ensure that disadvantaged groups benefit from the success of strategic economic projects?

Increasingly, INTERACT felt that greater use of a critical perspective, however difficult and uncomfortable, could help partnerships to understand these problems better, and to design more realistic and effective ways forward, if not complete solutions.

For example, the practitioners' starting point was that citizen participation is, by definition, 'a good thing'. However, as this assumption was analysed during the life of the project, new perspectives began to emerge. Participation may not always represent an enhancement of democracy. Participation creates an arena in which different communities of interest, with different access to power and resources, compete for influence.

Whether the outcomes of this competition are an improvement on traditional methods of representative democracy will depend upon a number of criteria, particularly the issue of 'who gains and who loses' as a result of participation. Favourable outcomes cannot be taken for granted. Similar

critical questions began to be asked within INTERACT about issues such as leadership, consensus building and partnership itself.

This critical perspective can lead to real and practical measures to improve the effectiveness of partnership working. For example:

- Partners should be selected to include members with different mindsets. Academics, or other independent parties, might be co-opted to facilitate critical analysis;
- Regular forums, for example seminars, should be built into the partnership process where critical analysis and challenge can occur in non-threatening ways;
- Partners should be aware of the political nature of their own value system, and regularly question the way they undertake partnership tasks. Why are certain issues being investigated but not others? Why are certain types of information being collected, but not others? What different interpretations could be placed upon the information collected and the analysis undertaken?
- Approaches to leadership should be developed with a conscious understanding of the power relations within the partnership;
- Partnership leaders should analyse the strategic planning process, and the partnership building process, in terms of their impact upon the distribution of power amongst the partners. Leaders should seek to design processes that achieve a distribution of power that is consistent with the aims of the partnership. For example, the partnership's steering group arrangements should be designed to recognise the limited resources available to voluntary sector partners;
- Public participation processes should be designed to recognise the distribution of power within both the partnership and the community. For example, the partnership should monitor which sections of the community actually take part in participation exercises, make allowance for excluded groups when interpreting public feedback, and if necessary seek to design second phase participation exercises to engage with those excluded from the first phase.
- The partnership should critically analyse the outcomes of its work from a 'who gains, who loses' perspective, and satisfy itself that these distributional consequences are consistent with the partnership's objectives.

Whilst the process was slow, and sometimes painful, INTERACT gradually developed this more critical perspective. Practitioners began to see that many of the difficulties involved in partnership working were due to flaws in the commonly held assumptions that underpin such partnership working. Perhaps more significant, practitioners became more relaxed about questioning their own assumptions and practices. As a result, the local researchers in turn became more confident in drawing critical conclusions from their case studies.

This shift in thinking within INTERACT is illustrated in Table 1, which compares as 'ideal types' the pragmatic and critical perspectives. Two points should be emphasised about Table 1. First, it does not represent start and end points for the INTERACT mindset, but rather a direction of travel. Second, the direction of travel was two way – whilst practitioners developed a more critical awareness of their working environment, the researchers also began to understand, and respect, the dilemmas that lead practitioners to adopt pragmatic approaches, and to appreciate that perfect solutions rarely exist.

Table 1: typology of pragmatic and critical perspectives

PRAGMATIC PERSPECTIVE	CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE
Professionals make objective decisions through a rational, non-political intellectual process. Politicians are ideological, officers are non ideological.	Professionals make decisions based upon political and ideological values. The distinction between politicians and professionals is merely that the former are party political, while the latter are 'only' political.
Analysis recognises that economic change is the prime driver of urban change. Policy responses tend to be physical based.	Analysis recognises that economic change is the prime driver of urban change. Policy responses tend to focus upon the impact of change upon power, social processes and different sections of the community.
Partnership is seen as a relationship amongst partners with equal rights and status in the partnership.	Partnership is seen as an arena for competition and conflict between partners with unequal power. The distribution of power is a key explanation of partnership outcomes.
Consensus exists amongst partner agencies.	The appearance of consensus is achieved by developing broad and bland strategies that allow conflict to persist out of the public spotlight.
Partnership decision making is based upon negotiation and compromise.	Partnership decision making is often based upon dominance and compliance.
Leadership strategy within the partnership is designed to find a consensus that exists but is currently hidden from view.	Leadership strategy is based upon managing and manipulating power relations, establishing alliances, etc., in order to achieve progress in a non-consensual environment.
Consensus exists within the community.	The community comprises conflicting interests based upon class, culture, age, gender, etc.
Public participation is an effective way of increasing the whole community's influence on decision making.	Public participation increases the influence of the already influential. Participation will eventually become marginalised by the power of key partners or by market forces, except on small scale, local projects.
The aim of the partnership is to respond to the community consensus by developing policies 'for the benefit of all'.	No policy benefits everyone. With each policy, some sections of the community will gain and others lose. Who gains and who loses is the key test of a policy.
Outcomes tend to favour majority, typically middle class, interests.	Outcomes may be designed to champion or protect the interests of minorities and disadvantaged communities.

Perhaps this is the most important single message that INTERACT can give to the outside world. **However important it is for politicians and practitioners to be pragmatic and make things happen, they must also develop the skills and self discipline to challenge taken for granted assumptions, to understand what is really happening, and to question their own ways of doing things.** They must also find non-threate-

ning arenas for exploring these issues with colleagues and partners. After all of this, they will still need to pursue a pragmatic approach to their work, but the understanding that flows from adopting a critical perspective will invariably enable them to design more effective implementation processes, and to manage those processes to better effect.

About this report: key messages from a critical perspective

INTERACT recognised that the contexts of different European countries and cities vary considerably, and that it is therefore not possible to find 'one size fits all' solutions to issues of strategic implementation. The other INTERACT publications therefore deliberately seek to take a neutral standpoint. The Fieldbook do not pretend to give answers, but rather attempt to provide guidance to enable others to find their own answers. Similarly, the newsletters, case studies and reports of officer exchanges simply document the experiences and reflections of the participants. They hopefully provide insights that will enable others to understand their own situations better, but do not attempt to solve others' problems for them.

This report, in contrast, explicitly draws together some key messages that the INTERACT network believes are important in the future shaping of urban policy in Europe. They are messages for the European Union, and for national and regional Governments, as well as for the cities themselves. These messages are concerned with making city governance more effective in the future. Equally important, however, they are concerned with enabling cities to take their place at the heart of the project to build a strong, viable Europe in a changing world.

A message for governments: partnership with your cities makes sense

INTERACT has a particular partnership message for Governments. Whilst this message is set down in more detail in the next Section of this report, it is perhaps also worth emphasising separately here. The traditional view that cities are essentially problems is giving ground to an understanding that cities are a country's key assets. They are the economic engines of the national and regional economies. They are where the country's business, sporting, and cultural infrastructure is concentrated. They are the nodes of the country's transport system – air, rail and road. Cities are the location for intense political debate and interaction, and the key arenas in which citizens engage in democratic participation. They are centres of multicultural diversity. They are the location for the highly intensive economic, social and cultural interactions that are necessary for innovation to take place. They are therefore the places where

new forms of economic activity generally first occur, and the testing grounds for new forms of social behaviour and political governance. Cities are where national social problems first arise, and where solutions to those problems are first tested out. The reality is that most people in Europe depend on cities for their livelihood and lifestyle.

If a country is to be successful, it must therefore have successful cities. Cities are developing new forms of strategy to ensure their success in a changing world. This report is about the obstacles that cities face in implementing those strategies through partnership, and how they might develop more effective approaches to implementation. Many of the messages in the report are for cities themselves – for the municipalities and their local partners.

Some of the messages, however, are for the European Union and for national and regional Government. **Cities cannot be successful on their own.** Economic competitiveness is of growing importance in city strategic planning. Many of the factors that determine a city's competitiveness – airports policy, the distribution of public R&D across the national university system, the territorial distribution of business/sporting/cultural facilities of international, national or regional significance, etc. – are decided by levels of Government above the city. **Building successful cities therefore requires greater partnership between the European Union, national and regional Government, and cities.**

Traditionally, higher levels of Government have adopted an arms length role with respect to city strategy. They have provided a legislative and resource framework for cities, and subsequently evaluated the performance of the cities in using resources effectively. This is no longer good enough. National Governments need to be direct and active partners with cities in developing city strategy, which should include identifying how Government policies and resource allocations can support the competitiveness of the cities. The same is true of regional level Governments – and of the European Union. Given the importance of cities to European, national and regional prosperity, the development of this vertical partnership must be to everyone's benefit.

2. ISSUES IN PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Vision: the glue that binds the partnership

INTERACT members were agreed that a key driver underpinning strategic implementation through partnership is the existence of an integrated vision embracing spatial, economic, transport, environmental, urban renewal and social elements.

Partners must be involved in shaping this vision at the outset to ensure their commitment to its implementation. The partnership should also give a high priority to achieving and maintaining political buy in to the vision – certainly at the city level, and by higher tiers of government as well if possible. Political actors should have active roles to play in the process – in shaping the vision, in negotiating with key stakeholders, in promoting the vision publicly, and in drawing in and representing the views of the public.

Implementation issues must be considered as part of this visioning process, otherwise the outcome is likely to be strategy that cannot be delivered. For example, a number of INTERACT case studies identified a mismatch between the vision and the resources available to deliver it - identifying internal and external resources should be integral to the visioning process, and responsibilities for resources should be clearly agreed

between the partners. Other case studies showed that failure to deliver the vision was the result of a failure to anticipate political obstacles or weaknesses in organisational capacity, and strategies should be developed at the outset for identifying and overcoming such obstacles. The visioning process should include identifying viable delivery vehicles for project implementation.

A dedicated, and adequate, staff resource must be identified to drive the visioning and implementation processes. Several INTERACT case studies concluded that weaknesses in implementation were at least partly caused by underestimating the staff resource required to drive the process forward. This in turn was often because the main task was seen as the production of documents such as strategies and action plans, and there was inadequate recognition of the (much larger) staff effort needed for systems building, partnership maintenance, communication, and so on.

A high priority should be given to building a positive, ongoing relationship with the local media, as it can play an important part in communicating the vision and in developing awareness, shared understanding and buy in.

The winning formula: the government/region/city partnership

Traditionally, the debate on partnership working has focused upon horizontal partnership – on achieving effective partnership working amongst partners operating at the same territorial level, typically at the level of the city or the local neighbourhood. Debate about vertical partnership – between different tiers of governance - is less well developed. Yet vertical partnership is particularly important for major cities for a number of reasons.

First, to an extent that is not true for smaller urban areas, a key strategic issue for major cities is their role within their region, within the national economy, and within the global economy. To achieve a viable, sustainable role at these levels, city governments need strong vertical partnerships with regional institutions, with national Government, and with the European Union. The focus for this partnership will primarily be the long term, economic competitiveness of the city,

and will be concerned with, for example, strategic transport infrastructure, broad strategy for the housing and labour markets, the development and location of major facilities, etc.

Second, as an INTERACT seminar highlighted very clearly, urban dynamics are not neatly contained within local authority boundaries. For most major cities, the labour and housing markets, for example, operate over a wider city-region that is typically much larger than the administrative city. Despite the very different local social, economic and political circumstances existing in the INTERACT cities, the seminar demonstrated that these city-wide housing and labour market dynamics raise many policy issues that cannot be resolved by the core city alone, but need to be addressed collaboratively at a higher level by the city-region as a whole.

Yet it is clear from INTERACT debates that most European cities experience difficulties in creating effective vertical partnership, because the city's ability to build partnership depends crucially on collaboration from institutions at higher tiers with (usually) equal or greater power.

It is likely that the city administration will need to take the initiative in building vertical partnership with city-regional, regional, national and European institutions. This might involve regular seminars with higher level agencies, joint working groups to look at selected issues, inviting higher level agencies to become members of a city partnership, etc.

Joining with other major cities may also be an effective way of building partnership with the national Government. Such an alliance can have a number of benefits. The number of cities is small enough to create a highly focused and shared agenda, management of the alliance can be relatively simple, and collectively the alliance represents for its size a disproportionately important share of the country's population and economic power, and therefore has considerable lobbying muscle.

Nevertheless, cities can only do so much themselves. **It is vital to the future vitality of city, regional and national economies, and to the European Union, that all tiers of Government recognise the key role of cities, and enter willingly into partnership with cities to enhance their competitiveness.**

Planning for the real city: the problem of city boundaries

Reference has been made above to the importance for major cities of planning at the city-region level. INTERACT analysed economic and labour market processes to tease out generic issues about metropolitan governance. This analysis exposed a range of policy issues. For example:

- Decision makers in the global market place to not see, or care about, administrative boundaries. They look at the city-region as a whole to assess whether it offers a competitive range of economic and lifestyle opportunities. It follows that the city-region as a whole needs to work together to create that competitive offering, because much of that offer - perhaps most of it - cannot be provided in the core city itself.

- The core city centre is usually the location for most of the highest level jobs in the city-region. As such, it is the engine room of the city-region's competitiveness. The trend for affluent workers to live beyond the core city boundaries results in unsustainable growth in commuting back to the core city centre.

- Conversely, where high level business activities move out of the core city, to be closer to their high skill employees in the wider city-region, this threatens the critical mass of activities in the core city centre that gives the core city its international significance and profile.

- The core city experiences a growing imbalance between an increasingly 'up market' job structure and an increasingly 'down market' population structure. The core city therefore becomes steadily less able to provide suitable employment opportunities for its own workforce.

- The shift of affluent households beyond the core city boundary also results in a shift of spending power. Many of the new medium skill jobs created to serve the lifestyles of the affluent (in health and leisure centres, entertainment, and other lifestyle activities) will therefore also locate outside of the core city to be close to their customers. It is these medium level jobs that provide the best hope for work for disadvantaged groups in the core city, and their dispersal to outlying

areas makes them increasingly inaccessible to the core city unemployed.

INTERACT's consideration of housing market issues and social polarisation reinforced its conclusion that efficient urban governance requires partnership at a city-region level in order to deliver the global competitiveness of the city and its hinterland.

Yet the experience of the INTERACT cities indicates that dialogue and collaboration at the city-region level may be difficult to achieve, due to parochialism and the suspicions of the neighbouring authorities over the motives of the central city. With few exceptions, such as Stuttgart and the Communautés Urbaines system in France, it has proved difficult to establish formal structures to give effect to city-region collaboration. Most cities are, instead, developing informal networks and partnerships of city-region municipalities. Whilst these arrangements are inevitably less effective than more formal structures, they recognise political realities, and create vehicles through which trust and collaboration can begin to develop. They can therefore address immediately a range of issues where a shared agenda can be most easily established, whilst paving the way for more systematic city-region collaboration in the longer term.

The core city can take a number of steps to initiate such collaboration.

First, using independent facilitators – perhaps from national Government or the local academic or business community – may enable the initial break through in collaboration to take place.

Second, it is usually difficult to sustain any partnership working simply 'because it is a good thing'. Sustainable partnership working is typical-

ly founded upon tangible projects. Within the city-region, the general suspicion of the central city may be overcome where there are issues where all municipalities can see a shared interest, such as transport infrastructure or a common tourism strategy. These tangible 'early wins' can be used to build relationships that permit dialogue and collaboration afterwards on more difficult city-region wide issues.

Third, processes and mechanisms for collaboration that are overly ambitious may result in the collapse of collaboration along with the collapse of the processes. It may therefore be tactically more effective to design simple collaborative arrangements to begin with, such as a simple six monthly exchange of views, with the aim of building upon these arrangements over time.

Fourth, the core city will also need to commit considerable energy to demonstrating that its concept of the city-region is not simply one of exploiting the rest of the city-region for its own benefit. It must show that, whilst it sees itself as having a distinctive role within the city-region, it also recognises and respects the complementary roles of other parts of the city-region, and will support them in achieving those roles. This may mean compromising its own interests from time to time for the sake of building longer term confidence and collaboration.

Having said all this, however, there is an important message for higher levels of Government. **The limited success of many cities in building effective city-region collaborative arrangements suggests that there is a clear role for national and regional Government in encouraging co-operation between local authorities within the city-region.**

It's not all grand strategy: making neighbourhood governance work

A further form of partnership that is particularly relevant to larger cities is the development of governance arrangements below the city-wide level. Whereas partnership with tiers of government above the city level are concerned largely with strategic issues of global competitiveness, neighbourhood based governance and partnership is more focused upon the day to day quality of life issues of local neighbourhoods – joined up

high quality public services, crime, the local environment, facilities for young people, etc.

Many of the case studies focused upon projects at the local area level. **Whilst vision and integrated strategy at the city-wide level is vital to create a holistic, long term sense of direction, such strategy is often too abstract and complex to guide practical action.** More locally

based projects have the advantage of reducing complexity to manageable levels, of providing a sharp focus upon tangible improvements, and of enabling citizen participation at a more meaningful level. Local area projects can also serve as pilots for the city-wide strategic vision, providing lessons and experience that can subsequently be replicated more widely across the city.

However, **decentralisation to the neighbourhood level creates a risk that strategic city-wide planning may become fragmented.**

Decentralisation programmes therefore need to be very clear at the outset about those competencies that must be retained at the city-wide level. This conclusion is reinforced by at least one of the INTERACT case studies, where strategic policy on car parking had been unsuccessful because of the inability to develop a common approach across the different districts of the city.

Different sorts of conflicts arise at the neighbourhood level compared to higher levels, and the design of a neighbourhood model of governance must be given a reality check against various factors before it is rolled out.

For example, community involvement is a central strand of neighbourhood level partnership. As discussed later, however, there are difficult issues about participation that decision makers are sometimes reluctant to address. Many participation processes simply create new opportunities for the already powerful educated and wealthy sections of the community to enhance their influence, increasing the already unequal access to power within the community. Community involvement may result in a small number of unrepresentative activists being given the opportunity to 'speak for the community', and to have an influence out of proportion to their numbers or

importance. The issue of unequal resources amongst partners becomes even more relevant when the community is involved - individual citizens often do not have the time, the information or the negotiating skills to join with officials in an equal partnership.

Capacity is an issue for many partner agencies as well as for the community. Whilst partners may have the capacity to engage in a single set of partnership structures at the city-wide level, they may lack the capacity to do so when those structures are replicated several times across the city at neighbourhood level. They may also have difficulty in signing up to partnership objectives at the neighbourhood level when these conflict with the legal requirements, financial regimes, administrative structures, etc. that the national Government has imposed upon them.

A further complication may be the wide range of neighbourhood level initiatives set up by the different departments of national or regional Governments. Typically, these initiatives will all have different procedural requirements, time frames, financial regimes and performance management requirements. Where a number of these initiatives are operating in the same local areas of the city, it may be very difficult to develop a coherent, integrated approach to strategy and partnership working at the neighbourhood level.

Finally, at the neighbourhood level the media can play a crucial role - in communicating to the local community and in influencing debates and events. Managing relations with the media is therefore vitally important - first, to exploit its resources to widen community involvement and, second, to prevent media campaigns from pre-empting the democratic decision making process.

City-wide partnerships: facing up to reality

Project managers need to bear in mind at all times that, despite the rhetoric of a shared agenda and commitment, individual partners will inevitably have vested interests. These can often be hidden by highly generalised statements of principle and policy, but will invariably emerge when the latter need to be translated into changes in policy or resource allocation within individual partner organisations. **Whilst the aim must always be to achieve consensus, project managers must always be aware that a part-**

nership is essentially an arena for mediating conflicting interests between stakeholders with differential access to power and resources.

Many INTERACT participants emphasised the emergence of 'partnership fatigue'. The emergence of an assumption that partnership is always 'a good thing' has resulted in an uncritical explosion of partnerships. **There is a need to question at the outset whether a partnership is the best way of achieving a project's objectives. Where**

it is, partners should be chosen carefully on a 'fit for purpose' basis, and pressures from potential partners for a seat at the table should be resisted if their role and contribution is likely to be limited.

The representatives of each partner should also be chosen on a 'fit for purpose' basis, again resisting pressure from those who want to be involved for prestige reasons but who will not make a significant personal contribution. Representatives should also be chosen with the aim of achieving team balance – ensuring, for example, a mix of skills in developing participation processes, in performance management, in critical evaluation, in leadership, etc. Membership of the partnership will also need to be reviewed regularly as the project evolves, progresses through different phases, and acquires experience of what (and who) does and does not work.

Some INTERACT case studies identified problems due to competition between different partners. To reduce this, the roles and responsibilities of each partner need to be defined clearly at the outset, based upon the core competencies of each partner. These roles and protocols should be designed and agreed jointly by the partners, and be transparent – being set down in writing where possible.

A considerable amount of time is required to understand the contexts which other partners operate within, to reach shared understanding, to build mutual trust and respect, and to allow partners to consult within their own organisations. The municipality can show a lead here by developing internal structures and processes that are transparent for external partners. The time required for partnership building is often significantly underestimated in project planning. This creates a high risk that trust will break down amid accusations of City Council duplicity and partners' inefficiency. Partnership building is a long term process, and needs to begin well before project outcomes are required.

Moreover, this partnership building is not a one off task, but requires continuous effort throughout the life of the partnership. How the partnership will be maintained over time needs to be agreed by the partners at the outset, and adequate resources agreed for this maintenance task. Even then, structural instability during the life of the partnership will be inevitable due to political and staff turnover. Strategies for coping

with such instabilities will need to be formulated at an early stage of the partnership.

It follows that partnership building and maintenance must be seen as a major task in its own right, separate from the task of delivering the partnership's policy objectives. Team building events using independent facilitators, effective communications systems, and shared responsibilities and leadership, can all play a part in this partnership building process. Partners should also be involved in designing the project objectives, partnership structure, decision making protocols, communications systems, etc., rather than simply being brought in during the implementation phase. Performance indicators should be developed to measure the quality of the partnership as well as to measure progress on project objectives.

Partnerships that are essentially talking shops are rarely sustainable. It is important to establish a work programme with specific, tangible outcomes. Early wins should be built into this work programme to develop confidence and commitment amongst partners, and to demonstrate the partnership's added value.

Community sector partners are often conscious that they cannot bring major resources to the partnership, and often perceive their involvement as superficial, tokenistic and marginalized. They frequently lack the time and organisational infrastructure to make the contribution necessary to be a major partner. Moreover, their legitimacy as representatives of community interests may be questioned by many in the wider community. There is also often a concern that, by joining the partnership, community groups will become incorporated and lose their independence. For all of these reasons, community partners need to be chosen with care and sensitivity, and to be adequately supported by the partnership afterwards. Partnership machinery needs to be designed to reflect the special role of community partners as representatives rather than resource holders.

Public/private partnership has emerged as a result of the growing emphasis upon city competitiveness, the privatisation of public services, and increasing restrictions on public budgets. It often takes place in an environment characterised by powerful myths – that the public sector is slow, bureaucratic, inflexible, etc., whilst the private sector is flexible, responsive and efficient. Such views do not form a good basis for public/privat-

te partnership and, often, local reality shows them to be quite false. Part of the partnership building process must therefore be to improve recognition within the partnership of the different parameters within which public and private actors operate, and to dispel unhelpful myths.

Public/private partnerships also create a risk that the democratic process will become marginalized. The private sector partners' need for profit, for confidentiality, and for building close relationships with their immediate partners, may result in a process that lacks transparency or political input. Political influence over projects must be built in as an integral element of the partnership.

Big urban projects are often dependent upon

Partnership and Citizen participation: rhetoric and reality

At its best, participation can be a source of countervailing citizen power in a corporatist world of private/public negotiation and decision making. It can enhance the efficiency of public decision making by introducing user expertise. It can be a civic learning process for citizens, through which they gain a greater understanding of resource limitations, the need to balance conflicting interests, and the need to balance short and long term objectives. It can therefore be a means of mediating conflict and achieving consensus.

However, the reality is that participation is often an unsatisfying experience for the partnership and the public alike. It is difficult to kick start, takes time to develop into a systematic process, risks becoming conflict laden, and there is seldom any real transfer of power.

Participation must be understood in the wider context of economic and political power. Though it can have significant influence on local level operational projects, participation will often have only limited influence on strategic decision making:

- Community preferences often conflict with market forces. Whilst the partnership may have some scope to influence the operations of the market, its ability to do so to respond to public preferences will inevitably be limited;

external factors beyond the influence of the local partners, such as changing market forces or shifts in business strategy at the headquarters of private sector partners. Local authorities are sometimes unprepared for unforeseen problems arising from such external factors. To reduce this problem, local authorities need to undertake rigorous risk assessments, and to establish at the outset how risk will be distributed amongst the partners.

Some INTERACT participants felt that municipalities were often not adequately prepared for working with private sector partners, and that organisational learning programmes explicitly focused upon this issue were necessary.

- However elaborate the participation exercise is, when the decision making stage begins it will be key individuals in powerful partner agencies who will bargain and negotiate decisions;

- Increasingly local partnerships, even strategic ones, are constrained by national or regional Government prescription. What the individual partners can contribute will reflect the rules and requirements placed upon them by Government. Where these requirements conflict with community preferences, Government priorities will inevitably take precedence;

- In reality, communities are not characterised by homogeneity and consensus, but by conflicting interests based upon class, culture, age, gender, etc. The participation process becomes an arena through which these conflicts are mediated. The sum total of these conflicting demands and priorities will invariably exceed the resources available to the partnership, and how conflicting demands are prioritised will be determined by the political value systems of the partners themselves. Often, certain sections of the community will find that their priorities have been systematically scored lower than the priorities of other groups, leading to a sense that their interests are marginalised and that participation is meaningless.

Consideration of a number of INTERACT case studies illustrated the difficulties of developing

representative participation processes. Different sections of the community have different capacities to exploit the participation process to promote their own interests. Often, it will be those that are already the most disadvantaged and disempowered that will lose out through that process. The process therefore needs to be explicitly designed to create level playing fields for such communities.

This leads to a more fundamental conclusion. **Participation can never be simply about counting heads. Democracy involves a commitment**

to all citizens - minorities as well as majorities. Often, the role of the State is to overrule the demands of the majority in order to protect or promote the rights of minorities. **Public participation does not absolve the municipality from the responsibility to balance conflicting interests against limited resources, and to protect minorities as well as majorities, on the basis of political judgement.** Whilst participation has a vital role to play in bringing government closer to citizens, it should not be allowed to override the representative democratic process.

This analysis leads to a number of practical conclusions for partnerships.

1 - There should be a clear understanding within the partnership that the participation process does not override the decision making role of politicians.

2 - Partnerships need to resist the pressures for ever increasing participation, and go back to first principles. They need to analyse the distribution of power within their partnership, and to anticipate how that power will be exercised at different points in the life of the partnership. On this basis, they should honestly identify where there is scope for genuine community influence over decisions, and where there is not.

3 - Participation requires sustained effort on the part of the partnership, and therefore a sustained commitment of staff resources. Too often, participation processes are too ambitious for the resources made available to deliver them. The scale of the participation process should match the resources available.

4 - The partnership should spell out clearly and honestly to the public the limited scope of the exercise, and where there is scope for genuine community influence.

5 - The partnership should monitor which sections of the community take part in its participation exercises (by socio economic class, ethnic or cultural background, age, gender, etc), should make allowance for excluded groups when interpreting public feedback, and should if necessary design second phase participation exercises to engage with those excluded during the first phase.

6 - The participation process must include an element of citizen education. Citizens will often need to be made aware of their responsibilities as well as their rights – for example, to look to wider goals beyond their own sectional interests, to compromise, and to accept the limits on resources.

7 - And perhaps most important, the partnership needs to be clear at the outset what distributional consequences (who gains and who loses) are consistent with its objectives, and interpret public feedback in the light of these distributional objectives.

8 - One INTERACT case study in particular emphasised the importance of giving feedback to the public on how their views have been considered – even if this means explaining why the partnership has been unable to take those views on board. The evidence from this case study was that, perhaps more than anything else, such feedback is a major motivation for citizens to take part in other participation exercises in the future.

Leadership, consensus and conflict: tom peters or machiavelli?

Despite the rhetoric of partnership as an association of equals, in reality the municipality will be required to take a clear lead. Often the partners will expect this, whilst at the same time criticising the municipality for dominating the partnership. The municipality must therefore be confident about taking on this task, and be prepared to accept the often negative feedback that results from providing leadership. At the same time, it must ensure that the project is not seen as a City Administration project alone, but one belonging to a wider set of stakeholders. Establishing a secretariat that is independent of the municipality, even if funded by it, can send out important messages about the municipality's willingness to share power with its partners.

Other partners must, in turn, accept that leadership by the municipality does not absolve them of any responsibilities. Municipal project managers can facilitate the project, but cannot do everything themselves. They can help in team building, articulating the overall direction of the project, shaping the principles of partnership working and citizen participation, and ensuring communication. However, leadership will need to be exercised at different times, and in different ways, by all the partners.

The most important characteristic of leadership is legitimacy – particularly the legitimacy given by the system of actors in the partnership. It is not given automatically because of the leader's formal role in the system. Rather, it is socially constructed on the basis of the leader's 'performance'. This performance itself may arise from a number of qualities including access to resources or decision makers, charisma, personal competencies, leadership by example, enthusiasm and personal commitment, etc. The existence or absence of these qualities determines the individual's capacity to win the confidence of others.

Often the real leaders of a project will be different to the formal leaders. Some partners will offer leadership in some areas, such as policy development or process design, whilst others will offer leadership on, say, communication or engagement of stakeholders outside of the partnership. Different partners will offer leadership at different

times and stages of the partnership's life. Leadership will always be fragmented – no one partner will offer leadership in all areas, and most partners will offer leadership in some areas. Leadership is therefore a dynamic and devolved quality. A partnership must recognise where its sources of real leadership lie, and how they are changing over time, and adapt its working arrangements to exploit them effectively.

Models of effective partnership working are generally built upon the assumption that the partnership is operating in an environment characterised by consensus – that the partners either already share a consensus or that there is a universal commitment to achieve consensus over time and that this commitment is possible to achieve in practice. The literature of modern management scientists such as Tom Peters strongly reflects this consensual view of the world.

Whilst this may be an ideal that partnership leaders should be striving towards, the reality is that often the underlying environment within which a partnership operates is one of conflicting cultural values, policy priorities and vested interests. However, for a number of reasons there is often a reluctance to explore the issue of leadership in an environment characterised by conflict.

■ For a start, exploring leadership in a consensus environment leads to the identification of morally acceptable leadership strategies such as sharing information fully with all partners, or ensuring that each step forward is taken only with the agreement of all partners. In contrast, effective leadership in a conflict environment may involve approaches that seem more ethically questionable, such as withholding information from certain partners on certain occasions, and 'doing deals' in secret with a minority of partners. Not only do leaders feel reticent to discuss openly such controversial strategies, but admitting in public even to be considering such leadership strategies may reduce the effectiveness of those strategies and reduce the leader's personal effectiveness.

■ Second, no partner wants to admit publicly that they are pursuing personal agendas or vested interests. The partnership will therefore create the

appearance of consensus by, for example, agreeing visions, objectives, etc in the most general of terms, leaving individual partners to interpret them in their own ways. The result may be that the partnership's output may simply be the aggregation of what the individual partners were intending to do anyway, with no added value from partnership working.

Leaders must therefore address the issue of conflict if they are to be effective. For a start, the aims of leadership need to be defined differently in consensus and conflict environments. In a consensus environment, leadership is 'helping the partnership to identify and achieve its collective objectives'. In a conflict environment, in contrast, leadership is more about 'influencing the partnership in order to achieve what the leader perceives as desirable outcomes, despite the lack of consensus'.

In both cases, the leader has the same responsibility to achieve positive outcomes – the difference in a conflict environment is that the leader's definition of positive outcomes is not shared by all partners, and that influence may be achieved through the building of partial alliances rather than universal ones. But achieving positive outcomes remains the core responsibility of the leader in both environments, and the issue of leadership in conflict environments cannot therefore be ignored. Machiavelli may be as useful a source on management techniques as Tom Peters.

- In a conflict environment, leaders must continuously analyse the distribution of power within the partnership. This power will come from different sources - the financial or staff resources available to different partners, knowledge, access to key external decision makers such as the Government, authority derived from legislation, control over information flows or other processes, partnership skills (for example in policy development or process design), and willingness to exercise leadership.

- Leaders also need to establish a clear understanding of the real agendas of different partners – their value systems, vested interests, personal priorities, etc.

- The above analysis – of who the leaders in the partnership are at any given time, their power bases, and their agendas – provides the back-

ground intelligence to enable a leader to devise a strategy for influencing a partnership towards achieving her/his objectives. In devising this strategy, leaders need to bear in mind two further points about a conflict environment. First, the 'positive outcomes' that the leader is working towards are not shared by everyone in the partnership. The leader must therefore constantly be critically questioning her/his strategy to be as sensitive as possible to the objectives of other partners. Second, as leadership and power is spread throughout the partnership, the leader's strategy is unlikely to be achievable unless it is based upon forming alliances with some of the other leaders.

- Processes and mechanisms for a partnership in a conflict environment must be designed so as to provide generous and frequent space for negotiation and 'deal making' between leaders. A process built mainly upon public or group meetings will result in difficult issues being avoided. Time and space for one to one meetings and 'shuttle diplomacy', out of the public spotlight, must be integral to the planning and implementation process.

- Team building sessions may not eliminate fundamental conflicts of values or interests, but they can create an environment where conflict is more easily managed. Social events involving partners, for example, can help partners to understand that their conflict results from systemic and structural issues rather than personality clashes, and thereby smooth the way to more mature negotiation, compromise and deal making.

Even if a leader's strategy cannot involve working equally with all partners all of the time, the strategy should be designed so as to avoid making enemies amongst partners if possible, as this will be counterproductive in the long term. The leader may need the support of different partners at different times, but during the life of the partnership (or the next partnership, or the next), the leader will need to be able to work harmoniously with every partner. Hostility and suspicion can be created very quickly, but takes a considerable time to erase afterwards. For example, the leader should regularly discuss issues with those she/he is in conflict with, to keep in touch with the other's agenda. The leader should also be clear about what her/his 'bottom line' issues are, and be willing to compromise on those issues above the bottom line as a symbol of commitment to the partnership and to the other partners.

Project management: do it right or don't do it at all

A strategic project being planned and implemented through an interagency partnership can be seen as a complex 'system'. This partnership system comprises a number of subsystems, including:

- Communications;
- Consultation and engagement of stakeholders outside the partnership;
- Performance management and monitoring;
- Resources – particularly staff resources and the time allowed to deliver the project;
- Capacity within the partnership to learn, adapt and improve.

If one or more of these subsystems fails to function efficiently and effectively, then the performance of the partnership system as a whole is adversely affected. Yet partnership working has a number of generic characteristics that mean that there may be an in-built tendency for many of these subsystems to function poorly.

First, each subsystem actually comprises a range of conflicting views and approaches belonging to the different agencies within the partnership. For example, the consultation subsystem will comprise a wide range of attitudes and approaches to consultation among the different partners, which makes it difficult to achieve a unified, coherent partnership wide consultation process. The same can be said for the performance management and other subsystems.

A second generic problem in partnership working arises from the uneven distribution of resources, particularly staff resources, among the different partners. The result is that well resourced partners can contribute to the partnership's different subsystems better than those partners with more limited resources. For example, some partners can undertake their consultation and performance management responsibilities to a high standard, whilst other partners will be able to do little or nothing in these areas. The result is that the

quality and effectiveness of each subsystem is often uneven and patchy. Since the partnership can often make progress only at the speed of the 'weakest' partners, this uneven quality of the partnership's subsystems means that progress is frequently slower, and the overall quality of the partnership work lower, than intended.

A third generic problem is that decision makers often fail to appreciate the scale of the complexities of partnership working, and design unrealistically ambitious processes, or build insufficient time into the project to enable the partnership to build effective, high quality subsystems.

The result of these in built characteristics of partnership working is that partnerships often fail to meet expectations.

Individual partners tend to view partnership working through what might be called an 'individual pathology' perspective rather than a systems perspective. In other words, the response of individual partners to weaknesses in the partnership is generally to blame other partners, whom they typically perceive as lazy, incompetent or uncommitted. The result of seeing partnership problems through this blame perspective is generally a deterioration in personal relationships within the partnership, with the result that the partnership's effectiveness may decline even further.

For example, typically the municipality has far more staff resources available to support the partnership than other partners. The municipality may therefore gradually take on more of the leadership role, and design processes and mechanisms that the municipality can deliver on, but which other partners do not necessarily have the capacity to support. The result is often a decline in trust between the municipality and the other partners – the local authority sees partners as uncommitted and incompetent, whilst the partners see the local authority as over dominant and controlling.

Replacing this individual pathology perspective by a systems perspective has many advantages in understanding the partnership and enhancing its performance:

- The systems perspective assumes that everyone in the partnership is equally honest, hardworking and competent, and therefore strengthens trust;
- The systems perspective focuses attention upon the design, and redesign, of processes and mechanisms, rather than on 'improving' people;
- By identifying the different subsystems in the partnership, the approach enables the partners to examine, in depth, different aspects of the partnership one by one, reducing complexity to manageable proportions;
- The approach focuses attention upon the sheer scale of the task involved in building an effective partnership, and encourages decision makers to allocate reasonable time scales, and staff resources, for partnership building;
- The systems approach also focuses upon the capacity of individual partners, thereby encouraging better resourced partners to support less well resourced partners and to design processes and mechanisms realistically with the capacity constraints of partners in mind.

Partnership building, and systems building, need to be seen as core objectives of project management - as important as developing policies and projects.

The partnership's work will involve consultation, planning, approval, implementation, monitoring and review, and perhaps other phases. An overall 'project plan' needs to be drawn up at the beginning of the partnership's work, showing the sequence of these activities, the inter relationships between them, when each phase needs to be completed, and providing a little detail on the main tasks involved in completing each phase. This project plan provides an overall framework within which processes and mechanisms can be designed for each of the partnership's subsystems. An early task for the partnership is to map out the different subsystems that it will require to achieve its purpose.

These processes and mechanisms will need to be subject to a 'reality check' to ensure that they will work in practice. They will need to be tested for realism against factors such as the time scales available for the project, the capacity of individual partners, the skills and technology available to the partnership, etc. It is important that this reality check is undertaken by the partnership collectively, rather than by the lead partner, as the partnership's effectiveness depends upon all partners having a shared understanding, and shared ownership, of the partnership and systems building tasks.

Independent facilitators and experts can provide an invaluable contribution to this reality check.

Monitoring and review will be an integral part of the partnership's work. There is, however, a tendency for partnerships to monitor and review only the policies, projects and programmes that they were set up to deliver. In reality, building an effective partnership is also a core objective of the partnership - it cannot deliver its other objectives if it does not achieve this objective. The effectiveness of the partnership itself should, therefore, also be subject to regular monitoring and review. The partnership may wish to establish performance indicators that measure key aspects of the partnership's internal functioning – for example, the percentage of key stakeholders that the partnership engaged with during the year, or a survey of partners on how they feel the lead partner has communicated with them during the year.

Critical evaluation of the partnership itself may also be achieved through regular seminars of the partnership, supported by independent facilitators. The seminar would focus only upon the partnership's internal working - not on its policies or programmes. It would critically evaluate its processes and mechanisms, explore weaknesses and their causes, and identify where and how processes needed to be redesigned in order to overcome those weaknesses. Perhaps most important of all, it would identify which partners will be responsible for achieving which improvements.

Improvement: When will we ever learn?

One of the issues that INTERACT investigated was partnerships' capacity to learn. Why are some partnerships able to improve their effectiveness over time while others are not? The case studies indicated that **many partnerships struggle to improve their performance, at least in the short term.** There are generic factors behind this weakness in partnerships:

- Partners tend to be experts in delivering specialist services. Many partners are not familiar with the organisational development concepts involved in partnership building.

- Partners tend to focus upon progress in delivering their strategy and projects rather than progress in building an effective partnership. Where progress on strategy or projects is poor, the 'individual pathology' model is often used to seek explanations. Key partners or agencies are seen as 'failing' the partnership. The reluctance to focus upon the partnership process itself means that partners do not see the causal link between strategy and project failure, on the one hand, and partnership failure on the other.

- Leadership and power are distributed widely throughout the partnership. The project manager typically lacks the necessary power on her/his own to impose a partnership building process. While leadership is distributed very broadly within the partnership, typically only a minority of leaders will see partnership building as a key function. Often, the project manager's supporters are those partners most marginalised by the existing partnership arrangements, such as voluntary organisations, who will lack the power and resources to support the project manager in increasing the priority given to partnership building.

Since leadership and power are widely distributed throughout the partnership, it follows that learning tools and processes must also focus upon the partnership as a whole rather than just the project manager. Even with project management skills and training, the individual project manager cannot alone move the partnership in a 'better' direction unless all, or most, of the powerful individuals in the partnership own and share the partnership building agenda.

One option may be to co-opt an organisational development expert to the partnership, with the remit of advising/supporting the project manager in the task of building effective mechanisms and processes. This expert could also play an important role in raising organisational development awareness and skills within the partnership, and in facilitating regular critical self evaluation within the partnership.

When developing a process for partnership building and learning, the project manager needs to be aware of potential resistance from partners with the power to block progress. This strategy might include building alliances with powerful partners who are committed to partnership building, bringing in independent external 'auditors' (such as a local university) to 'shock' the partnership into action, or deliberately seeking critical community feedback to force the partnership to address its effectiveness.

The dispersed nature of leadership also has implications for formal training. **Training for effective partnership working cannot be achieved simply by training project managers individually in project management skills. Since partnership, and leadership within it, is a shared responsibility, training too must be shared and collective.** The key actors in the partnership must enter a collective learning process through which they critically analyse the strengths and weaknesses of their own particular partnership, identify the causes underpinning them, collectively agree solutions and improvements, and explicitly agree a share out of responsibilities for delivering those improvements. The traditional concept of training makes way for an interactive, team based learning process, where the participants (perhaps with independent facilitators) 'teach' themselves and each other.

If the partnership is to learn, then time and space for reflection must be built into the partnership process. Even then, the learning achieved by the partnership will not be transferred to other partnerships or organisations unless processes are developed explicitly to achieve this - for example, by organising a programme of seminars to share its experiences and reflections with others.

3. INTERACT AS A VEHICLE FOR TRANSNATIONAL LEARNING

Towards the end of the project, INTERACT members began to reflect upon their own experiences as a learning network, and how these experiences could be of benefit to future transnational networks.

This learning had a number of rich veins to it. At the most general level, it was very apparent that the number of participants contributing to discussions, and the quality of those contributions, increased steadily as INTERACT proceeded. Equally impressive was participants' growing confidence in critically evaluating their own working environment and their own work, and reference has already been made to the changing mindset within the network. Another noticeable trend was a shift in participants' focus away from their 'narrow' responsibilities for their own particular part of INTERACT towards a commitment to the achievement of INTERACT's wider collective responsibilities – the final outputs from the project.

Each set of permanent actors – practitioners, Scientific Committee, Training Team and local researchers – made a distinctive contribution to INTERACT's learning – not just because of their specialist skills but also because of key choices they made at critical points in the project. Each faced choices about what role they might play, and what attitude they might take. The choices they actually made all benefited the INTERACT learning process in the long term.

For example, the municipalities could have adopted a competitive attitude towards each other. In fact, they chose the route of mutual support and camaraderie. In one meeting early in the project, for instance, critical evaluation of some of the case studies by the academics resulted in the cities' rallying around their colleagues in those cities being challenged. The point of referring to this incident is not to comment on whether the academic critiques were right or wrong, but to argue that an important result was that growing mutual support amongst the practitioners created an environment where they could be more challenging towards one another without offending colleagues.

Another invaluable factor underpinning the network's learning process was the perseverance of the Scientific Committee. There were, almost certainly, occasions when they felt that they were making little progress in adding rigour to INTERACT analysis. They might have chosen to withdraw to the margins of the project, or even to disengage from the process completely. Instead, they continued to attend meetings, and to encourage participants to ask challenging questions. Perhaps more than they or the practitioners realised, their perseverance was a crucial factor in the progress that the network made.

Equally important was the approach adopted by the Training Team. Starting from a fairly traditional concept of training, they chose to adopt an admirable flexibility and 'customer orientation' in shaping their work towards the needs and experiences of the practitioners, including drawing several training officers from cities into their work to help shape it. They might have chosen a more defensive and detached attitude, and taken a 'we are the experts, we know best' attitude. The approach they actually chose, and the partnership they forged with some city training officers, was a major reason why the INTERACT learning materials achieved the quality that they did.

Finally, the contribution of the local researchers showed that attitude can be more important than experience. Most of the researchers pushed their critical analysis to the limits of what they felt the practitioners would accept and, when they found that this was acceptable, pushed it a little further! Despite the sometimes daunting array of experienced practitioners and academics at meetings, the research students chose to contribute fully to the debates rather than adopt a more passive role. In doing so, they added to the richness of the learning process for everyone. At other times, too, out of genuine interest in the project they contributed more than was required of them.

At the request of INTERACT, one practitioner undertook an analysis of the detailed ways in which INTERACT developed as a learning vehicle.

This analysis identified three distinct levels of learning:

■ **Wisdom:** through awareness of other cities' systems and experiences, reflection on the participant's own situation, increased motivation for professional development, increased capacity to communicate personal experiences to others from different backgrounds, insights into personal improvement, and motivation to innovate and to transfer knowledge to others.

■ **Knowledge:** professional knowledge (attitudes, procedures, co-operation), best practice knowledge, and knowledge about effectiveness and efficiency.

■ **Information:** about issues and problems in other cities and organisational settings, intelligent clustering of relevant and related data, and networks and contacts.

By explaining their own experiences to other cities, participants became more aware of their own circumstances and behaviour. In this way, INTERACT provided opportunities to stand back from day to day pressures and reflect on the bigger picture. At the same time, by reflecting on the case studies and presentations from other cities, participants were encouraged to create abstract explanations to make sense of the material they were receiving. This abstract analysis in turn enabled participants to identify broad ideas or solutions that could then be applied more concretely in their own city. Less tangibly, but equally important, it was very clear that participation in INTERACT often inspired individuals personally, and raised their motivation and aspirations for their work.

The wide variety of contexts, issues and policy initiatives that existed across the countries involved meant that the exchange of knowledge and learning was much broader and richer than is possible by good practice exchanges between cities within a single country. The different perspectives that were brought to the table partly reflected country of origin. Equally important, however, was the variety of professional backgrounds that INTERACT brought together – the social sciences, planning and architecture, economic development, training and organisational development, and so on.

The rich learning experience created through national and professional diversity was further strengthened by the wide range of topics covered by the 24 case studies. The latter also enabled cities to take a large number of different officers to different meetings to share experience. The officer exchange programme reinforced this wider dissemination of learning - two cities hosted no less than 9 exchange partners.

Finally, and perhaps most important, INTERACT participants are agreed that the project represents a long term learning process that will reach far beyond the dissemination of the formal outputs of the project. This longer term process will be gradual and invisible, but continuous. It will occur every day, as participants apply their learning in their work back in their city and their country, and influence those they work with. Above all, INTERACT has taught participants a certain humility - that, however big and successful their own city is, they can always learn much more from cities elsewhere in Europe.

APPENDIX I

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APPENDIX 2

LIST OF CITY CASE STUDIES

Belfast	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ City Wide Partnership■ Belfast GEMS – a Regeneration Project
Birmingham	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Birmingham City Pride Partnership■ A Critical Evaluation of the Community Strategy Partnership
Brno	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Rehabilitation of Housing in the City District Novy Liskovec■ Implementation of the District Development Plan: Project Management and Infrastructure
Budapest	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The Role of Transport in Sustainable Urban Development■ Brownfield Regeneration in Budapest
Den Haag	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Local Governance and Business Start Up■ Integrated Economic Planning in the Inner City: City Mondial
Genoa	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The Relationship between Urban Space and the Health and Welfare of Citizens: the Homeability Project■ Towards an Educating City
Lyon	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Action Plan for a Technopolitan Metropolis■ Implementation of the Greater Lyon Participation Charter
Malmö	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Building a Collaborative Design Approach for the Development of the Western Harbour■ Western Harbour and Mollevangen: Two City Districts under Transformation
Munich	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Trade Fair City Riem■ Urban Development Project Isar Sued
Utrecht	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Kanaleneiland: An Analysis of Social Partners' Collaboration■ On Track? The Redevelopment of Utrecht's Station Area
Venice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Urban Governance and a Strategic Plan for Venice■ Creating an Organisation to Implement the Strategic Plan
Vienna	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Renewal of Shopping Streets in Vienna■ Towards a Gender-aware Urban Development Planning Process

APPENDIX 3

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