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# LINKING 'DOTS' IN 'SQUARES': COMPARING PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN PUBLIC AND NON-PUBLIC ACTORS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EU COHESION POLICY

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A new programming period of Cohesion Policy lies ahead and the debates surrounding the reform could not omit the high priority partnership represents for the successful implementation of the policy. Two decades after, the evidence is widely scattered among countries (even more between regions), on what concerns partnership implementation, factors that contribute or hinder its realization and the spill-over effects (Kelleher et al. 1999; EC-DG Regio, 2005; EP, 2008, EESC, 2010). The poor attention to the horizontal dimension of partnership leads us to think there is a missing element in the puzzle: is it enough to formally apply the principle of partnership or solutions of 'network' nature between wide range of actors is needed to achieve the effectiveness of the policy?

In this contribution, we discuss the ambiguity of the partnership principle and the puzzling evidence of 'partnership winners and laggards'. In this attempt we proceed in two stages: first, we analytically refine the concept of partnership diving it into two categories and measure it. Going back in time, based on a comparison of three regional cases (Silesia, Saxony and Apulia), it can be seen how partnership moved in certain contexts from formal requirement at planning stage to various forms of partnership arrangements during the implementation. While certain actors have more access-points compared to others but factors differ in each context, it is showed that formal partnership is not necessarily a 'fertile soil' for real joint collaborations between administration and societal actors. To explain why this happens, at the second stage, we posit three clusters of variables, which differently influence the creation of partnerships: *capacity* (for public administrations) *organisational* (for societal actors) and *contextual* (leadership, experience and money). Our study suggests, related also to the debate on (new) public governance as influenced by partnership principle, that alongside network modes, market and hierarchy-style governing determines the dynamics of multi-organizational partnerships in cohesion policy.

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**Key words:** partnerships, cohesion policy, regional development, societal actors

## INTRODUCTION

At all levels of authority, partnership became in the last decade, a recurrent rhetoric in the search for more active collaboration and experimentation with different types of (interactive) governance in the public sector to assure higher policy effectiveness and legitimacy. Considered sometimes a panacea rather than tool to be readily used in daily practice and routine, partnership vaunts a myriad of definitions, interpretations and practical disguise. It became a buzzword of our times, yet it is consistently more than just a trendy notion in political research. Partnership is capable "to overcome the dilemma between public shared responsibility and independent social criticism" (Andersen, 2008), where collaboration stands at the core of governing. "This includes the work of governments with other governments and with nongovernmental sector" (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003). However, partnership is not a straightforward potential of collaborative advantage (Huxham, 1996), it requires trust, constant coordination and high commitment of all parts in exchange of resources (tangible and intangible). Not a simple solution for the "increasing complexity of policy problems and the increasing interdependency of policy areas, policy level and policy actors" (Torfing et al. 2012).

The EU cohesion policy, engineered for the regional social and economic development, has adopted in the middle of reform in the late 80s the principle of partnership as ruling the realization of its actions (EC, 1988). And, as the Commission acknowledges in the Guidelines of the last programming period, a “highly important factor determining the effectiveness of cohesion policy is the *quality of partnership* between stakeholders” (EC, 2006, italics added). In the meanwhile, the policy became in EU the second most important in financial terms, and gave impetus, in several cases, to structural reforms of the central administration and economic sector of the member-states (Hooghe et al. 1996; Leonardi, 2005; Mairate, 2006). Thus, it seems at first sight, a breeding policy ground as collaboration and innovative forms of deliberation over years could have emerged and perpetuated good practices of partnership. It appeared to us very curious the mixture of partnership with the cohesion policy, with a somewhat inherited contradiction. Cohesion is a European policy, flowing from the top to the bottom, with specifically designed departments in charge with its implementation. At the same time it tackles local issues and requires the action to be developed within a collaborative, partnership framework.

The evidence gathered on the issue is however polarized. From the first Thematic Evaluation to the recent Report on the behalf of Commission, the evidence unveils a great amount of variation in the implementation of partnership principle of cohesion policy, not only between countries, albeit between regions belonging to the same unit system (Kelleher et al. 1999; Bachtler et al. 2009; Heinelt & Lang, 2011). Additionally, as shall be duly explained later, a cut distinction must be done between the governance of the policy on the vertical axis and on the horizontal, where partnership stands in the first case as an inter-institutional dialogue between authority levels, and as a dynamic multi-organizational collaboration at regional level in the latter.

Almost exclusively, the research carried in the field concentrated on a single organization in interaction with other levels of authority, where other types of mechanisms, skills and competences are in action. Whereas studying collaborative, joint actions with actors of the society bring to the core different mechanisms of relations. Therefore, our focus is placed on the horizontal dimension, where partnership is the explained variable. It asks whether it contributed to the creation, revival and intensification of the linkages between administration and their society.

Once stated the general question, it must be said at the outset, that the present article is a sequential part of an on-going research. Thus, here we propose the discussion and the conceptual refinement of partnership as used in theory and applied in cohesion policy practice. We draw the trajectory from principle to practice of the partnership in three different regional cases. And as shall be justified, the existent approaches are too narrow in explaining and capturing developments of this realm.

The choice of cases as well as the focus on regional, rather than country level is determined by our goal to offer a fine-grained picture and comparative results without averaging and sacrificing the richness of each context. Thus, we picked three regions belonging to the federal, regionalized and unitary systems of Germany, Italy and Poland respectively, ensuring that each case has a comparable sub-national administrative level and an operational programme in charge.

The paper is structured in three parts. The first discusses the conceptual and normative limitations in the search of partnership arrangements. The second introduces our proposed analytical framework. The last describes the data and preliminary results.

## **PARTNERSHIP IN COHESION POLICY: FROM PRINCIPLE TO PRACTICE**

For the purpose of our research, several burdens in the normative dimension and theoretical discussions of partnership need to be elucidated.

Although being two sides of the same coin, *partnership* should be carefully distinguished as the one that ‘entitles subnational government to participate at the making of regional policies’ (Bailey & De Propriis, 2002) alongside national governments and the Commission (representing the vertical axis). And the horizontal axis of partnership as the “cooperation between state and non-state actors” (Bache, 2010, p.63) where the “greatest variation occur throughout the Union” (Kelleher et al. ’99:16).

In the Council Regulations<sup>1</sup> partnership is a loosely defined concept, allowing as such a flexible interpretation for each member-state (Kelleher et al., 1999; Dezseri, 2008; Roberts, 2003:32). Formally, the Commission does not emphasize the distinction between the vertical and horizontal axis, nor it generated an extensive debate about the potential collaborative relations within regions, their extent and composition in order to be highly effective. Rather, this normative prescription represents a guide and works towards soaring different practices of collaboration between public actors and partners from society during implementation without imposing bounding rules. It is up to directly interested subjects to interpret and make rich use of the different multi-organizational arrangements in order to enhance effectiveness, consolidate legitimacy and equity of the policy. As the Commission suggests in the Guidelines for 2007-13 period, one example of such arrangement can be the involvement of private sector through public-private partnerships (EC, 2005). But other practices have been witnessed throughout European regions: like the Strathclyde European Partnership Programme Management Executive in Scotland, or the Growth Forums in Denmark. Consequently, we can assume variation between models of partnership developed in each national context, but even more on regional level: from broad and effective collaborations to shallow and formalistic interactions discontinuously applied foremost through Monitoring Committees (MC).

Before moving to the core of our discussion, it should be disclosed that the lion's share of attention in empirical investigations insofar carried on the topic was dedicated to the vertical dimension of partnership, contributing to the growing debates about the rise of multi-level governance in literature, territorial politics and the role of sub-national authorities in interest intermediation within the European forum (Hooghe, '96; Allen, 2000; Thielemann, 2000; Bauer, 2002; Piattoni, 2006; Bache, 2010).

Regarding the horizontal dimension, explored issues concerned the practical materialization of partnership in Monitoring Committees, the conditions of societal actor's involvement in the formulation and implementation of the policy and the extent of civil society participation at policy process (Heinelt & Smith, '96; Harvey, 2004; Dezseri, 2008; Graziano, 2010; Polverari & Michie, 2010; Batory & Cartwright, 2011; Heinelt & Lang, 2011).

[Fig. 1 about here]

The last point, despite the rising interest on collaborative arrangements and more general the changes in the (new) public governance (Osborne, 2010), is far less investigated than the vertical dimension. Only recently, scholars started to explore thoroughly this question and separate the two dimensions of partnership. Yet, understanding the phenomenon of partnership requires a rigorous framework of analysis, a comprehensive methodological toolkit and competent theories to address the issue.

We have identified several limitations in the existent studies that once addressed could integrate under one umbrella different definitions, units of analysis and theories to consent comparative studies. These are:

- the conceptualization, in both normative and practical terms (Polverari & Michie, 2009; )
- empirical analysis, when almost exclusively the Monitoring Committee is the unit of analysis (Batory & Cartwright, 2011);
- theoretical loop: MLG theory being the used framework of investigation.

Moreover, many arguments are built predominantly on structural and path-dependent macro-strands that too often emphasize local idiosyncrasies and organizational arrangements as explananda of partner's collaboration and the effectiveness for the overall process.

### Overcoming tight spaces

It is self-evident that the first two points go together: once defined the analysed concept it is then decided the unit to investigate upon. Hence, patchy or missing concepts lie at the heart of the problem. The studies that focused on the issue of horizontal partnership, framed it *stricto sensu* as the principle's inclusiveness (always vertically) towards the third sector and economic actors (Polverari & Michie, 2009;

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<sup>1</sup> Council Regulation nr. 2052/1988; Council Regulation nr. 2081/1993; Council Regulation nr. 1260/1999; Council Regulation nr. 1083/2006.

Batory & Cartwright, 2011; Dabrowski, 2011). Meaning that *partners* – non-governmental – should be actively included in the implementation, but it does not discern on the (variety of) forms, levels of analysis and factors that account for variation.

Unpacking the idea promoted by partnership principle, means that at all stages of the policy process, a greater inter-agency cooperation between public authorities and private actors, not-for-profit/voluntary organizations occur in different forms. In fact, partnerships are not static, yet dynamic and according to Lowndes and Skelcher, “involve several different modes of governance – market, hierarchy and network” at “different points in life cycle of a multi-organizational partnership”. Partnership is a governing mechanism, required though not in specific terms, at the direct disposition of public managers, and we do not argue in favour or against. We rather seek to unveil whether and how public managers resort to it and how it occurs since knowledge is heavily limited on the issue.

Most studies regarded Monitoring Committees as operating form of the partnership principle. As Polverari and Michie assert, “(t)he Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC) is the only forum in which partners are called to participate in the programme implementation (after the stage of programme drafting) (Polverari & Michie, 2009). But in fact, MCs are just one consideration of the principle, and partnership takes different forms at each stage, with the difference in the degree of formalization (as we explain in the next section).

The main weakness in analysing MCs is the scarce information it provides for understanding the mechanism of partnership. Because the function of Monitoring Committee, which are established under the Managing Authorities, is to “satisfy itself as to the effectiveness and quality of the implementation of assistance” in issuing evaluation criteria and indicators, oversee the strategy and progress of assistance, approve annual reports etc. (EC Regulations). However, “there is an important distinction to be made between the partnership and Monitoring Committees” insists the first Report on partnership (...) [I]t appears that MCs are not necessarily partnerships at all, and in the absence of additional partnership processes they can merely represent a reification of the partnership idea” (Kelleher et al., 1999: 51). Therefore, the single evaluation of Monitoring Committees would give an incomplete picture about the partnership dynamics and this for several reasons. For instance, in certain cases MCs were until recently closed to the participation of social partners<sup>2</sup>; other evidence shows that MCs were mere collectors of general information on fund spending instead of achieving their established goals. And not less important, MCs meet few times a year and consist of both vertical and horizontal actors of partnership.

We argue that MCs represent an important source of description and of the organizational setup of relations between public and non-public actors. But is insufficient in explaining the overall implication of the partners under different mechanisms, and does not figure the convergence or divergence of patterns among different regions. Therefore we should move beyond the analysis of Monitoring Committees. Because in “achieving interesting outcomes often depends on finding attractive solutions, which encourage actors to activate their resources and knowledge for the problem and/or policy process at stake” (Edelenbos & Klijn, 2006). And as the praxis shows different forms of partnership, outside MCs, have been experimented which need to be investigated.

Another relevant issue important to understand is under what conditions, or better which factors hinder or contribute to the establishment of partnerships. Summarizing the propositions existent in the literature, two clusters of variables account for possible explanation of variation across contexts:

- existing formal administrative practices and institutional traditions (Kelleher et al. 1999; Polverari & Michie, 2009; Heinelt & Lang, 2011);
- and the experience of regional and socio-economic partners

From these arguments, general hypotheses can be subtracted that federal states are better endowed and prone to the creation of partnerships than centralized and newly arrived countries. And once again centralized management states have more difficulties in identifying and building partnerships than their decentralized or federal counterparts in the process of implementation.

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<sup>2</sup> Here can be mentioned the case of Spain in certain Autonomous Communities, and UK in the first two cycles of programming (along the exclusion of locally elected politicians).

These predominant models can be falsified since at the core of the investigation now lies a different concept of partnership and second a different set of explanatory variables are under consideration. In the next section we present the theoretical framework. We start with the definition of partnership, and then we propose a scheme of its operationalization and measurement. However, not before providing the assessment we carried on our three regions about MCs. Further we move to description of ideal type of partnership and supported evidence.

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The shift from hierarchy to innovative forms of inter-organizational working has been tackled in different streams of research, yet with not many common-point agreements. The crux of these researches is the effective and efficient way to carry public policy implementation and service provision. Broadly speaking, these topics make (often) reference to the vast concept of governance. Without going deeply into its nuances, governance can be described as the development of governing styles in which boundaries between and within public and private sectors are disappearing (Stoker, 1998; Rhodes 1997). To complicate more, there are numerous ‘adjectives’ and theoretical perspectives on governance (see Osborne, 2010). But governance is not our object of research, albeit partnerships, which have been considered by the new public governance (McQuaid in Osborne, 2010), interactive governance (Torfing et. al, 2012), collaborative management (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003) etc. And in this paper we will limit ourselves to mention that partnerships regard a network form of governance, “in which public actors take their interdependencies with other actors into account and try to solve governance problems through cooperation rather than central steering and control” (Teisman & Klijn, 2002: 198). Starting with health care, partnerships have been spreading to education, poverty alleviation, urban regeneration and economic development, but are yet a poorly understood phenomenon (Selsky & Parker, 2005; Andrews & Entwistle, 2010).

Collocating the research on partnership within the realm of cohesion policy we argue how one is nested with the other and how disregarded aspects of the one and another can bring more insights to our understanding.

As mentioned in the introduction, partnerships are at best usually conceived as a “good thing”, but it does not automatically imply a shift in the daily routine to joint decision-making or the collaboration of equally resource-endowed partners. On the contrary, partnerships are complex in nature, but the pay-offs are higher working together than alone. Rightfully, as Balloch and Taylor acknowledge:

“Partnership will require new incentive structure and people who can work with change – spreading rather than protecting knowledge, working creatively with diversity and conflict, learning to handle risk. Public service bureaucracies have not been designed for this in the past and public sector workers have not been rewarded for this. There are genuine difficulties involved in breaking down existing cultures and working in new ways, and this takes time and investment” (Balloch & Taylor, 2001: 9).

Guidance on what is meant by partnership, which factors increase their possibilities and a framework for evaluation are scarcely reflected in the literature and almost inexistent in cohesion policy.

The necessity for such arrangements are explained by a variety of reasons among which is the heterogeneous distribution of resources (knowledge, money, ideas etc.), the increased direct participation of citizens in the public affairs and the complexity of the issues today faced by all subjects of the society. Allegedly, the public sectors as arena of demand-aggregation and solution-provider based on hierarchical mechanisms is challenged in its possibility of goal achievement, thus it must borrow and learn from other sectors. On the other side, private actors have the capacity to maximize benefits by lowering the costs of delivered outcomes, yet the sense of ‘individual’ over ‘community’ prevails which endanger the stability and equilibrium in a society. Not less important the third sector organizations, limited in resources, have greater capacity to interact with excluded groups and advocate attention on sensible issues (like environment, rights, special care). In front of this reality, partnerships are identified as third way between market and hierarchy, a constructive arrangement to bring together multiple actors in order to share resources, responsibilities and risks and achieve commonly defined goals.

In this research, the conceptual sense of partnership, means the working together of different organizations “in the pursuit of a set of commonly held and agreed goals; and the assumption that the achievements of the whole exercise will be greater than that which can be achieved by partners acting separately” (Roberts, 2003:21). The function of partnership is resource sharing, exchange of information, distribution of responsibility among stakeholders and improved efficiency of service delivery. The commonly accepted vulnerabilities of partnership emphasize the increased costs of coordination, the limited capacity of certain actors and the diluted control.

The intent of this article is (1) to determine the various ways in which partnership is used as a mode of governing in cohesion policy at regional level and (2) to uncover the different theoretical and practical dimensions of partnership in the management of social and economic development.

To measure partnership, which is a multi-dimensional concept, we have to consider its multi-actor nature and the dynamics of its structure. Because partnerships differ greatly in their size and scope: ranging from dyads to multi-organizational and can even become institutionalized in time.

In a narrow sense, partnership can be regarded as a ‘final product’ resulted from the interactions among authorities and other non-public relevant actors and assessed based on the expected results. Yet, without diminishing the importance of results, the concept of partnership and its measurement views the overall dynamic, and as such the conceptual framework should contain the:

- process;
- output, and
- outcome level.

In this study we shall concentrate on the first two since the last – outcome – assesses the overall impact of partnership on cohesion policy in a long-term perspective. Moreover, we distinguish the stages of partnership that coincide with the stages of policy cycle. (see fig. 2). The last point is even more relevant in the realm of cohesion policy. As the collected evidence reveals, most of partnership interactions took place at the design of intervention system (the drafting of regional operational programmes). Whereas more substantive arrangements were sporadically used during the implementation, but most of the time the very minimum required of partnership was put in place.

The literature distinguishes partnerships based on informal agreements between public and private partners or on formal arrangements, like those specified by a contract’ terms and conditions. They can also be distinguished at different levels of organization, such as strategic or project level (McQuaid, 2010). Combining the evidence in the regions with theoretical reflections, we argue that partnership activity ranges on a continuum, where formal arrangements are not in contrast with informal but rather evolving into *substantive* arrangements where (often) higher levels of commitment and trust are expected. On the other side, the direction of cooperation – top-down or bottom-up – discriminates between *mandated* and *voluntary* partnerships.

- Formal partnerships, range from simple acquisition of information to a negotiated agreement that paves the way to more extensive projects (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003). The formality is understood as an already existent model of organizing cooperation and to a certain degree normatively bounded.

- Substantive, are purposive evolved forms of cooperation offering assistance, usually for a common broad-range action, trying also to reduce costs in human, financial or even infrastructural terms.

- Mandated, have a prescriptive nature, following a top-down perspective, rooted in legislation or governmental regulations, “directed towards the idea that the centre can *compel* the creation of partnership at local level – the creation of partnership through hierarchy” (Hudson, 2004: 76). Despite the leading role of government in ensuring structure and additional power-resources, mandated partnerships, dominated by one powerful partner, risk to become the synonymous of ‘lengthy, fruitless meetings’ where other stakeholder may be unwilling to be involved and co-operate (Armistead & Pettigrew, 2004; Balloch & Taylor, 2001).

- Voluntary, arise where co-operation brings a mutual benefit to involved parties, and as result might improve image and status among peers. It mixes network style of interactions, exchange knowledge, builds

trust and experiment with innovative methods of cooperation; it may be based on a pre-established contract as well as 'spontaneous' collaborations that arise between actors that have previous knowledge about each other and decide to merge their synergies to reach a common goal.

In order to facilitate the analysis and understanding of partnership within cohesion policy action we advance a model that intersects the *type of formalization* and the *direction of cooperation* as dimensions of partnership and propose ideal-type categories to distinguish its different forms. The description of each category is provided as follows.

[Table 1 about here]

In the bottom-left corner of the table, are collocated partnerships that are mandated and have formal disposition. Monitoring Committees are a good example of such arrangements as they emanate from EC regulations and have been verified to be in most cases a forum of information exchange that may lead subsequently to more advanced forms of partnership based projects.

On the same continuum, formal but voluntary partnerships regard in first place those type of agreements specified in a special contract, with explicit terms and conditions to be respected. Commonly, the literature identifies public-private partnerships as operational forms of such arrangements. The participation is on exclusively voluntary base (usually calls of tender are organized) and is a product of negotiations between principal and agents. This type of partnership in cohesion policy measures is most frequently found in infrastructure projects, when authorities as principals design the pursued objectives and negotiate with agents the terms and conditions of the contract.

The cell on the top-left side comprises mandated yet substantive partnerships. That is, authorities in order to overcome some of their regulatory burdens may recur to collaborative relations under specific, organizational forms with actors of the third sector or social partners, like environmental organizations or employment agencies. It represents an intermediate step between limited/restrained partnerships and extended to multiple actors of private and public sector. An example can be those associations or forums where authorities, private for profit and not for profit actors take parte on equal positions in the management of programme-areas.

The last cell consists of partnerships that are both voluntary and substantive in nature. Different stakeholders match together in order to maximize the outcomes of a common effort that could be otherwise difficult to accomplish by one subject or less effective. Such cooperation is focused on the quality of the results since the costs are elevated compared to individual actions, albeit the pay-offs are substantially higher. Mainly, these are project-based partnerships with a growing number of actors of different types: public with business, private with voluntary organization, public and third-sector. One such example may be projects in research and innovation sector where universities, industrial parks and spin-offs work under the same structure.

In searching for these arrangements, most case studies concentrated on the local and urban level, less on regional one, since it is more tangible and frequent to establish ties between partners on small-scale dimensions. In the material regarding the three studied regions only some of these partnerships have been found (next section), but this does not discard the possibility of their occurrence (also because this is the first part of the data collection).

In the anticipation of data analysis and each case presentation, further we present an assessment scheme of the partnership in Monitoring Committees. As mentioned before, partnership in MCs represent a starting point to move over and search for extensive partnership arrangements outside them. The evaluation took into consideration two dimensions of partnership in Committees: representativeness and inclusiveness. Each dimension is further composed of two indicators as follows:

- *Membership*: actors represented in the Monitoring Committee, both public and non-public;
- *Power* (legal): expressed in official documents and statuses of MC regarding the distribution of the right to vote. Despite the reluctance of the majority of MC to grant the right to vote evenly, it is an indicator of power in the sense of weight on outcomes;

- *Roles*: clarity and formality in the division of responsibility among actors. In the act of defining and dividing roles, actors explicitly attribute a certain value to each other's contribution in the process of collaboration;
- *Contribution*: regards the way actors, other than administration actors, were entitled to contribute to the debates and decisions of the MC (also Regional Committees). The very basic is the sole informing about general questions of the policy; although at first sight consultation and advisory may seem of same value the slight distinction is that advisory can be obtained also from external consultants (who may be also not familiar to the context) while consultation may leave space for a joint resolution after discussions. In the current cycle some MCs have provided, beside other contributions, the written comments and proposals as form receiving interpellations.

[Table 2 about here]

Regarding the overall evaluation of partnership, the logic is similar to the one presented for MCs yet more detailed and specifying the desired impact and results. At this point some preliminary exploration is presented regarding both formal and substantive partnership.

## DATA AND ANALYSIS

This first chunk of comparative analysis was based upon desk research, gathering information from official documents, reports and other available sources (newspapers, periodic newsletters, minutes of meetings). The evidence, at a further stage, will be completed with data collected during fieldwork in the three regions through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to be carried among stakeholders of the public, private and voluntary sectors.

The purpose of the inspection was meant to go as much as possible back in time to have comparative evidence with recent periods and track, on a longitudinal axis, the gradual development of partnership. Thus, we started with the 1994-1999 cycle until the current one. As follows, it is first presented the assessment of Monitoring Committees as formal manifestation of partnership; afterwards each case is briefly presented on the relevant points discussed above.

### On the traces of partnership: moving over Monitoring Committees

The evidence we provide in this first part of assessment proves that partnership is indeed a multi-dimensional concept. The proposed evaluation scheme is only a first attempt to yield a broad view on how partnership evolved during time and across three cases exclusively in the Monitoring Committees. Despite various indicators have been used to compose the dimensions of our concept, a numerical interpretation is an obvious limitation in understanding the phenomenon of partnership. For this reason, the positive 'discrimination' we make between *formal* and *substantive* partnership ensures a rich account we shall further provide on the concrete materialization of partnership. In fact, it is confirmed that Monitoring Committees are a vague reference for partnership as they only transpose, in the majority of cases, the requirement of regulations.

[Fig. 3 about here]

From the figure inserted above emerges an ascension trend common to all three cases, meaning that over programming cycles, on a whole, partnership evolved in a positive way. The different and discrete levels that mark the starting point for each region, has tended to improve over years, reaching – with small variation – developing or mature levels. However, none of our cases falls into the maximum range of score, confirming that much is yet to be done on improving the actual state of partnership in MCs.

On average, the representativeness dimension strengthened its evolution over time. Membership has improved in all three cases, albeit powers are heavily skewed towards public authorities with no granting right to vote for other partners. All three regions preserved the same practice of granting the

right of vote only to financially responsible actors – i.e. representatives of public authorities<sup>3</sup>. Though societal actors are numerously more they count less and activate only in advisory or observatory capacity. In the case of Apulia and Silesia, consistent efforts have been done to involve and give voice to as many actors as possible in the Monitoring Committees. As expected, in the case of Saxony, only certain actors have been considered: those representing target-measures of the regional programme.

In contrast, the inclusiveness dimension is much weaker than representativeness in all cases. The evident pitfall is the lack of role assignment. Similarly with the issue of power distribution, roles are not clearly defined and no responsibility division takes place among stakeholders. This is a first sign of how each partner weights the contribution of the other in the process of collaboration. In absent or confused duty distribution, hierarchical exchange will dominate the relationship among partners. An encouraging sign comes from the constant progress of how partners were involved outside Monitoring Committees. The dominant type of contribution, in the case of societal actors, was that of advising. Only in the last cycle in the statute of MC's of Silesia and Apulia was included the right of written contribution to which the Committee is bound to formulate an answer until its next meeting.

This synthetic inspection of MCs in fact shows how regions converge in their practice of partnership arrangements. The basic explanation is the strict interpretation, with slight deviances, of the regulations regarding partnership. Although regions belong to three different systems of government and institutional cultures the path of partnership is quite the same. Hence, there is a good argument to assert that partnership is more than participation in MC. Rightfully, it has to be searched at all stages of the policy, as Michie and Polverari argue, but also within other different forms as we mentioned in the previous section. With not very extensive material (at this point) we illustrate in what follows the experience of the three regions. If it is true that partnership saw hard times in getting rooted in the daily implementation of cohesion policy, changes started to be visible and efforts of authorities to step out of isolation are increasing. Below are presented in a comprised version the experiences of the three case-studies, followed by the discussion and preliminary conclusions.

**Saxony** is one of the four Eastern Lander of Germany belonging to the Convergence objective of CP. Immediately after reunification Saxony became part of the Federal scheme of assistance for regional development – GRW, where later structural funds were incorporated and then de-coupled. Germany, and especially the Eastern part, as follower of a statist tradition and strong bureaucratic administration, is one where partnership experienced hard paths and difficulties to get established in policy routines (Thielemann, 2000). Despite evident difficulties to integrate societal actors in policy implementation, some positive developments occurred from 1996 onwards.

Namely, in 1997, together with the Employer's Association and Trade Unions the regional government established the 'Innovation und Arbeit' Foundation, where each part had an equal number of representatives. Supported by EU technical assistance, the Foundation had the mission to elaborate through regional fora different models of development and channels of co-ordination and management. It provided information to regional partners, advice to project applicants and contributed to the constitution of regional partnerships and networks. In five years, almost 1000 project ideas have been started, applying the concept of bringing together the right partners and secure funding at the start-up phase<sup>4</sup>. However, the Foundation in February 2005 was announced to insolvency, and subsequently replaced by the creation of a think tank – the Institute for Innovation and Labour (Saxony), which represents a platform of collaboration between social partners and regional authorities.<sup>5</sup>

In the current cycle, outside the meetings of MC, every year in a distinct venue since 2007, around 200 or more representatives of associations, social organizations and institutions, government, have attended thematic workshops where opportunities have been discussed and projects presented. Each year a

<sup>3</sup> These are both representatives of national government as well as regional. Usually, more than one department (ministry in the case of Saxony) is represented and can vote during decision-making process.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.medienservice.sachsen.de/medien/news/151653>, access date: January 2013

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.medienservice.sachsen.de/medien/news/147020>;

<http://www.medienservice.sachsen.de/medien/news/138688>

different issue has been tackled and relevant actors invited to attend the discussions: from the innovation to high-education sector, business and industry representatives.

The question of partnership in **Apulia** started to be discussed only at the end of '94-'99 period. As most of the structural changes related to European funds in Italy for this period, the realization of the partnership principle had a top-down initiative, mostly through national regulations that contributed to the elaboration of programming documents. The authorities of Apulia launched some positive signs in the 2000-06 period by organizing different thematic workshops that included different social and economic actors, who were present also in a Regional Committee (complementary to MC).

The strong sign in the direction of partnership development was largely visible in the present cycle of programming. First a Memorandum of Understanding (Protocollo d'Intesa) was signed between regional governments and societal actors meant to establish a method of partnership work and collaboration not only in "advisory terms under the priorities assigned to MC, (...) but also through the use of stable tools and methods in sharing and participating during all stages of programming and implementation" (POR FESR Puglia, 2006).

Secondly, different activities have been promoted to bring administrations, as well as social and economic actors to contribute to the development of partnership. Two distinct moments have to be mentioned here: the School of citizens and administration partnership in territorial development<sup>6</sup> C.A.S.T. and LAB Puglia. The goal of C.A.S.T. is the diffusion of knowledge and good practices of stakeholder's involvement in strategic planning. It is oriented to civil servants, citizens, associations that participate at the process of planning and works to strengthen the network of collaboration. Similarly, LAB Puglia launched in 2009 supports the qualified and shared use of structural funding by regional managers, local public servants and interested partners. The initial event saw the participation of 45 actors, during the next year LAB Puglia met three times. The periodicity of CAST takes place in a different city and intends to enrich the knowledge and experience of actors responsible for strategic planning (CAST Bari, BAT and Brindisi). Also CAST Mobile concerns applied models of partnership that regard public administrations, firms, associations and citizen communities promoted to improve the communication between delivering business and citizens.

The case of **Silesia** displays a steady growth and consolidation of the partnership idea. Already at the end of 2005 the Regional Board of Silesia started to organize different initiatives involving social partners and other relevant actors in the draft of the 2007-2013 ROP. First, a survey has been circulated among 215 institutions with the purpose to gather information about the Community needs and necessary projects to be implemented. Through several workshops organized in four thematic groups and moderated by academic consultants, the participants have established the criteria for project selection and the category of beneficiaries. The promotion of the plan occurred in business and academic environment through several organized meetings (Wojewodztwo Slaskie, 2011). During on-line public consultations was created a database containing information about funding which can be used as a tool of co-participation and accessed by whole range of actors – PARTNER II.

In the current cycle, partnership is distinguished at the institutional level – including public consultations, workshops and survey; and at project level, which is acknowledged as bringing "added value by extending the territorial scope of the project" (ZWS, 2011). Additionally, the distinction is made on each policy stage. As the annual report informs, more than 100 projects have been implemented under partnership formula with entities belonging almost exclusively to the public sector. The Silesian Managing Authority have grasped the merit of results from synergies working together and moving away from fragmented and uncoordinated actions of actors from same issue-area. In this sense, in 2011 a working group especially on partnership issues was created in order to support relevant partners in the process of measures implementation. The idea was to find suitable solutions for the future searching both in already existing practices throughout European regions and develop a model on its own between public administration and non-governmental actors and business and promote partnership projects of regional nature (WS, 2012).

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<sup>6</sup> In original "Scuola di partecipazione cittadini e amministrazione per lo sviluppo dei territori", partecipazione was translated as partnership since the meaning in Italian is not mere participation, albeit partnership.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Far from drawing a complete picture about development of partnership on regional level, this very preliminary qualitative analysis is a good point of departure in discerning forms and potentialities of partnership. As mentioned at the outset, the paper sought to ‘unpack’ and refine the concept of partnership. Our proposed conceptualization and distinction between dimensions of partnership makes a step forward and brings back in the attention on horizontal level and those dynamics working between forces of public and private arena. It stands clear that a certain confusion still defines the interpretation each region attach to the realization of partnership soaring different practices and levels of integration. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that partnership gained more importance, increased the exploration of forms and has added value to the effectiveness and legitimacy of CP. With small difference, the regions tend to enhance the conditions of formal partnership. However, this picture would be incomplete if one should consider how at the implementation stage the partnership is materialized among cases. The real divergence of patterns lies at this level. As we argue the level of analysis should be carried at policy stages and discriminate between types of partnership that also vary according to the stage.

It is premature drawing conclusions but we feel safe in disagreeing with the study of Polverari and Michie, that concludes somehow less optimistic regarding the role of horizontal partners, that “(…) it is licit to conclude that the time for partnership has not arrived yet” (Polverari & Michie, 2010: 103). It is of course a matter of time that extensive and voluntary partnership get entrenched in the praxis of cohesion policy, but also a question of complexity and perception about the benefits and risks of partnership mechanism. While it is not straightforward which ingredients lay at the core, to different degree resources and capacities are used as explanations, actors, as stakeholders of issues, are to understand the necessity of achieving goals together rather than separately. So far, the mandated and formal partnership prevails above substantive and voluntary one, on one side because government still recur to traditional, contracting-out forms of cooperation, but in the same time private/voluntary actors hesitate building a partnership when there are no clear-cut advantages of doing it. However, in a situation of constant growing in complexity of problems, more often than not partnership will be regarded as suitable tool to tackle scarcities. As a matter of fact, we could hypothesize that in times of deep crises partnerships could be more advantageous as resources are scarce but social issues more pressing.

Therefore, the next step of the research as we preannounced consists in carrying interview and collect data in the territory of each region. Information about attitudes, practices and behaviour should serve as material of hypotheses testing and explanatory factors as well as understanding conditions favourable/unfavourable to partnership activation. The query is why societal stakeholders engage in partnerships and whether this type of mechanism corresponds to their expectation. The model for our research explores three cluster of variables: external and internal factors and contextual, that consider actors of both public and non-public arena. Based on recent research that distinguishes partnership between public-private for profit, public-public, public-private not-for-profit, and tripartite we aim to investigate their occurrence and effects on efficiency and legitimacy of the policy. More ambitious would be trying to answer whether partnership change the institutional context in which they take origins and what learning effect they create. Not less important would be the consolidation of the methodological approach in investigating partnerships: from qualitative and singular case-study to comparative and network analysis. All these endeavours are necessary to set-up comparable criteria to use in the analysis of partnerships and their impact and the consequences they produce on the involved stakeholders and the society in general.

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ANNEX

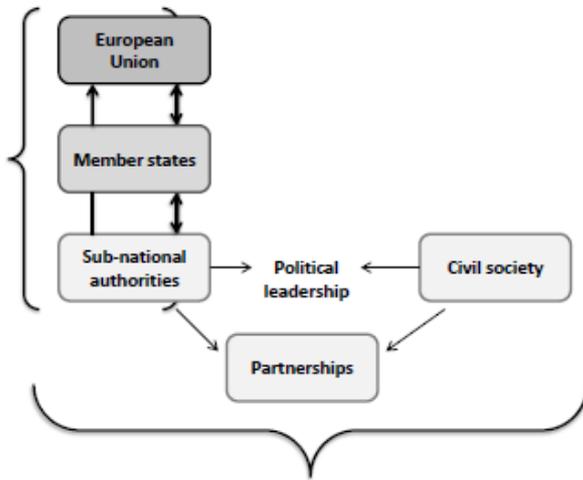


Fig. 1. Vertical and horizontal planes of partnership

Fig. 2. On the left: partnership life cycle through stages of policy delivery. On the right: stages of policy cycle at delivery level. Adapted from Molle (2005: 195).

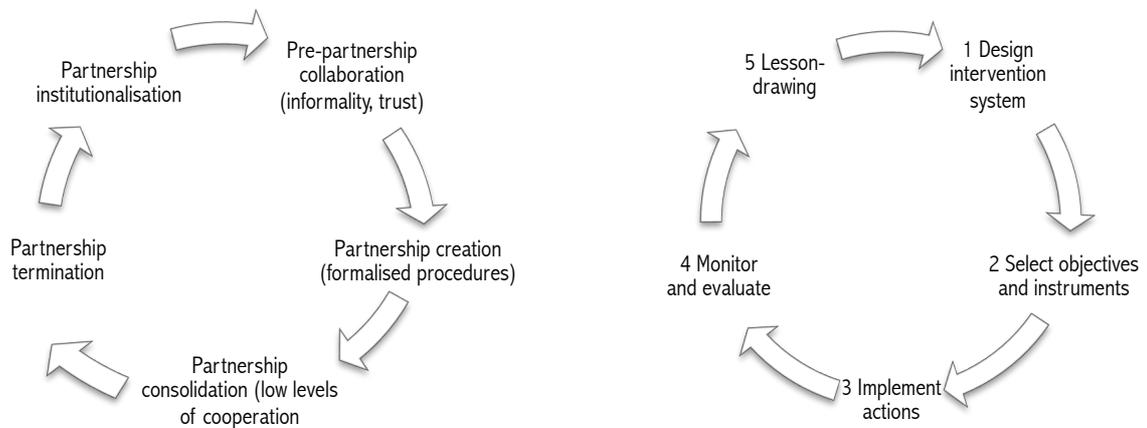


Table 1. Ideal-type models of partnership

Substantive	Foundations, Associations	Private-private Private-voluntary cooperation
	Monitoring Committees	Private-public partnerships (PPP)
Formal	Mandated	Voluntary

**Table 2. Evaluation scheme for partnership in Monitoring Committees**

		4	3	2	1
<b>Representativeness</b>	Membership	All possible actors (private for profit and not-for-profit)	Actors evenly representing measure areas	Statutory minimum actors	Partners with financial responsibility
	Powers	Required consensus (all partners with right to vote)	Corporate practices (financially responsible with right to vote)	Hierarchical practices (only administrative responsible with right to vote)	Ad-hoc procedures
<b>Inclusiveness</b>	Roles	Clear definition and division of roles	Clear definition for financially responsible actors	Roles are vaguely defined for all partners	No division or clarity about roles
	Contribution	Written comments and proposals	Consultations	Advisory	Informing

Scales:

4 - 3,6 = Advanced      3,5 – 2,6 = Mature      2,5 – 1,6 = Developing      1,5 - 0,5 = Beginner

**Figure 3. Development of partnership in Monitoring Committees over programming periods**

